CHEETAH OUTREACH TRUST CONSERVATION PROJECTS
PROGRESS REPORT JUNE 2024

(COMPILED BY DEON CILLIERS AND CYRIL STANNARD)

AUGUST 2024

INTRODUCTION:

The goal of the Cheetah Outreach Trust's numerous conservation efforts is to mitigate livestock losses on farms where cheetahs roam free and to advance the conservation of South Africa's free roaming cheetah populations within the farmland landscape. The Livestock Guarding Dog Project, which was started in 2005, is one of the major initiatives of the Trust. The Trust has deployed 389 individual livestock guarding dogs in 19 years, mostly in South Africa, within the free roaming cheetah distribution range. These canines lessen conflict between farmers and cheetahs as well as other predators by guarding the livestock against predation from predators.

From 2013 to August 2023, the Cheetah Outreach Trust collaborated with Green Dog Conservation to run the Irwin's Guardian Livestock Guarding Dog Stud. This collaboration centred on producing livestock guarding dog puppies for deployment on farms by the Cheetah Outreach Trust. This relationship ended in August 2023, and a new partnership was formed with the HANRI Trust. The Irwin's Guardia Stud was relocated to the new facility, which was constructed with the generous assistance of Wildlife Warriors and Toerbroers.

The Cheetah Outreach Trust has broadened its conservation efforts by working on several projects pertaining to free-roaming cheetah conservation in addition to the Livestock Guarding Dog Project. In order to track the presence and/or absence of cheetahs and other predator species including brown hyenas, leopards, spotted hyenas, and African wild dogs, one such program uses camera-trapping on farmed regions. In regions where their existence is not yet tolerated, the Trust also helps with the relocation of predators like brown hyenas, cheetahs and leopards. Discussions with farmers about long-term predator and livestock management techniques, such as the deployment of livestock guard dogs, are made possible by these relocations.

The Cheetah Outreach Trust has begun collaring cheetahs in their natural habitat in order to better understand the behaviour of free-roaming cheetahs and how they interact with livestock guarding dogs and livestock herds as well as other farming activities. This makes it possible to monitor their natural movements across international borders and across farmland areas. The knowledge acquired about cheetahs living on farms is expanded by sharing the information with the farming community, other cheetah conservation organizations, and conservation authorities.

In addition, the Trust has launched South Africa's first Free Roaming Cheetah Census in collaboration with the Ashia Cheetah Conservation Project, the University of Stellenbosch, and Groningen University. This census effort, supported by the SA Hunters, Provincial Conservation Authorities, the Phasa Foundation, and farmer associations, aims to collect information on free-roaming cheetah populations. The census data will provide significant insights on cheetah distribution and help develop effective conservation policies for free roaming cheetahs in South Africa.

Fostering tolerance towards predators, including cheetahs, and securing predator-tolerant habitat for these species outside of protected zones on farmland are the long-term objectives of the Cheetah Outreach Trust's work with farmers. With the use of livestock guarding dogs, among other non-lethal predation management techniques, the Trust hopes to reduce hostilities between farmers and predators. It's important to remember that, according to recent research, cheetahs currently inhabit only 10% of their historical distribution range, with 77% of their range occurring outside of protected areas. Consequently, comprehensive research on farmland predators is necessary to give farming communities current and pertinent knowledge, promoting a better understanding and co-existence with these predators in the farmland landscape

LIVESTOCK GUARDIAN DOG PROJECT
PLACEMENT AND MONITORING OF LIVESTOCK GUARDING DOGS:

Since the start of the Livestock Guarding Dog Project in 2005, the Cheetah Outreach Trust has been closely monitoring the progress and working abilities of livestock guard dogs. This monitoring procedure has included regular visits, phone calls, and questionnaires for the farmers who have received these dogs. This ongoing monitoring has been critical to the project's overall success, allowing the Trust to evaluate the dogs' effectiveness in lowering livestock losses and resolving conflicts between farmers and predators.

Ten puppies from the Irwin's Guardian Stud were placed by the Cheetah Outreach Trust between June 2023 and June 2024. Four of these placements were made in South Africa's Western Territory, and six were made in the Eastern Territory. Ten puppies remain to be placed from the 20 placements we had planned for 2023–2024. This resulted from the loss of a litter of puppies as well as the disturbance caused by the Irwin's Guardian Stud's relocation to a new location in the Northern Cape. Due of her advanced age, one of our older females was retired, while an older male passed away at the breeding facility. Two new young breeding dogs were added to the Irwin’s Guardian Stud. Indications are that Ester is pregnant and we should be expecting her litter puppies at the end of August with an unconfirmed pregnancy from Tiaki.

