CHEETAH OUTREACH TRUST CONSERVATION PROJECTS
PROGRESS REPORT DECEMBER 2023

(COMPILED BY DEON CILLIERS AND CYRIL STANNARD)

DECEMBER 2023

INTRODUCTION:

The Cheetah Outreach Trust has been actively involved in various conservation initiatives aimed at reducing livestock losses on farms within the cheetah range and promoting the conservation of free-ranging cheetahs in South Africa. One of their key projects is the Livestock Guarding Dog Project, which was initiated in 2005. Over the span of 19 years, the Trust has placed a total of 387 individual livestock guarding dogs, primarily within the cheetah distribution range in South Africa. These dogs help protect livestock from predation, thereby reducing conflicts between farmers and cheetahs.

From 2013 to August 2023, the Cheetah Outreach Trust was in a partnership with Green Dog Conservation to manage the Irwin's Guardian Livestock Guarding Dog Stud. This collaboration focused on breeding livestock guarding dog puppies for placement on farms by the Cheetah Outreach Trust. This partnership came to an end in August 2023 and a new partnership was established with the HANRI Trust. The Irwin's Guardia Stud was moved to the new facility that was built with the kind support of Wildlife Warriors and Toerbroers.

In addition to the Livestock Guarding Dog Project, the Cheetah Outreach Trust has expanded its conservation efforts by undertaking other projects related to free-roaming cheetah conservation. One such initiative involves camera-trapping on farmland areas to monitor the presence and absence of cheetahs and other predator species like brown hyenas, leopards, spotted hyenas, and African wild dogs. The Trust also assists in the relocation of predators, such as cheetahs, leopards, and brown hyenas, in areas where tolerance levels are not yet conducive to their presence. These relocations open up opportunities for discussions with farmers regarding long-term predator and livestock management strategies, including the use of livestock guarding dogs.

To gain a better understanding of free-roaming cheetahs and their interactions with livestock guarding dogs and livestock herds, the Cheetah Outreach Trust has started collaring cheetahs in areas where they occur. This enables the tracking of their natural movements on farmland areas, including across international borders. The gathered information is shared with the farming community, other cheetah conservation organisations, and conservation authorities, contributing to a greater understanding of cheetahs living on farmland.

The Trust has also embarked on the first Free Roaming Cheetah Census in South Africa, in partnership with the Ashia Cheetah Conservation Project, the University of Stellenbosch, and Groningen University. This census project, supported by various organisations such as the SA Hunters, provincial Conservation Authorities, Phasa Foundation and Farmer Associations, aims to collect data on free-roaming cheetah populations. The information gathered through the census will provide valuable insights into cheetah distribution and aid in the development of effective conservation strategies.

The long-term goal of the Cheetah Outreach Trust's work with farmers is to foster tolerance towards predators, including cheetahs, and secure predator-tolerant habitat for these animals outside of protected areas on farmland. By introducing farmers to non-lethal predation management options, such as the use of livestock guarding dogs, the Trust aims to minimise conflicts between farmers and predators. It is worth noting that recent studies have revealed that 77 percent of the current cheetah distribution range occurs outside of protected areas, and cheetahs now occupy only 10 percent of their historical distribution range. Therefore, in-depth studies focused on predators on farmland areas are essential to provide updated and relevant information to farming communities, fostering better understanding and coexistence with these predators.

LIVESTOCK GUARDIAN DOG PROJECT

PLACEMENT AND MONITORING OF LIVESTOCK GUARDING DOGS:

Since the initiation of the Livestock Guarding Dog Project in 2005, the Cheetah Outreach Trust has been actively monitoring the progress and working abilities of livestock guarding dogs. This monitoring process has involved regular visitations, telephonic discussions, and questionnaires with the farmers who have received these dogs. This continuous monitoring has been crucial to the overall success of the project, allowing the Trust to assess the effectiveness of the dogs in reducing livestock losses and mitigating conflicts between farmers and predators.

