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Abstract: A two and a half years survey of cheetah's populations in southern Africa shows three principal trends: in relatively large countries, findings suggests a stability of the cheetah's status stable cheetah populations (Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana); in countries where cheetah distribution is limited to small patches, the species range shrank (Uganda, Malawi); and, in the last group of countries, conflicts between cheetahs and commercial ranches posed poses a serious threat on to the species survival (Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa).

Status of the Cheetah in Eastern & Southern Africa

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I embarked on the study of the status of wild cheetahs in Africa almost six years ago, not fully realizing how ambitious that goal was. When ISEC Canada joined the project as a major sponsor, I had already surveyed

cheetahs in a few eastern and southern African countries but needed to go back to Africa to cover more ground. I thought that you might be interested in hearing about the results of the whole enterprise.

First I would like to present the method I used, in order for you to appreciate the accuracy of the results, and because it turned out to be a powerful new approach. Faced with establishing a species' status on the scale of a continent, I was bound to choose an indirect method. Luckily, cheetahs are spectacular animals that are relatively rarely observed, and people generally remember well their encounters with them. Therefore, I relied on an interview approach to assess the species status. In each country, after lengthy preliminary contacts with the relevant authorities, I got hold of a four wheel drive, selected a dependable research assistant willing to rough it for a small salary, and took off for the remote dry savannas that cheetahs favour. I drove through the protected areas and regions of ranches and rangelands where cheetahs were likely to occur, based on ecological conditions. There I stopped to interview everyone susceptible to provide me with reports of cheetah observations. I interviewed officials and staff in protected areas, and ranch owners and traditional pastoralists on rangelands. My results show that, provided interviews are rigorously conducted and enough respondents are contacted, this method is among the most accurate of all indirect methods (it gives 89 to 100% of cheetah densities obtained from long term studies!)

Using this method I spent two and a half years surveying cheetahs in eight east and south African countries. At the time of this writing, I have analysed my results for three countries: Kenya, Uganda and Malawi. The overview I am presenting now is also based on the impressions I gathered from other countries: Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Although the status of cheetahs varies from country to country, I observed three general trends.

In relatively large countries, in which extensive tracts of dry rangelands are used for grazing by traditional pastoralists, cheetahs seem to hold their ground. Kenya is such an example. In Kenya, cheetah distribution has been stable in the last 30 years, and I could find no difference in the group size of adult cheetahs nor in the size of litters observed between my study and a reference study conducted in 1965. This last finding also suggests a stability of the cheetah's status as does the direct comparison of density estimates in the only two parks where previous data were available.

Cheetah status in Tanzania and Botswana seems to be comparable to what I just described for Kenya, although this has yet to be confirmed by further analyses.

In countries where cheetah distribution is limited to small patches by either ecological conditions (Uganda) or both ecological and historical factors (Malawi), the species range shrank since the last continental wide survey in 1975 (Myers 1975). In Malawi, cheetahs are now restricted to a single protected area, the Kasungu National Park, as a result of high human population pressure and transformation of natural habitat into (see next page)

cultivated lands. Kasungu National Park holds less than 50 cheetahs, and the survival of this small population depends on its ability to maintain ties with other cheetah populations, the nearest of which occur in Zambia.

In Uganda, cheetah numbers seem to have declined outside Kidepo National Park since the late 1970's, mostly as a result of the killing of their potential prey as automatic weapons became widely available at the end of that decade. Nonetheless, suitable habitat is still available and small numbers of prey are still found. Therefore, increase of cheetah numbers to former levels is not to be ruled out if poaching is contained.

In a last group of countries, conflicts between cheetahs and commercial ranchers pose a serious threat on the species' survival. These countries are all located in the southern part of the continent and include Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. In these countries, cheetahs became quite abundant on farmland after their competitors, lions and spotted hyenas, were eliminated by farmers. Cheetahs were

tolerated on ranches because they are little trouble to cattle, though they may occasionally take a calve. However, for economical reasons, many of these cattle ranchers currently wish to switch to game ranching, the raising of wild herbivores for hunting, meat production, or recreational purposes. Cheetahs, which are extremely efficient predators of wild game, are a major pest in the eyes of the new game ranchers. Fortunately, cheetahs exist in relatively good numbers in protected areas of South Africa (about 200 in Kruger National Park and 50 in Kalahari Gemsbok National Park). Conversely, most cheetahs in Namibia and Zimbabwe occur on farmlands, which makes the problem more acute in these two countries.

In short, we cannot speak of the status of cheetahs in eastern and southern Africa. Ecological, economical, and political circumstances heavily contribute to create very different situations, from declining in range and numbers to apparently stable status.



OUR VOLUNTEERS - What can we say about our loyal core of volunteers, many of whom have been with us since the beginning. Without you we could not function. Without you we could not have helped the cheetahs, black footed cats, cougars and many more species. Without you we would not exist.

A simple thank you never seems enough, but thank you we do!!!! In grateful appreciation of the hundreds of hours you have all put in on behalf of the cats, we have again purchased a "share of the rainforest" in your names.

Loss of habitat is the biggest threat to all wildlife today. Because our volunteers sincerely care about the wild cats, we felt that providing them with secure homes would meet with your approval! The six feline species of Costa Rica are indebted to you, as is the organization.