

ISSUE Nº
26
2^a 2023

CHEETAH STRIDES

The Newsletter of the Cheetah Conservation Fund



Corey Raiffel

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Fall Tour

IWT Study

Moving Day

Project Cheetah



Cheetah
CONSERVATION FUND



DONATE

PO Box 2496
Alexandria, VA. 22301
info@cheetah.org
1.866.909.3399
www.cheetah.org/donate

VISIT & VOLUNTEER

International Research and Education Centre
Otjiwarongo, Namibia
open 364 days per year

Cheetah Rescue and Conservation Centre
Geed-Deeble, Somaliland

CCF's Headquarters USA
200 Daingerfield Rd.
Alexandria, VA. 22314

Volunteer to help CCF save the cheetah!
cheetah.org/get-involved/volunteer/

Keep up with the cheetahs on social media!



@CCFCheetah



KEY DATES

MEET DR. LAURIE MARKER AND HELP CCF MAKE THE WILD A BETTER PLACE

IN PERSON

AN EVENING WITH DR. LAURIE MARKER AT THE MEETING HOUSE

SEPTEMBER 28, 2023
ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN

CCF FUNDRAISER AT LIVING DESERT

OCTOBER 7, 2023
PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA

AN EVENING WITH DR. MARKER AT CODY PLACE CLUBHOUSE

OCTOBER 7, 2023
PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

CCF FUNDRAISER AT ORFILA WINERY

OCTOBER 9, 2023
ESCONDIDO, CALIFORNIA

LECTURE AT UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

OCTOBER 19, 2023
LARAMIE, WYOMING

FUNDRAISER AT ERATH WINERY

OCTOBER 22, 2023
PORTLAND, OREGON

Check the events page for upcoming events.

cheetah.org/get-involved/ccf-events/

ONLINE AND IN-PERSON

INTERNATIONAL CHEETAH DAY

DECEMBER 4, 2023
ANNUAL GLOBAL CELEBRATION OF THE CHEETAH - JOIN US!

2024 GLOBAL CHEETAH SUMMIT

JANUARY 27 - 31, 2024
DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

JANUARY 27 & 28, CHEETAH HUSBANDRY/REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY WORKSHOP

JANUARY 31, CHEETAH SUMMIT

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR



Thank you for being a vital part of our community through your subscription to our *Cheetah Strides* newsletter. Your interest and commitment to our work keeps our programs running and allows us to make the wild a better place for both cheetahs and people. *Make the Wild a Better Place* is the theme of my fall US fundraising tour. CCF's work improving wild spaces is something I will be speaking about at events.

What is “the wild”? For cheetahs, the wild includes rural livestock farmland, as the species is better suited to life outside of protected areas. Because their ranges are so large and they are more negatively affected by competition from other predators, the cheetah's wilderness is often shared with human communities. Driven by the cheetah's close proximity to people, the main threats to the species are habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, and illegal wildlife/pet trade. Our programs at CCF, anchored in scientific research and hands-on educational outreach, are aimed at crafting pragmatic solutions to mitigate these threats. Our work allows humans to more harmoniously share the landscape with predators like the cheetah. Making the wild a better place for everyone.

Shifting people's perspectives on predators through education allows us to safely reintroduce the cheetah into their former rangeland, making the wild a better place that functions the way it's meant to. We are not only restoring the natural order of ecosystems but also fostering a space where every individual can actively partake in conservation. Our work to make the wild a better place is not merely a vision, but an attainable reality.

This issue of *Cheetah Strides* has some important milestones and updates like the inauguration of our Cheetah Rescue and Conservation Centre (CRCC) in Somaliland, and the first anniversary of India's Project Cheetah. I hope you enjoy reading about these stories and more. I will also be elaborating upon recent developments and sharing in depth insights into our conservation work during the events of my US tour, location and details of which are highlighted to the left.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie Marker".

Dr. Laurie Marker
Founder & Executive Director

HELP US KEEP THE CHEETAH WHERE IT BELONGS

in the wild.