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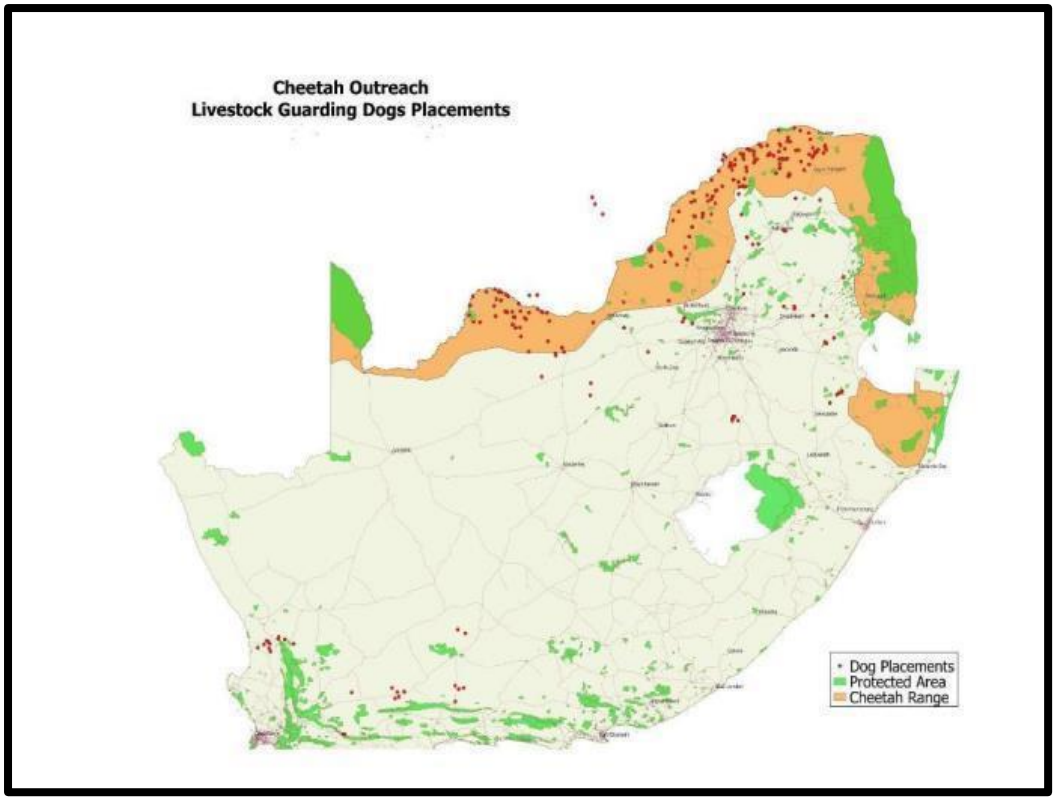

Figure 1: Placement of Livestock Guardian Dogs

CURRENT STATUS OF ALL LIVESTOCK GUARDING DOGS PLACED.

All livestock guarding dog placements are continuously monitored by the Cheetah Outreach Trust in order to verify their efficacy and handle any potential problems. Monthly visits are made for the first year following the dogs' placement in order to closely observe them and quickly address any issues that may occur with appropriate corrective measures. Dogs under the age of two are visited and observed twice a year after the first twelve months, and older dogs are visited once a year. This makes it possible for the Trust to stay in constant communication with the farmers and the dogs that guard the livestock.

By the end of June 2024, the Cheetah Outreach Trust had placed 389 Livestock Guarding Dogs. Of these placements, 326 were considered successful, with the dogs actively working and protecting livestock. However, 63 placements have had to be rehomed due to behavioural difficulties since 2005. This translates to an 84% successful placement rate.

The current status of the 326 successful placements is summarised here. 35% are still actively working and defending livestock, 12% have retired, 50% have died while on duty or as a result of old age, and 3% have been relocated outside the cheetah range. Continuous monitoring and assessment of livestock guarding dog placements help to improve the project's performance in decreasing livestock losses.

