

## Botswana: Unique Cheetah DVD to Benefit Schools

DVD - Spirit of the Kalahari - is unique in its double-barrelled approach of imparting conservation message and the celebration of Botswana's song and dance. This communication mix appears to be highly effective, judging from the response it elicited from the audience that attended the DVD launch at the Mmokolodi Nature Reserve recently. The Cheetah Conservation Botswana (CCB) DVD is to be integrated into the organisation's education programme. It was disclosed that the DVD would be distributed to schools around Botswana. The film chronicles the lives of two farmers - a traditional one and the other a modern one or rather more appropriately a "weekend farmer." The DVD starts by setting the tone of being a wildlife-based show, depicting snippets of game at Mmokolodi. Giraffes, bucks, zebras and hippos are shown in their natural habitat.

The changeover to the cattlepost or "masimo" is effective in that it drives home the fact that the two environments are in fact compatible. The traditional homestead is characterised by normal chores that include maize/sorghum pounding, roasting of maize by the open fire, preparation of family meals, and the cooking of 'serobe. (tripe) to be fed to the livestock guard dog. In another take, the traditional farmer is busy tending his livestock (goats and cattle). Not only is he involved with livestock tending (go disa) but also makes sure the holding pans or kraals (masaka) are in good working condition.

Basically, the message being conveyed here is that this traditional farmer employs the best farming practices and good management, which guarantee effective land and predator conservation. On the other hand, the second farmer, the examples of whom are prevalent in Botswana, appears to have the necessary financial wherewithal. In contrast to the first farmer, who uses a donkey/horse as a mode of transport, the second one drives a 4 x 4 vehicle. The film takes the viewer through the process of applying for land for ranching from the land board chiefs, who explain the applicant's rights to land and related information.

The weekend farmer enthusiastically launches into setting up a ranch. However, because of a poor management system that includes not paying farm workers on time, things are bound to go awry. The resultant scenario is that of demotivated, loafing, and alcohol-consuming farmhands who fail in their duties. On one of his weekend excursions to the ranch, our town farmer realises that some of his livestock is missing.

Armed with a shotgun, he immediately assembles a search party that subsequently picks up tracks of the predators. The spoor leads the party to a carcass of one of his goats. He rushes to the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), in town where hysterically and incoherently he tries to explain his situation to them. But before his problem can be addressed, he takes off in a bid to return to the farm - with what he reckoned to be a "lasting" solution in his head. He slaughters a donkey whose carcass he poisons. This disingenuous act leads to the death of many predators on the ranch, and wildlife officials get to know of that. He is arrested and the wildlife officials later inform him that he had "inadvertently poisoned or contaminated his water and grazing resources". This obviously clear contrast in management styles, has spurred the CCB into action as they maintain "education is one of the most vital keys in conservation and a priority for CCB".

The film, therefore, continues by showing two officers, as part of the CCB outreach programme, addressing villagers on matters relating to predators, and particularly cheetahs. Information that is departed includes the fact that cheetahs normally eat smaller livestock such as goats and calves. A statement is also made to the effect that normally predators' preferred meal is that of wildlife as opposed to domesticated animals.

The outreach officers explain to their listeners that livestock management strategy is very important and critical in minimising human/problem animal conflict. The CCB was founded in 2003, primarily on the realization that no research work had been carried out to establish the status of Botswana's cheetah.

It is estimated that there are only 10 000 cheetahs left in the world. Hence they have been listed under CITES I as the most endangered species. CCB's objectives include long-term conservation, scientific research, species management and community education.

Since its inception CCB has carried out various activities towards the realisation of its goal. The organisation has been rehabilitating and releasing cubs into the wild, including the two that were released into the Tuli area recently.

Three males and a female were also released into the Central Kgalagadi Game Reserve (CKGR) last October and November, after being captured by farmers. In some instances cheetahs that have been captured by farmers are collared and released back into the farms for research purposes to establish their movement and territory size. As part of their outreach programme, CCB has participated in the DWNP events and at major trade fairs. They have also held workshops for teachers and communal farmers.

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