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Abstract: The status of the cheetah, *Acinonyx jubatus*, varies widely in the 44 countries listed in this report, being extinct in a few countries, nearly so in some, and endangered in most. Only in two or three countries are the cheetah populations such that they are considered only threatened, where they are legally eliminated if found to be in conflict with human interests. All populations are regulated by CITES as Appendix I, which bans international commerce and sporting trophies. Namibia has been exporting a limited number of wild caught animals for zoological and private exhibition. At the January 1992 CITES meeting, quotas were set for export of 150 animals from Namibia, 50 animals from Zimbabwe, and 5 animals from Botswana. Information on distribution and status in the different countries where cheetahs occur are presented.

Cheetah Preservation Fund Report

by Daniel and Laurie Marker-Kraus*

The Cheetah Preservation Fund was founded by Daniel Kraus and Laurie Marker-Kraus in August, 1990 and set-up within the International Wilderness Leadership Foundation, a Colorado-based conservation organization. As the first international conservation program solely established for the wild cheetah, the Cheetah Preservation Fund's mission is to develop long-term research and conservation efforts for the free-ranging cheetah. Namibia, formerly South West Africa, was selected as the base of operations.

Namibia was chosen for two reasons. First, because it has the largest remaining population of cheetah in the wild, although this population has declined by half over the past 10 years to less than 3,000 animals. With fewer than 15,000 cheetahs left in the world (we estimate between 9,000 and 12,000) it is very important to stabilize this population to ensure a relatively healthy gene pool for the future. Also, virtually all cheetahs in captivity have come from Namibia, but it is not self-sustaining and is supported through the import of wild cheetahs from Namibia. Little is known, though, about the cheetah's behavior and biology in this part of Africa.

The second reason is that the new nation of Namibia is the first country in the world to include sustainable utilization of wildlife and protection of the environment in its constitution. It is felt that this statement will be important for the conservation efforts of the Cheetah Preservation Fund.

Education is a big part of our program for the long-term conservation of the free-ranging cheetah in Africa. Very few people realize that the cheetah is an endangered species and not found all over Africa in large numbers. We have given many talks and public lectures throughout the country. We have lectured at the State Museum, the University of Namibia, and the State Agriculture College, to the Wildlife Societies in the two major cities, to the Peace Corp Volunteers who will be working at schools through out the country, and at several conservation orientated schools. Surrounding these talks have been considerable media, newspapers and radio, which have reached a large percentage of the Namibian population and shared with them the goals of the Cheetah Preservation Fund. People know we are here, what we are doing, and how they can begin to help.

We have given talks at several farmers association meetings. Since the wildlife in this country belongs to the landowners, the farmers are directly responsible for the populations of wildlife and cheetahs. The world picture of the cheetah is told during our presentation and this brings the cheetah's situation home to Namibia. This type of education is proving very effective as some farmers have told us that they now look at the cheetah with different eyes after hearing us talk. These talks also help to lay the ground work for our follow up meetings with the individual farmers, as they then have a basic idea of what our program is all about.

In October, we were asked to present a paper at the Annual Namibian Veterinary Congress. We were able to establish collaborative associations at this meeting. Working with the veterinarians is an important component of our program here, since they work so closely with the farmer, and the majority of the cheetahs in this country live on farmlands. The veterinarians are also keen to begin assisting our program through the opportunistic collection of biological sample from cheetahs and other wild felines.

A major accomplishment for this first year is the production of a half hour documentary done by the local Namibian NBC-TV station. This production has included a historic view of the cheetahs situation and why Namibia is so important to the survival of the species, and personal interviews with farmers who have found solutions to their cheetah problems.

After nearly a year in Namibia, we are encouraged by the progress we have made in laying down solid ground work for a permanent base of operations for the Cheetah Preservation Fund.

The work of the Cheetah Preservation Fund has been accepted by the locals and word continues to spread that we are here. People are very interested in our program and the problems the cheetah faces in its struggle for survival.

The Cheetah Preservation Fund is primarily a conservation organization but effective efforts to conserve the cheetah can only be developed through research, to gain a full understanding of the species. Therefore, dual programs of research and conservation are being run simultaneously.