EDUCATION FOR ALL AGES AT CCF

CCF's vision of a landscape where both cheetahs and people coexist harmoniously is brought to life through our community engagement and environmental education programs: Future Farmers of Africa (FFA) and Future Conservationists of Africa (FCA). So far this year CCF's education team engaged with 13,436 Namibian students from primary and secondary school levels, as well as 267 teachers in both its outreach and centre-based programmes. A total of 124 farmers and community members participated in FFA coursework from Okatjoruu, Coblenz, and Okondjatu in the Okakarara District. These efforts underscore our commitment to adaptable and inclusive education, fostering a deep understanding about wildlife, not only for people from the local communities but also from abroad.

Our recent visit from TrainOccasion Primary School students exemplified our hands-on approach to early learning in environmental education. The school's specialty educational programs are made for students with unique educational needs. TrainOccasion's students observed cheetah feedings, participated in educational games, and embarked on an interactive tour of our Centre including our Cheetah Museum and Model Farm. Their excitement was infectious.

The enthusiasm continued with visits from Otjiwarongo High School, Omugwelume and Ponthofi Secondary Schools. The students explored our varied conservation initiatives, gaining insights into the practical and theoretical aspects of saving the cheetah. Secondary school visits are generally more focused on all the ways that conservation can be a good career choice. Students in this pivotal age group are given a deeper dive into CCF's methodologies. We show them everything from our ecology and genetics labs to our biomass and tourism operations. We usually have a lot of interest in our onsite vet clinic.

Our recent session with farmers from Hereroland at our Model Farm was the first FFA group we have welcomed since the COVID-19 pandemic. CCF's predator-friendly certification coursework provides insights into sustainable farming practices, methods to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts, and opportunities to increase the profitability of even the smallest livestock herd. We are especially happy to show conservancy farmers our Dancing Goat Creamery where we produce a variety of marketable dairy products.



We also welcome hundreds of international visitors, working guests and interns. This year in a partnership with Vanier College in Montreal, Canada, we are fortunate to welcome groups of interns on a rotating basis. From students studying to become veterinary technicians to those focused on environmental and wildlife management studies, all the groups immersed themselves in five-week internships where they delved into various aspects of conservation. Students had hands-on learning experience in cheetah husbandry helping with our morning cheetah runs and helped us with our remote camera trapping projects. We are providing them valuable academic knowledge and practical conservation insights and skills that will aid them in their future endeavors in wildlife conservation or veterinary medicine.

By helping build and foster a love of environmental education through all the various tracks of study and at all ages, CCF is helping people to live better lives with wildlife, not in spite of wildlife. We are working to shape a future where the cheetah can live harmoniously alongside people and everyone can benefit from having access to valuable natural resources, and human-wildlife conflict is a thing of the past.

Photos: Opposite page: Students from Ponghosi Secondary School **This page: clockwise from top left:** Students from TrainOccasion Primary School, two photos of farmer tours at the Dancing Goat Creamery and Milking Room at CCF's Midel Farm, Students from Otjiwarongo High Challenged CCF to sporting events during their visit.

RESEARCH PAPERS PUBLISHED

CCF's resource library has many interesting papers being published by scientific peer-reviewed journals. Many more are in review or pending publication. Below is a list of the most recent published papers. To read the papers in full visit: <https://cheetah.org/resource-category/scientific-papers/>

ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH

In Press - Ostrich: Journal of African Ornithology, *Status and density of threatened Kori bustard in a woodland savanna.* by Bandyopadhyay, K., Cristescu B., Beck, J.L., Koprowski, J.L., Marker, L.

May 2023 - Published in Animal Behaviour, *Social organization of a solitary carnivore, the leopard, inferred from behavioural interactions at marking sites* by Verschueren, S., Fabiano, E. C., Nghipunya, E., Cristescu, B. & Marker, L. 200: 115-124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anbehav.2023.03.019>



ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE RESEARCH

In Press - Conservation Science and Practice, *Genetic support to uplist an African cheetah subspecies, *Acinonyx jubatus soemmeringii** by Schmidt-Küntzel, A., Yashphe, S., Hamalwa, H., Ismail, S.H., Tricorache, P., Brewer, B., O'Brien, S.J., Marker, L.