For the year of 2023, the Cheetah Outreach Trust placed 14 new livestock guardian dog puppies that were born at the Irwin's Guardian Stud. Out of these placements, 8 were made in the Western Territory and 6 in the Eastern Territory of South Africa. We were 6 puppies short of our anticipated 20 placements in 2023. This was due to a loss of a litter of pups as well as the disruption of the breeding dogs due to the move of the Irwin's Guardian Stud to a new venue in the Northern Cape. One of our older females was retired due to her age and an older male died at the breeding facility due to old age.

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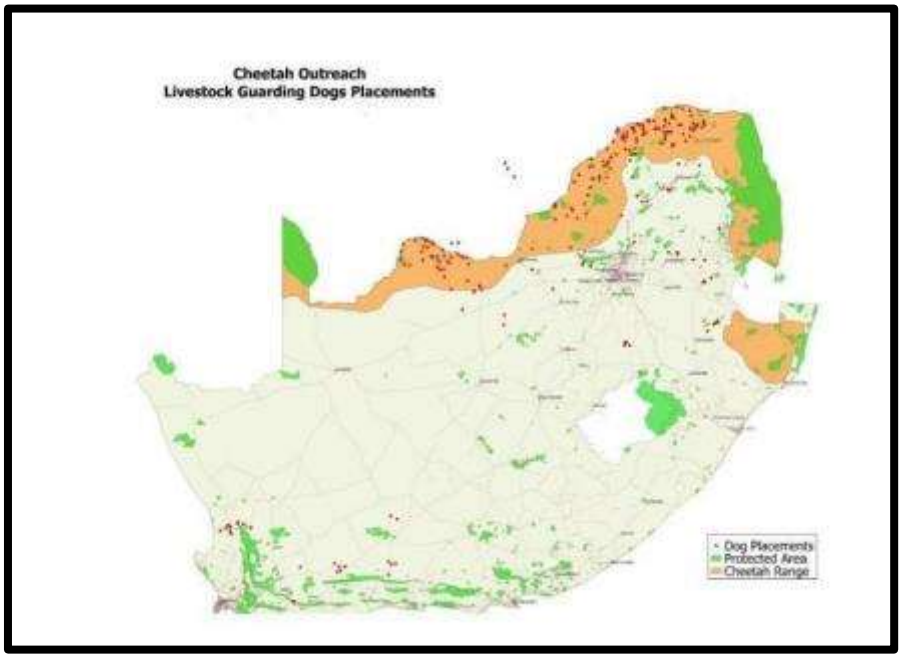

Figure 1: Map illustrating the placement of the livestock guardian dogs

CURRENT STATUS OF ALL LIVESTOCK GUARDING DOGS PLACED.

The Cheetah Outreach Trust maintains ongoing monitoring of all livestock guarding dog placements to ensure their effectiveness and address any issues that may arise. For the first 12 months after placement, monthly visits are conducted to closely monitor the dogs and promptly address any problems that may arise through effective corrective methods. After the initial 12-month period, dogs under 2 years of age are visited and monitored twice a year, while older dogs are visited once a year. This allows the Trust to maintain regular contact with the farmers and the livestock guarding dogs.

Up until the end of December 2023, the Cheetah Outreach Trust has successfully placed a total of 387 Livestock Guarding Dogs. Out of these placements, 325 have been considered successful, with the dogs actively working and guarding livestock. However, 62 dogs had to be removed due to behavioural problems. This represents a 79% successful placement rate.
Among the 325 successful placements, the breakdown of their current status is as follows: 37% are still actively working and guarding livestock, 11% have been retired, 49% have either passed away while in service or due to old age, and 3% have been moved out of the cheetah range. The continuous monitoring and evaluation of the livestock guarding dog placements help ensure the project's effectiveness in mitigating livestock losses and fostering coexistence between farmers and predators within the cheetah range.