The first phase of this long-term program is the gathering of basic information and the compiling of an extensive data base. From this information, priorities will be established for the long-term conservation of the cheetah in Namibia.

During the first two years, basic information is being gathered through an in-depth survey conducted by personal interviews with farmers, throughout the cheetah's range on commercial and communal farmlands, to assess the attitudes towards and the state of conservation, biodiversity, and wildlife and livestock management. This information is critical, since ninety-five percent of all the cheetahs in this country are found on these farms, and not in protected parks or reserves.

So far in our survey, which began in June, we have covered over 2.4 million acres (about one million ha.) of farmland. Data collected during the survey includes distribution of cheetah and wildlife, numbers of livestock, farmers interactions with cheetah and other wildlife, current livestock and game management practices and how they impact on the cheetah, and the overall conditions of the land for the long-term sustainability of the entire ecosystem.

We have just completed our second district in the Hochfeld area and are moving into our third district, near Otjiwarango, where we have been offered the use of an old farm house. We will introduce ourselves to the area through talks at farmers association meetings. By working directly with the farmers associations and individual farmers, we learn about their history with wildlife in the area.

A very important objective of the Cheetah Preservation Fund is to develop strategies to conserve the biodiversity of the large ranges that cheetahs occupy. The cheetah can only survive if its habitat is preserved and can support healthy wild prey populations. The maintenance of wild prey reduces the conflict of cheetah on livestock and therefore, the prey base is critical to the long-term conservation of the cheetah.

In this arid land, farms average in size from 10,000 to 40,000 acres (4,000-16,000 ha.). An important point is that 80% of the wildlife in Namibia lives on these farmlands and is legally owned by the farmers, not the government. Since the wildlife belongs to the landowners, strategies to sustain populations of wildlife and the cheetah for the future must be developed with the farmers along with livestock and pasture management. This

ownership of wildlife causes some unique problems for wildlife and our cheetah conservation efforts. Each farmer has his own opinion as to how to deal with his wildlife, even though the game moves from farm to farm. Therefore, development of workable strategies is dependant on the ability and the willingness of local communities, and their full understanding of all aspects of the ecosystem.

The cheetah is considered to be a problem animal by the farmers and a threat to livestock. It is legal to shoot a cheetah if it is threatening livestock so for three generations farmers have done their best to eliminate the species. As we travel through the cheetah regions of the country interviewing farmers, we are developing a clear picture of their problems with the cheetah, and we are learning what can be done to reach a compromise so that the cheetah has a chance to survive and habitat will be available for the future.

The biggest problem for the cheetah is live trapping, after which a large percentage of them are then shot. These live traps are set at playtrees. Therefore, the playtrees are the cheetah's biggest problem. These playtrees have not been reported in any other area of Africa and the significance of them here is not totally understood. These trees have sloping trunks that branch into large horizontal limbs that can easily be climbed into by cheetahs. Cheetahs come to the playtrees on a regular basis and mark them with scat and urine. These trees are a focal point for cheetahs in their large home ranges. We are recording the locations of the playtrees and are working even closer with the farmers that have these trees on their farms.

Not all farms have playtrees, but on those that do, the farmer can catch all the cheetahs that come to the trees. We have talked to one farmer who, in the last 11 years, has caught and then killed 175 cheetahs. So, much of our effort is to get such farmers to use farm management practices to protect their livestock, rather than expend so much energy in trying to exterminate a species. We have found that by moving calving herds out of the areas where playtrees are, reduces calf losses and the farmers' problems with the cheetah.

Much of our program includes promoting farm management practices, found here and in other parts of the world, to protect livestock from predators, reducing the need for the elimination of a species. Some of these practices include the use of donkeys with calving herds, as they chase away dogs, jackals, and cheetah; more rapid rotation of stock through camps; larger concentrations of stock in camps during calving times of the year; bringing cows in closer to the homestead during calving time; farms with more wildlife have less problems with cheetahs because cheetahs prefer wild game; promoting more aggressive breeds of cattle, such as the *Bos indicus* and indigenous breeds; keeping heifers (first time calving cows) in the same camps as older cows, as many losses are in heifer herds because they don't know what to do; keeping a few cows or steers with horns in with the calving herd. Other solutions are being found for small stock, sheep and goats, and these include the use of herders and large breeds of guard dogs to stay with the herds. And, would you believe, baboons raised with the herds become furious protectors.