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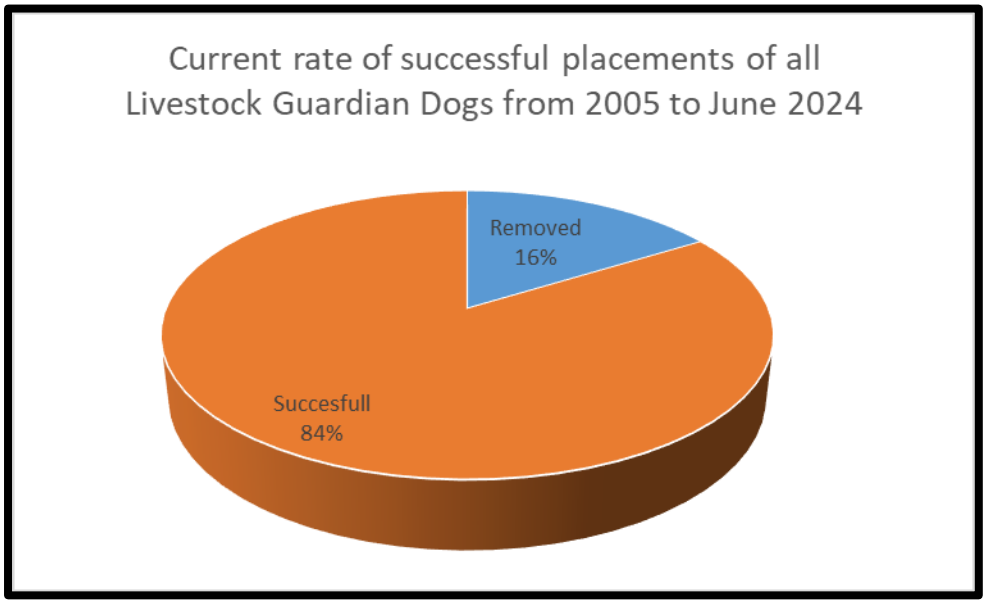

Figure 2: Current status of Livestock Guardian Dogs

As previously stated, 50% of livestock guardian dogs placed had perished in service between 2005 and June 2024, a period of 19 years. This is a 50% mortality rate, which may cause alarm if not explained. The majority of deaths were caused by snakebite in the early years of the placements. Since then, snake aversion training has been implemented, which has significantly reduced the number of deaths caused by snakebite during recent years. Some of the dogs have died for unexplained reasons, which occurs when the livestock guardian dogs fail to return to the kraal and the carcasses are only discovered a day or two later, having decomposed owing to the heat to the point where the cause of their deaths cannot be ascertained. A tiny number of livestock guardian dogs have not returned, but bodies have not been recovered, so we choose to classify them as missing rather than speculate on the reason. Carcases that have been discovered but have no definite cause of death are classed as unknown for the same reason. The remaining causes are self-explanatory, as illustrated by the graph in Figure 3.