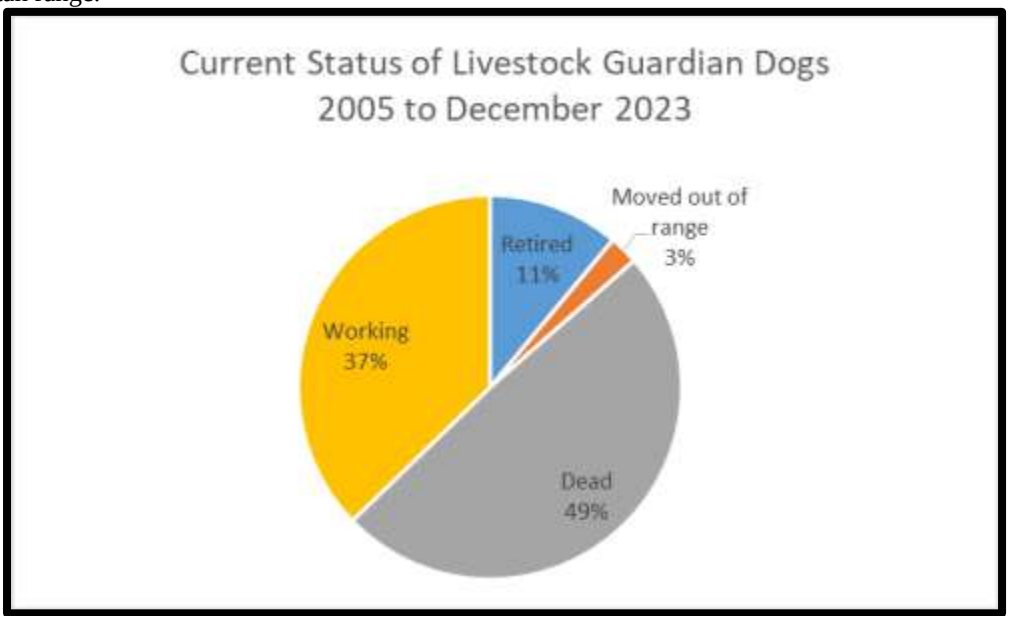

Figure 2: Current Status of the Livestock Guardian Dogs

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Figure 3: Irwin's Guardian Lexi with her herdsmen

Figure 4: Irwin's Guardian with farmer and herdsman

SPONSORS FOR THE PLACEMENT OF LIVESTOCK GUARDIAN DOGS IN 2023

We are very grateful to the following sponsors and donors who made it possible to place the following individual livestock guardian dogs during 2023:

Irwin's Guardian Ana	Ana Rogovic
Irwin's Guardian Betty2	Fresno Chaffee Zoo
Irwin's Guardian Finn	Toerbroers
Irwin's Guardian Victor	Wild Wonders (Naming rights for recognition of support)
Irwin's Guardian Ngunnawal	Canberra Zoo (Naming rights for recognition of support)
Irwin's Guardian Thor	Marjolein and Willem de Kant
Irwin's Guardian Hero	Brent Lourens &Leon Lourens
Irwin's Guardian Jackson	John Horseman Trust
Irwin's Guardian Lexi	DGB/African Secrets (Naming rights for recognition of support)
Irwin's Guardian Omer	Lourdes Gomez
Irwin's Guardian Legacy	Shawn and Morgan Stephenson
Irwin's Guardian Aurora	Fairmont Wildlife Society
Irwin's Guardian Ava (female)	Annie Beckhelling and Cheetah Outreach CC
Irwin's Guardian Cooper	Tom Archipley and Paige

IRWIN'S GUARDIAN STUD BREEDING FACILITY

The Irwin's Guardian Livestock Guarding Dog Breeding Facility, located at the Green Dogs Conservation property near Alldays in Limpopo Province, has been operating successfully for several years. This partnership came to an end at the end of August 2023 and the Irwin's Guardian Stud was moved to a new site in the Northern Cape Province and the breeding dogs are now managed on behalf of the Cheetah Outreach Trust by Hannelie Liebenberg, an experienced and reputable Anatolian breeder and new conservation partner. The breeding dogs at the Irwin's Guardian Stud receive regular vaccinations, which are sponsored by Virbac, a company specialising in animal health. The food for all the dogs involved in the breeding project is proudly sponsored by Ultrapet, and the Cheetah Outreach Trust considers Ultrapet as a key partner in this endeavour. The new facility was built with the financial support of Wildlife Warriors and Toerbroers.