REWILDING RESEARCH

April 2023 - Published in Nature Ecology & Evolution - *The case for the re-introduction of cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*) to India: A response to Gopalaswamy et al.* by Tordiffe, A.S.W., Jhala, Y.V., Boitani, L., Cristescu, B., Kock, R.A., Meyer, L.R.C., Naylor, S., O'Brien, S.J., Schmidt-Küntzel, A., Stanley-Price, M., van der Merwe, V., Marker, L. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feosc.2022.1028851>

FEATURED STAFF AT CCF



ANN FAN

VETERINARIAN, SOMALILAND

Originally from Taiwan, Dr. Ann Fan has been a practicing small animal veterinarian in the US for the past 10 years. It's always been a dream for her to work in Africa with wildlife like cheetahs. She was captivated by their elegance and their struggle for survival from a very young age. She signed up right away when she heard Dr. Laurie Marker was giving a lecture at the Phoenix Zoo. The talk focused around CCF's efforts in Somaliland and the need for veterinarians. Ann introduced herself and asked Dr. Marker if she could help by working for CCF in Somaliland.

When she arrived at CCF's Centre, she was immediately impressed by how well the cheetahs are cared for. The dedication and resources poured into the work by our staff members was inspiring. The cheetahs at CCF's new Centre in Geed-Deeble are now living "in the bush", exploring and enjoying their natural habitat. Ann's help was crucial to our efforts in moving and setting up the new facilities. We are so thankful for her expertise.

SPONSOR A LIVESTOCK GUARDING DOG (LGD)

Help support our efforts to provide an invaluable wildlife conflict mitigation solution to rural farmers. cheetah.org/donate/sponsor/





MOVING DAY MILESTONE: CCF'S MONUMENTAL RELOCATION TO GEED-DEEBLE

Throughout the first half of 2023, CCF conducted a multi-stage relocation operation in Somaliland. CCF outgrew its facilities in Hargeisa with a series of confiscations occurring in rapid succession over the past two years. A new larger facility, the Cheetah Rescue and Conservation Centre (CRCC) was conceived and developed in collaboration with Somaliland's Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC).

More than 90 cheetahs, a leopard named Milo, and a caracal named Honey, all confiscated from the illegal wildlife/pet trade, are now living in the expansive 800-hectare facility. The CRCC is not only a haven for these rescued animals but also serves as a prominent beacon for wildlife research, education, and training in the Horn of Africa. Integral to the Centre's design are its vast enclosures. Built to international standards, they afford the cheetahs the most naturalistic living conditions in the Somaliland landscape.

The months-long transfer, encompassing all the cheetahs, was meticulously executed under Dr. Marker's guidance. Thanks to the professionalism and dedication of staff in Somaliland the Safe Houses were dismantled with most of the components from these sites being saved for repurposing at the CRCC. Furthermore, this move aligns with broader aspirations to establish Geed-Deeble as Somaliland's first national park.

With Hargeisa's Safe Houses now decommissioned, the focus shifts entirely to fortifying the mission and infrastructure of the CRCC.

Photos: this page: Cheetah keepers unload the crates in the cheetah's new home in Geed-Deeble **Opposite page:** Cheetah cubs confiscated from the pet trade in Somaliland.

STUDYING SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE IN ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

In the vast digital marketplace of the 21st century, where consumers browse and purchase a variety of goods from clothing to electronics, there exists a more insidious commerce: the online trade of live cheetahs. A comprehensive six-month survey, executed by CCF in tandem with TRAFFIC from October 2022 to March 2023, delved deep into this unsettling trend to uncover the nuances of this trade and the platforms that are used to post the advertisements.

Researchers sought to understand the changes or new trends in trading and private ownership of the cheetah. The findings? Social media platforms are at the heart of this trade, with many turning to popular sites like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube to either buy or showcase their 'exotic' pets. Sellers employ multiple methods to avoid garnering unwanted attention, like posting image-only content or using multiple profiles to post.



Not limited to cheetahs, there has been a rise in the trade of various wildlife, from reptiles and birds to other wild cats. With Western Asia emerging as a hotspot for this activity, accounting for two-thirds of the URLs connected to live cheetah trades, the global nature of this issue was revealed during the study.

It is important to note that discrepancies do exist between the amount of online advertisements and official reports of cheetah imports in several countries. The digital world provides an avenue for illicit trade in wildlife as well as an opportunity for scammers who create fake advertisements designed to take advantage of potential buyers. The survey recommends a more detailed online watch, further research on the motivations behind owning exotic pets, and a boost in public awareness campaigns.