By working closely with farmers and sharing these management practices, we hope to reduce the conflict between them and the cheetah. So far our data suggests that the cheetah population is lower than what is estimated by the Department of Wildlife, Conservation, and Research. Our continued survey will verify the population trend. We have developed a form for farmers to keep track of cheetah sightings and tracks on their farms, to help us develop a pattern of movements between farms. This has been very well received and should be of

assistance in the over all data collection.

While conducting the survey on the farmlands, we have also initiated a survey of the small population of cheetah in the Etosha National Park Reserve. We have spent some time up there organizing tour operators, rangers, and researchers to work with us in keeping records of sightings of cheetah. This 22,000 sq.km. park may have less than 50 cheetahs as compared to several hundreds 50 years ago. We need to understand the reasons, whether it's just the increased populations of lions and hyenas, and/or disease. The cheetah dies very quickly from anthrax infected meat, and in some areas of Etosha, this disease is common. We have started a collaboration with an already existing anthrax study at the Etosha Research Institute and will collect biological samples for them, from cheetahs in and around the park.

In conjunction with the farm survey, biological samples, blood and tissues, are opportunistically collected for analysis to assess the over-all health and genetic make-up of the free-ranging cheetah population. In December, we sent our first batch of samples for analysis to our collaborators at the genetics and pathology labs in the United States. Hundreds of cheetahs are killed here each year and so sample collection is only a problem of logistics. Therefore, our collaboration with the countries veterinarians is important for rapid processing of the samples. As little is known about the health and biology of the free-ranging Namibia cheetah, these condemned cats will at least be supplying information for the species that, in the end, will help to provide solutions to the complex issues of their conservation.

Our international conservation collaborations have continued while in Namibia. A document was produced for the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources' (IUCN) Cat Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission. This document, a current status and distribution report on the cheetah throughout its remaining world range, is being used as the base for the Cheetah Action Plan, a conservation strategy being developed for the species.

Laurie continues her work as the International Cheetah Studbook Keeper. The Studbook is an annual publication of the world's registry of captive cheetahs and includes births, deaths, transfers, and wild imports into the captive population. It is used as a tool to assist managers in establishing a genetically healthy captive cheetah population.

The survey of farmlands will continue through 1992. We will begin looking into the small populations of cheetah remaining in the native communal lands, Bushmanland, Damaraland, and Hereroland along the Botswana boarder. We will work in collaboration with other researchers in some of these areas.

In this second year, after completing the survey, we will submit a report which summarizes each district and our findings. This public document will include recommendations to assist communities in the sustainable utilization of resources, including, pastures, livestock, wildlife, and the importance of predators in a healthy ecosystem. The document will be widely distributed and be made available to the Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation, and Tourism and the farmers in each district.

Information gained during the survey will determine where radio telemetry will be conducted. Radio telemetry of cheetahs will add to the data available on cheetah distribution and behavior, and why certain areas are more prone to cheetah/livestock conflict. Radio collaring will begin in the latter part of 1992 and will be conducted in two areas, one farming area selected from the data gathered during the survey, and in the Etosha Park National Reserve, to obtain comparative data.

The survey and field study will provide the necessary infor-

mation to determine the priority needs for the cheetah in this country and to develop a strategy for maintaining biodiversity. These priorities will be established in cooperation with the local communities and the Namibian Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation, and Tourism.

The results of the research will assist the Namibian government with policies towards sustainable utilization of wildlife and the long-term conservation of the cheetah and the ecosystems in which they live. The information will have an immediate impact on the conservation of the cheetah in Namibia, and will

provide valuable information which will increase chances of survival for cheetah throughout its existing range.

Conservation education efforts will continue. Grass-roots education and training in wildlife management and conservation is done in each community and individually, during the survey process. By giving talks and utilizing the local and international media, public awareness will increase.

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