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Figure 5: Irwin's Guardian Compton at the new Irwin's Guardian Stud

In terms of the breeding program, two new breeding dogs have joined the Irwin's Guardian Stud after they spent their sub adult days as ambassadors at the Cheetah Outreach facility where they were used to educate visitors until they were old enough to be taken to the Irwin's Guardian Stud for breeding purposes. This ensures the continuation of the breeding program and maintains the lineage and genetic diversity of the breeding dogs involved. We did lose one of our older males (Morrison) to old age recently and a younger male (Torres) will be moved to the Cheetah Outreach Facility as an ambassador as he is not adapting to the new environment at the new facility.

Figure 6: IG Compton welcoming IG Scout the Irwin's Guardian Stud

The Cheetah Outreach Trust values the partnerships and sponsorships it has established with companies like Virbac and Ultrapet, and the partnership with Toerbroers and the Hanri Trust as they contribute to the success and sustainability of the Livestock Guarding Dog Project and the Irwin's Guardian Livestock Guarding Dog Breeding Facility. We are very grateful towards Green Dogs Conservation who have done an exceptional job by hosting and managing the Irwin's Guardian Stud for the past several years.

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PREDATOR CONFLICT WORK:

Since December 2020 14 leopards have been managed as part of conflict mitigation with farmers in Limpopo. One young leopard sub-adult female that underwent rewilding was released successfully. During the same period 25 cheetahs were received from farmland areas where they were caught by farmers or where we were able to capture them for the purpose of collaring and release. 17 of these cheetahs have been released back onto farmland areas after they were collared with satellite collars. 7 of the cheetah received were released into the Cheetah meta-population in protected areas in South Africa as they were not suitable to be released back onto farmland areas due to their age or period they had to be kept in holding.

Figure 7: Leopard released after rescued from a trap cage

A report of cheetah in the Namakwaland area was received and together with the Northern Cape Authorities, SANPARKS and SA Hunters, a task team was established to deal with any conflict that may arise. The Trust presented a training session for role players at the Goegap Nature Reserve in Namakwaland and capture cages were made available to the Conservation Authorities to use on short notice should further reports of conflict arise. Reports of these cheetahs have died down and we think that these cheetahs have either established themselves within the National Park or have migrated back to where they came from.

Reports were also received from the Debeng area of the Northern Cape regarding a group of dispersing cheetah moving through the area. Systems were put in place to capture these cheetah if they established themselves within a specific area but these cheetahs have disappeared and it is thought that they have gone back to the area where they dispersed from.

A single female cheetah was recently caught within an intensive antelope breeding camp in the Thabazimbi area. We were given the opportunity to collar this cheetah with a collar provided Ashia Cheetah Conservation who are partners in the Free Roaming Cheetah Census. Unfortunately this female cheetah was found dead three weeks after her release back into her former range.

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Figure 8: Female cheetah collared for release back onto farmlands

FREE ROAMING CHEETAH CENSUS PROJECT

The Free Roaming Cheetah Census (FRCCP) project was initiated by Cheetah Outreach Trust and partner organisation Ashia Cheetah Conservation to assist the Cheetah Outreach Trust to expand their efforts across the landscape where cheetah occur on farmlands (which is enormous). Stellenbosch University and Groningen University with PhD students where brought on board to deal with the mass of incoming data and formalise the outputs from the work. The FRCCP is the biggest and most comprehensive survey of cheetah presence and associated predation costs to landowners across all free-roaming cheetah range in South Africa ever done. With adequate support and resources to see it through properly the status of the free roaming cheetah in South Africa can be scientifically determined across the natural range and conservation focused policies taking in consideration the co-existence needs of the farming communities can be developed to ensure the long term conservation of cheetah on farmlands in South Africa. There is currently not enough information available about the current status of cheetah on farmlands and previous studies only provided a rough estimate of what is thought the be the status of free roaming cheetah in South Africa. Very little scientifically based data is available highlighting the impact these cheetahs have on farming practices and once again this is part of what the FRCCP is aiming at addressing. The survey will take place over a fixed schedule of 3 years with regular and summary feedback to landowners and partners. The Cheetah Outreach Trust will have a much stronger relationship with landowners for the conflict mitigation and intervention work and will have adequate data to lobby policy change with Conservation Authorities where required.