The survey findings remind us that while technology can do much good to promote conservation efforts, we must use caution when using social media platforms. There are many challenges to creating and posting photos of cubs and young cheetahs online that need to be addressed. As the illicit online world adapts to pressure from authorities, our vigilance and responsiveness is key to protecting the world's wildlife.



PROJECT CHEETAH ANNIVERSARY

On September 17th, we reached a pivotal milestone - the first anniversary of Project Cheetah, the ambitious reintroduction initiative involving India, Namibia, and South Africa, that aims to reestablish cheetah populations in India after a 70-year absence. This year has been a testament to the power of collaboration and resilience, teaching us invaluable lessons on the complexity of global conservation efforts.

Project Cheetah is focused on a critical mission: ensuring the survival of the dwindling cheetah population, currently fewer than 7,500 individuals globally. As native habitats continue to disappear, this project serves as a beacon of hope, highlighting the urgent need for a unified global response to conserve this species. Namibia and India have shown remarkable cooperation and determination to turn this plan into reality, a process that spanned 12 meticulous years of research and planning.

However, this journey has not been without its obstacles. This year saw several challenges that pushed us to innovate and adapt, including unexpected complications with collar-related technologies and tick infestations, which resulted in the unfortunate death of three cheetahs. Additionally, the high mortality rate amongst cheetah cubs, both in captivity and the wild, highlighted the precarious nature of conservation efforts. But through perseverance, open-mindedness, and resilience, the team remained steadfast in its mission, leaning on the diverse expertise of its members to navigate these challenges.

Despite the hurdles, the global attention on Project Cheetah has ushered in a renewed interest in cheetah conservation, bringing the spotlight on the urgent need to protect endangered species and their habitats worldwide. The collaborative efforts between members of the Project Cheetah team are essential as we venture into the project's second year.

Photos: This page: Dr. Laurie Marker and Dr. Stephen O'Brien at Kuno National Park
Opposite page: Gaurav and Shaurya in Kuno National Park in India.

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF “THE NAMIBIAN SET” IN KUNO

At the first anniversary of Project Cheetah, we remain steadfast in our commitment to the project’s success and also to maintaining transparent and honest communication with our supporters about the project’s progress and challenges. As part of this mission, we provide the following condensed update on the cheetahs commonly referred to as “The Namibian Set”, the eight cheetahs sent from Namibia to India and their year in Kuno National Park. This update offers a candid look into their successes including their adaptability and hunting prowess in new terrain. It also outlines some of the challenges they faced being part of the historical wildlife reintroduction.



Gaurav and **Shaurya** (formerly Elton and Freddy - “The Rockstars” coalition) swiftly made their mark within Kuno. Acting as the perfect vanguard for the project, the pair made their first successful hunt within 48 hours of their release. This historical milestone (the first cheetah hunt in over 70 years) was followed by establishing a territory around the boma (release holding area). They were probably anchored by a female in the boma. They exerted their dominance over the other male groups that were released chasing them out of their territory.

Sasha, a 5.5-year-old female passed away unexpectedly on 27 March 2023. While her demise was attributed to renal failure, the suddenness of her passing, especially given her alert and active state the day prior, raised questions about her health history. In Namibia, Sasha exhibited no clinical signs of disease, rendering her a prime candidate for the Indian reintroduction. All her health examination results from Namibia were transparently shared with the global team overseeing the Indian project and both Namibian and Indian authorities.

On March 24, **Jwala** (formerly Siyaya) gave birth to four cubs in a hunting boma, the spacious prey-stocked enclosure where she had lived for months. Shaurya was identified as the father of the cubs. Regrettably, an intense heatwave with temperatures soaring to 116°F (46.66°C) in Madhya Pradesh contributed to the rapid decline of her eight-week-old cubs. The heat, coupled with her inexperience as a first-time mother, claimed the lives of three of her cubs as they succumbed to dehydration and malnutrition on May 23. One was able to be retrieved and is being raised by the animal care staff at Kuno.

Pavan and **Aasha** (formerly Oban and Asha) a male and female that were released separately, demonstrated the cheetah's resilience and adaptability to new surroundings. Their excellent hunting skills became evident shortly after release. However, their innate curiosity led them multiple times to explore beyond the park's boundaries. The project's team intervened, bringing them back within the park to ensure their safety in this monitoring period.