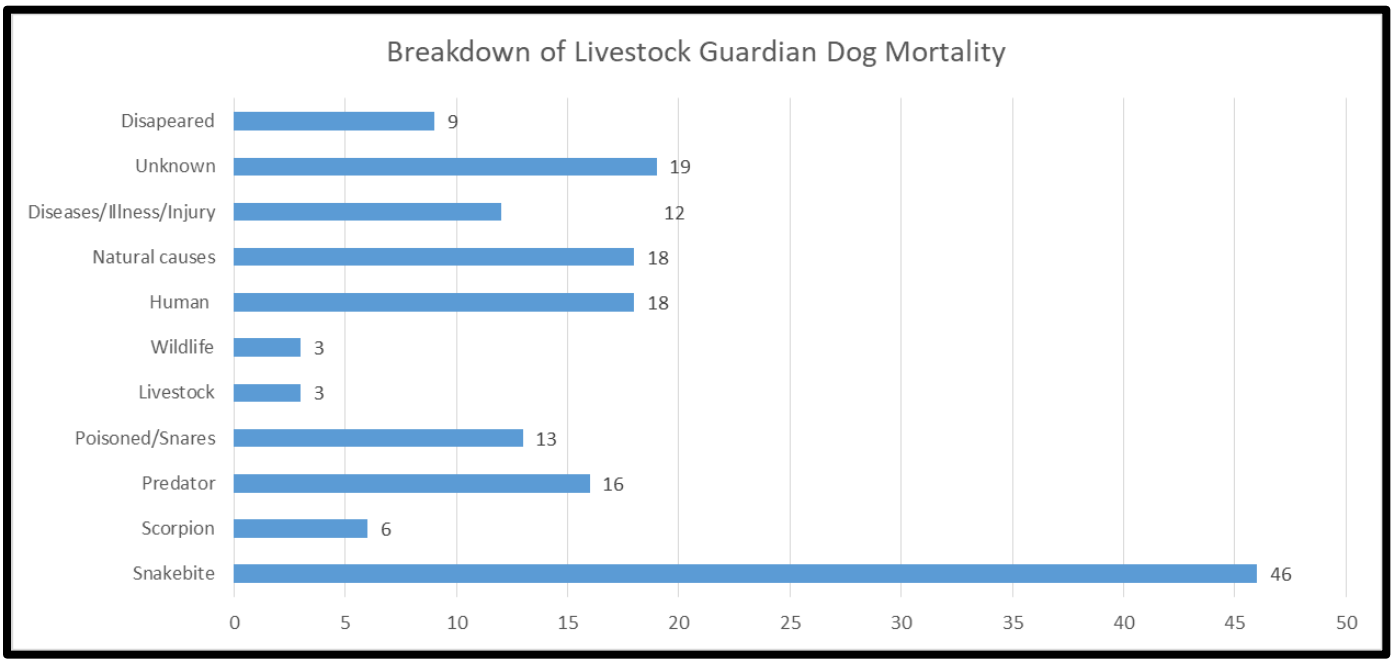

Figure 3: Mortality of successfully placed livestock guardian dogs 2005 to June 2024

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Figure 4: IG Bodey with his goats

Figure 5: IG Hero with sheep

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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 June 2023 to June 2024:

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 Bodey	Tom Archipley and Paige
Irwin's Guardian Wasabi	Wasabi Warriors

IRWIN'S GUARDIAN STUD BREEDING FACILITY

The Irwin's Guardian Livestock Guarding Dog Breeding Facility, based on the Green Dogs Conservation property near Alldays in Limpopo Province, had been running effectively for several years. This partnership ended in August 2023, and the Irwin's Guardian Stud was relocated to a new location in the Northern Cape Province. Hannelie Liebenberg, an experienced and reputable Anatolian breeder and new conservation partner, now manages the breeding dogs on behalf of the Cheetah Outreach Trust. Virbac, an animal health firm, sponsors the immunizations that the breeding dogs at Irwin's Guardian Stud undergo on a monthly basis. UltraPet happily sponsors the food for all of the canines involved in the breeding effort, and the Cheetah Outreach Trust regards UltraPet as a valuable partner in this work. Wildlife Warriors and Toerbroers provided financial support for the new facility's construction.

During the beginning of the year, Irwin's Guardian Ester gave birth to a litter of two puppies, both of whom were successfully placed with eagerly awaiting farmers in the Eastern Territory of the Limpopo Province. We are thrilled to learn that both Irwin's Guardian Tiaki and Irwin's Guardian Ester may be expecting litters soon. Our new breeders, Irwin's Guardian Scout and Compton, have acclimatised well. This ensures the continuance of the breeding program while also preserving the lineage and genetic diversity of the breeding dogs involved.

Figure 6: IG Compton and IG Scout

We were able to snake proof the Irwin's Guardian Stud's surrounding fence with the financial assistance of the John Horseman Trust, FIAA, and the National Zoo Canberra. We were able to attach the shade netting to the existing fence with the help of the interns from Toerbroers. The interns put in a lot of work, and in just two days, the snake proofing was finished.

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Figure 8: Day 1 - Snake proofing starts

Figure 7: Day 2- Nearly finished with snake proofing

Figure 9: Snake proofing done. Thank you Toerbroers Interns.

The Livestock Guarding Dog Project and the Irwin's Guardian Livestock Guarding Dog Breeding Facility are made possible by the partnerships and sponsorships the Cheetah Outreach Trust has developed with organisations such as Virbac and Ultrapet, as well as the collaborations with Toerbroers, Wildlife Warriors, and the Hanri Trust. These partnerships and sponsorships are highly valued by the Trust.

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PREDATOR CONFLICT WORK:

Since December 2020, 30 leopards have been managed in Limpopo as part of conflict mitigation efforts with farmers. One juvenile leopard sub adult female who underwent rewilding was successfully released. Another young adult female captured by the Free State Conservation Authorities and the Bloemfontein SPCA has been relocated to a rewilding site in the Thabazimbi area; she will be released in August 2024. In June 2024, an adult "Strawberry Leopard" female was rescued and moved to a safe area in Limpopo Province. In order to keep farmers from just shooting or illegally trafficking in these leopards, funding is vitally needed for the seemingly never-ending and underfunded rescue efforts of leopards.