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Figure 9: Free Roaming cheetah captured on camera trap

BUSHMANS KLOOF WILDERNESS RESERVE & WELLNESS RETREAT CAPE LEOPARD PROJECT

In order to safeguard herds on farms in the free-roaming Cape Leopard habitat in the Cederberg Mountains outside of Clanwilliam, the Cheetah Outreach Trust and Bushmans Kloof partnered to launch a Cape Leopard conservation initiative in 2018. The project uses Anatolian Shepherd dogs to guard flocks of livestock against predation from the Cape leopard. Bushmans Kloof provides funding for the project, and the Cheetah Outreach Trust places, monitors and provided husbandry care for 25 dogs over the course of five years, or until they pass away from old age or retirement. The project's goal is to assist farmers who have Cape leopards present on their properties protect their herds from predation making it unnecessary for farmers to deploy lethal control methods against the Cape leopards and other predators that occur on the farmlands within the Cederberg area.

The Clanwilliam area farming community has valued the involvement of the Cheetah Outreach Trust since its initial placement of the first livestock guardian dogs in 2018. Every one of the 25 dogs has been assigned to a separate region of the Cederberg Mountains, each farm having either a resident leopard or a high level of leopard activity. Out of the twenty-five canines, sixteen are still in service, six passed away, and three had to be taken out because of undesirable behavior.

First, Ewie Smit's farm had two of the worst incidents of predation in the research. He farms with sheep and has a herd of 150 ewes. He became involved in the project during its first year, following the deaths of 148 lambs to disease and predators. Less than 5% of the lambs were lost when Rocky was brought to the farm at the end of 2018. He feels privileged to be involved with the initiative and is amazed by what Rocky has accomplished for them. But when Rocky happened to come onto a leopard following a natural kill, the leopard fatally injured him during a fight. Second is Sybrand de Beer, a sheep farmer who also has a resident leopard and frequent sightings of other leopards roaming about his property. He was preparing to sell his last sheep when he learned about the initiative and promptly wanted to participate. In just one year, he had lost 25 fully matured ewes to predators. After being placed on the farm in 2020, Jambo has lost less than 5% of his herd and is now, almost four years later, back to the point where he may begin to develop his herd once more.

The Cheetah Outreach Trust will continue to oversee and protect the project and farmers during the project's maintenance phase, which will run until the last dog retires.

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Figure 10: Max in the Cederberg

Figure11:Cape Leopard on camera trap on farm where Gabriel is deployed

VISITORS TO THE PROJECT

- A talk on the Cheetah Outreach Trusts' project was given to Wild Wonders and guests in Mashatu, Botswana
- Robert Johnson of the Rare Species Fund linked up with the project while he was in South Africa.

Figure12: Wild Wonders guests receiving info on the Cheetah Outreach Trust projects

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CHEETAH OUTREACH TRUST 2023 USA DONOR LIAISON AND FUNDRAISING TRIP

The Cheetah Outreach Trust was extremely fortunate to have Deon Cilliers, our Conservation Manager, go to the United States this year to visit current donors and connect with new donors and supporters. During this tour, Deon spoke at the annual ZAA conference in Rhode Island, New York, and visited donors in Florida, Ohio, Alabama, Nevada, and California. With the exception of the ZAA conference, a whirlwind tour was undertaken, visiting thirteen different sites and attending presentations. Our heartfelt thanks to Sue Steffens at Tigers for Tomorrow in Alabama, Busch Gardens in Tampa, Zoo Miami and the Ron Magill Conservation Endowment in Miami, Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens, and Columbus Zoo and Aquarium in Ohio, The Wildcat Education and Conservation Fund in California, Animal Ark in Reno, Wildlife Safari in Oregon, Fresno Chaffee Zoo, Project Wildlife, Orange County Zoo, San Diego Safari Park, and Seaworld San Diego for their hospitality. There were fundraisers at the Wildcat Education and Conservation Fund and Tigers for Tomorrow. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Cat Haven for their assistance, and most all to Wild Wonders for organizing the events at each of the aforementioned sites and for supporting the international trip from South Africa to the USA and back.