Dhatri (formerly Tbilisi), had an elusive nature. Her hunting prowess indicated a great transition into her new wild life in India. However, she faced severe complications due to parasitic infestations around her tracking collar. On August 2 Tbilisi was found deceased by the monitoring team. One of the cheetahs from South Africa had experienced similar parasitic infestations that led to a fatal infection, so all the cheetahs were recaptured and taken back to the boma for health examinations and treatments.

As Project Cheetah continues, the well-being of the cheetahs remains our top priority. Lessons learned over this year shape our future actions, driving us towards achieving our goal: a thriving cheetah population in India.

Photo: this page: Pavan in Kuno National Park, Opposite page: top left: Scarlett's surgery, top right: Scarlett in recovery, bottom: Scarlett at release

SCARLETT'S SECOND CHANCE AT A WILD LIFE

September 14, 2023 was a momentous day at the Cheetah Conservation Fund! After four months of dedicated care and rehabilitation, we were thrilled to release a remarkable cheetah back into the wild.

Scarlett is a cheetah who earned her name due to the countless scars and wounds she bears, a testament to her resilience. She found herself in a conflict situation involving livestock and experienced intensive life threatening injuries and sepsis. She was gored, with a gaping hole through her leg and abdomen. When she arrived at CCF, we didn't know if she would make it.



Thanks to your support, our incredible veterinary team benefits from a fully-equipped clinic and our knowledgeable cheetah care teams can implement a healing regimen of nutritional supplements in a sanitary recovery area. We implement a multistage rehabilitation protocol and keep cheetahs like Scarlett comfortable while also keeping them wild. The team worked tirelessly, and Scarlett defied the odds, making a swift recovery.

Before her release, we carefully fitted her with a satellite collar to monitor her progress and ensure her safety. Using telemetry we can intervene if she experiences any problems. We remain committed to the ongoing well-being of all our cheetahs, even after they've returned to the wild.

When the crate door was opened, Scarlett was a bit confused and took a few seconds to realize she was free. But once it clicked, she wasted no time, taking off at a full run, a breathtaking symbol of resilience and freedom.



Kids

CORNER



STORIES FEATURING THE WORK OF CCF'S YOUNG SUPPORTERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.



Seven year-old Stella is a young cheetah fan from Canada who collected donations instead of gifts for her February birthday in order to sponsor resident cheetah Khaleesi. Stella LOVES cheetahs, her entire birthday party was cheetah themed including a cheetah cake. Yum!



Ella is a young supporter from UK and a fantastic artist who created a book entitled *Cheetahs: Africa's most endangered cat*. She is hoping the book will be an opportunity to raise funds and awareness as the book includes information on the cheetah's biology and physical characteristics.



Over the summer Piper, her sister, Lucy, and some friends had a lemonade stand to raise money for Cheetahs. The folks who came by were so supportive and delighted to see the kids donating the money to support Cheetahs! Piper even shares her birthday with the cheetahs on International Cheetah Day.

Do you have a story about a young supporter that you would like to share? Send us an email including a short description and some photos and we will include it in an upcoming issue of *Cheetah Strides* or on our website!

Email: info@cheetah.org



“THE AMBASSADORS” CELEBRATE 13 YEARS!

The cheetahs known as The Ambassadors (Peter, Senay and Tigerlily) turned 13 years old this year. The siblings were treated to a special birthday enrichment meat treat in August.

Making the wild a Better Place



Juried Children’s Art Competition

in Support of
Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF)

Deadline: Nov 11, 2023, 11:59pm EST

Media: Drawing, painting, collage!
Sorry, no sculpture or photography.

Two Categories: 6-9 years old + 10-15 years old

Fee: \$15 for 2 works

Winner
announced
via email on
Dec 4, 2023:
International
Cheetah Day



All artwork will be shown
in the online web gallery. Artists
will receive recognition and cool
Cheetah-themed prizes!

Entry Instructions:

Visit CCF's website to participate - cheetah.org/events/juried-childrens-art-competition/



LEARN MORE ABOUT CCF

CCF's Field Centres in Namibia is a hub of multinational research projects happening across the cheetah's range.
www.cheetah.org/about/what-we-do/research/



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