During the same time period, 29 cheetahs were collected from farmland areas, either they had been trapped by farmers or where we had been able to capture them for collaring and release. 21 of these cheetahs were released back onto farmland after being fitted with satellite collars. Seven of the cheetahs were released into the Cheetah meta-population in protected regions in South Africa since they were too young or had to be held for an extended amount of time for them to be released back onto farmland areas. One cheetah male with major eye damage was donated to the Ann van Dyk Cheetah Centre for breeding purposes because he was non-releasable.

Our conflict mitigation work is focused on a multi-disciplinary and integrated approach which benefits not only cheetah but also other predators that share the landscape within the farming areas to ensure broader biodiversity conservation within these farmland areas.

Figure 10: "Strawberry" leopard in trapcage

Figure 11: "Strawberry" leopard successfully rescued and relocated

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FREE ROAMING CHEETAH CENSUS PROJECT

The Free Roaming Cheetah Census (FRCC) 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 were brought on board to deal with the mass of incoming data and formalise the outputs from the work. The FRCC 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 (Thank you Ashia Cheetah Conservation) 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 FRCC is aiming at addressing. The survey is taking place over a fixed schedule of 3 years with regular and summary feedback to landowners and partners.

The FRCC is now halfway through and with the results 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. As part of the FRCC's range usage and life history studies, a male cheetah was caught in the Swartwater region in February 2024 and collared with a Spoortrack satellite collar given by Ashia Cheetah Conservation. Unfortunately, a local farmer recently shot this male cheetah. When the farmer saw that the cheetah had a satellite collar on, he got in touch with us. Although it is very heart-breaking to loose our collared cheetahs to killing by farmers, this does give us an indication of the impact this activity has on the current cheetah population and also the possible number of uncollared cheetahs been shot and simply not reported.