Figure 13: Busch Gardens Tampa presentation

Figure 14: Presenting at Zoo Miami

Figure 15: Fundraiser at Tigers For Tomorrow in Alabama with Sue and Wilbur

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Figure 16: Deon at Cincinnati Zoo with Lily Maynard and Eric Byrd

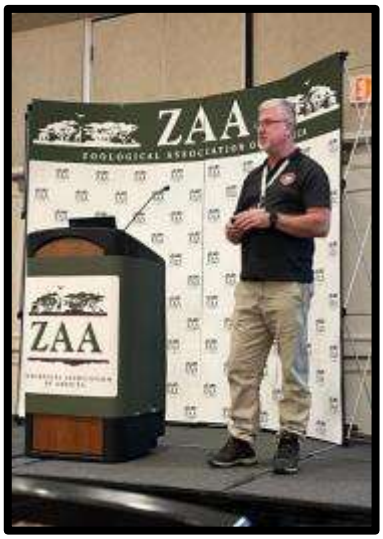

Figure 17: Deon presenting at ZAA Conference

Figure 18: Deon with Barbara and Rob Diceley at the WECF Fundraiser

IN SUMMARY:

Under the leadership of our Executive Trustee Annie Beckhelling and her right hand Trustees Jeremy Burman and Ross Cowing, the Cheetah Outreach Trust has made tremendous progress in the conservation of free-roaming cheetahs in South Africa in 2023. The Cheetah Outreach Trust is incredibly thankful to ALL of our faithful and supporting supporters, who have continued to support our conservation efforts despite the fact that many of our contributors have encountered financial difficulties themselves.

Our collaboration with like-minded cheetah conservation organizations (Ashia Cheetah Conservation) in South Africa has enabled us to participate in the Free Roaming Cheetah Census, with Stellenbosch University and Groningen University serving as the academics behind it. We would like to thank all landowners who have already provided information about free roaming cheetahs on their farms, as well as those who have made their farms available for additional research, including camera traps. Toerbroers and Vermont Sales generously donated incredible prizes to three lucky farmers who filled out the Free Roaming Cheetah Census online form. The free roaming census will continue in 2024, with ourselves and our partners working tirelessly in the field to collect the necessary data. We regrettably lost two of our cheetahs collared with satellite collars this year as a result of possible illegal shootings, and we have initiated criminal cases with the South African Police Service to further investigate.

The relocation of the Irwin's Guardian Stud to its new location in the Northern Cape resulted in fewer puppies for placement as livestock guardians than we expected, which can be attributed to the stress of the move as well as adjusting to a new environment. We are confident that we will achieve further success in this area in 2024.

As members of national predator forums such as the Cheetah Advisory Group, the Wild Dog Advisory Group, and the Leopard Consultative Forum, we continue to provide advice on matters pertaining to the conservation of predators.
We are excited about 2024 and the many challenges that lie ahead. Only with the ongoing assistance of our funders, conservation partners, and the farmers who own the farms where cheetahs still roam freely will we be able to meet these challenges.

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OUR WISHLIST FOR 2024

- Camera traps x40 @US$200 each
- SD cards x 150 (for camera traps)
- Sponsors for fuel for field officers - 6000km per month
- Tyres for field officer vehicle (3 ply - 265/60/18 (8 tyres)
- Caps and T-shirts for field officers and to distribute to farm workers
- Portable printer, does not need to be a 3 in 1 a printer/scanner will do (x2)
- Portable 1 TB Hard drive for storage of photos from camera traps (x2)
- Sponsor awareness trip for Conservation Manager to Australia and New Zealand
- Donating towards general program costs – salaries, maintenance, etc.
- Flatbed trailer x1 @ R19500
- 12 volt to 220 volt inverters for use by field officers in the field to power laptops. (x3)
- Printing cost of farmer livestock guardian dog training manual.
- 5 ml syringes and needles for vaccinations of livestock guardian dogs. (500)
- Smartrap control units for two capture cages.
- Garmin GPS Devices. (x3)
- 300 meters of shade netting to cover perimeter fence of the Irwin's Guardian Stud to prevent snakes entering.

OUR LONG TERM DONORS

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