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Abstract: Namibia has one of the largest and healthiest wild cheetah populations. In 1974/75 estimates for population figures are reported between 1,500 and 6,000 individuals. Farmers view the cheetah as a major cause of stock losses and kill them in ever-increasing numbers. These killings are allowed, as long as the cheetah was a threat to humans or livestock. Cheetah kills have to be reported and the person responsible is allowed to retain the skin. The Directorate of Nature Conservation carried out an intensive research project on cheetah on private farmland from February 1984 to August 1986, to investigate population status, cheetah problem on farmland, cost to farmers of cheetah predation and to establish suitable control and conservation methods to ensure the future survival of cheetah on private farmland.

CHEETAH IN NAMIBIA

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Namibia (Southwest Africa) has one of the largest and healthiest wild cheetah populations, and although there are no accurate population figures, estimates have ranged from 1,500 by Myers in 1974 to 6,000 by Joubert and Mostert in 1975 and Gaerdes in 1974. It has been suggested that the population was increasing. However, farmers view the cheetah as a major cause of stocklosses and kill them in ever-increasing numbers. They are allowed to do this because, although classed as a protected animal, cheetah may be shot to "prevent a human being being injured or to protect the life of any livestock whilst the life of such livestock is actually being threatened". Cheetah kills must be reported within 10 days, and the person responsible is permitted to retain the skin.

More than 95% of the cheetah population is on private farmland, mainly in the northern and central districts, an area of about 100,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Cheetah are also found in southern districts, below 23°S, but only locally and sparsely dispersed.

Farmers consider the cheetah to be responsible for an annual loss of more than R.2,000,000 to the cattle industry alone. Moreover, farmers are becoming aware of the impact of cheetah on wild game, which has increasing economic value. The cheetah is therefore viewed as having no economic benefit and in direct competition to farmers profits, and so they are killed in ever-increasing numbers.

Another important reason for increased killing is the farmers' antagonism to local, and especially international conservation organisations, which are blamed for bans on all trade in cheetah.

Although more than 24% of Namibia is either proclaimed protected area or falls under direct governmental jurisdiction, there is only one suitable area for cheetah - Etosha National Park. But the park has large populations of lion and hyaena, and thus only a small cheetah population. As there are no other suitable habitats for the translocation of cheetah in Namibia farmers cannot sell a captured cheetah nor will the local authorities accept it. The result is that farmers simply kill cheetah and either bury it or leave it out in the veld. This practice has been increasing in the past three years. It is thus clear that regulations drawn up to protect the cheetah, have, in Namibia, very definitely had the opposite effect.

The Directorate of Nature Conservation carried out a full-time intensive research project on cheetah on private farmland from February 1984 to August 1986. The aim was to find out:

1. the population status of cheetah in Namibia,
2. the extent of the cheetah problem on farmland,
3. the cost to farmers of cheetah predation,
4. what control and conservation methods should be used to ensure the future survival of cheetah on private farmland.

Fieldwork was carried out on 20 farms and 17 cheetah were captured and fitted with radio-collars, being then tracked to obtain information on movement, home range, diet and stock losses caused.

The study area is known to have one of the highest cheetah densities in Namibia, with one cheetah per 50 km<sup>2</sup>.

Preliminary results indicate that homeranges varied from 800 km<sup>2</sup> for males to 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> for females, but these home ranges shifted from year to year, and only a long-term study would provide a true picture.

Males were found to be either solitary or in male family groups of between two and five. Females were either solitary or with a litter, with litter size varying from five to nine with an average survival rate of four, which is considerably higher than that reported in East Africa.

Diet varied from area to area, depending on what was available, but was found to be mainly young kudu, hartebeeste and oryx; adult and young steenbuck, duiker and warthog, and also hares, rodents and some ground birds.

Stock taken consisted only of new-born calves to calves of about eight months of age, and, on average, only about three to four calves were taken per year by cheetah. However, while some farms had no losses, others lost as many as 10 per year.

A survey of cheetah numbers on farmland is being carried out, but indications are that it is far below the official estimate of 6,000, and rather between 2,000 and 3,000, with signs that the population is decreasing because of intensive persecution.

(Editor's note: According to the CITES Secretariat Namibia gave permits for export of 58 live cheetah in 1986, for possession of 203 skins, and for 109 trophy hunts, of which 10 were successful. In all 271 cheetah were disposed of in the first six months of 1986, 650 in 1985, 715 in 1984, 875 in 1983, and 890 in 1982.

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#### CHEETAH CUBS KILLED BY LIONS

Four male lions were seen systematically killing four young cheetah cubs as they called to their mother from their hiding places in the Londolozi Game Reserve in South Africa, but none of them was eaten. The incident lasted an hour, according to a report from Londolozi.

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#### CHEETAH STUDBOOK

An international cheetah studbook is to be inaugurated. It will be run by Ms Laurie Marker, the North American Regional Cheetah Studbook Keeper, based at the Safari Game Search Foundation Inc., P.O.B.600, Winston, Oregon 97496, which will provide support.

According to cheetah census figures in the International Zoo Yearbook 24/25 there were, in 1985, 207.225 in 106 collections, of which 127.131 were bred in captivity. Of 59 births in seven collections in 1983 17 died.