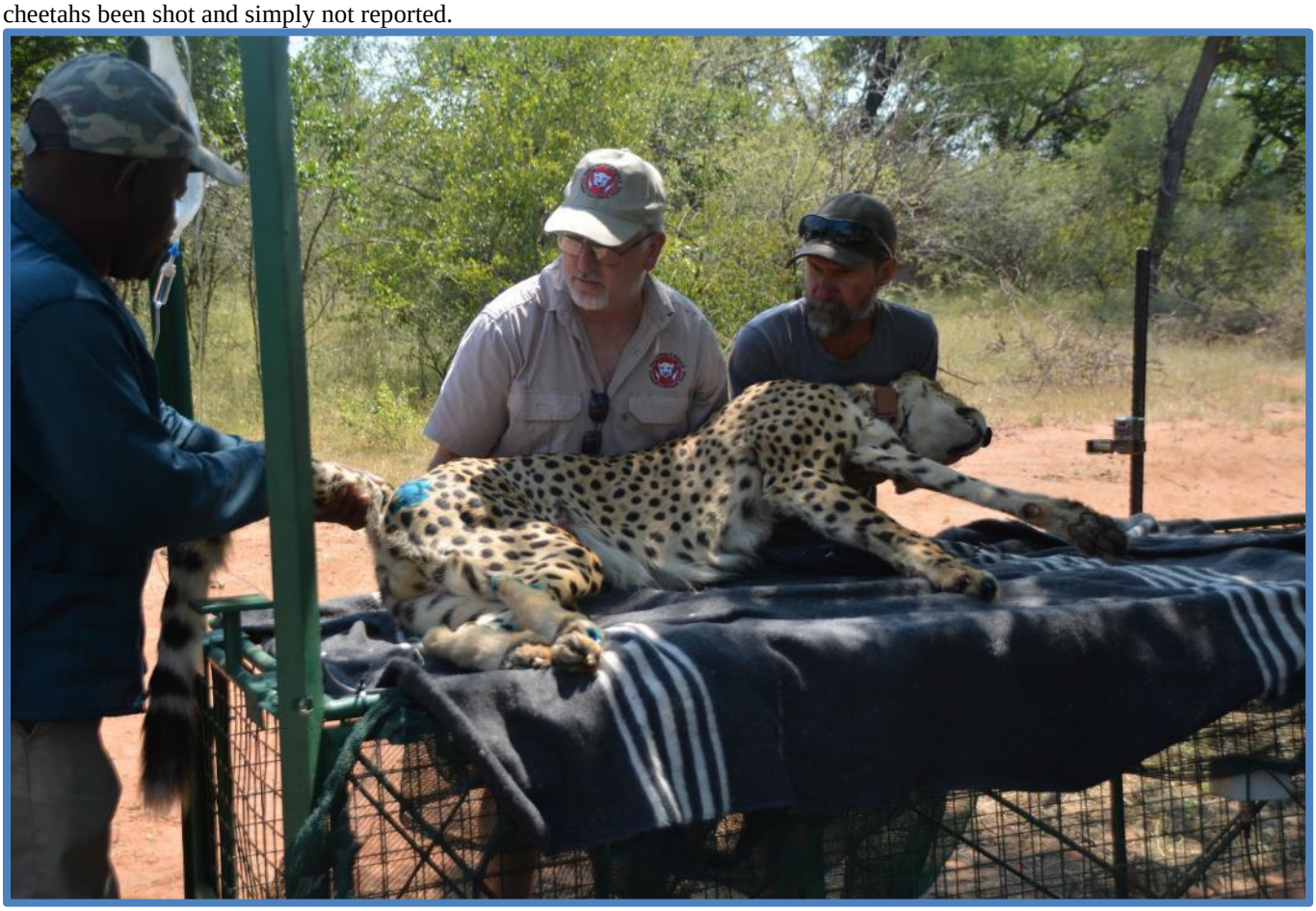

Figure 12: Cheetah Male collared with Louis Heyns of Ashia Cheetah Conservation

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Figure 12: Collared male at scent marking tree on camera trap

Figure 12: Collared male carcass after it was shot by farmer

In the Lephalale region of Limpopo, a female cheetah was also fitted with a satellite collar of the same kind, courtesy of Ashia Cheetah Conservation, for the same research project of the FRCC. She has been sighted a few times by hunters in the area quite a distance away from where we captured and collared her. Fortunately the hunters reported seen her and did not shoot her. We are currently focusing on the farmland area east of Alldays and Pontrift toward the Kruger National Park boundary from the perspective of the Cheetah Outreach Trust, doing farmer surveys and setting up camera traps for monitoring.

Figure 13: Cheetah female collared close to Lephalale as part of FRCC

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Figure 14: Cheetah on FRCC 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 to 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.

Figure 15: Aza during monitoring visit in the Bushmans Kloof

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 behaviour. The project is running well and all the farmers have had positive experiences with their dogs. They all agree that the usage of the dogs has been to their financial and emotional benefit. The emotional benefit comes from not having to worry about predation on their flocks. The Cheetah Outreach Trust will continue to oversee the project and farmers during the project's maintenance phase, which will run until the last dog retires.

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Figure 16: Anatolian Max with Bushman Kloof staff during monitoring visits

VISITORS TO THE PROJECT

- A talk on the Cheetah Outreach Trusts' project was given to Wild Wonders and guests in Hoedspruit.
- S.P.E.C.I.E.S Director, Anthony Giordano had a meeting with Deon Cilliers at the SA Wildlife College re future cooperative projects.
- Ron Magill from the Ron Magill Conservation Endowment and Zoo Miami visited with guests at the Cheetah Outreach Facility and a talk was given to Ron and his guests on the work of the Cheetah Outreach Trust. Ron presented the Trust with a cheque of support for which we are very grateful.

Figure 17: Ron Magill handing over a cheque of support to Annie Beckhelling and Deon Cilliers of the Trust

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FUNDRAISING

We are once again very grateful to everyone who hosted Deon Cilliers during our USA trip in October 2023 with special thanks to Wild Wonders who made the trip possible by covering the international travelling costs.

We are currently running a fundraising campaign for funds to be used in our conservation work. We were very fortunate to have a 5 day vacation for five people donated by the Neptune's Lodge and Beach Bar at Barra in Mozambique. We are selling tickets for a lucky draw at R500.00 per person. The lucky draw will take place on the 4th of October 2024. https://www.backabuddy.co.za/campaign/free-roaming-cheetah-conservation~2

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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 initiate and 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. Toerbroer, Vermont Sales and Fowkes Bothers have generously donated incredible prizes to three lucky farmers who participate in the Free Roaming Cheetah Census online survey. The lucky draw will take place at the end of November 2024. The free roaming census will continue in 2024, with ourselves and our partners working tirelessly in the field to collect the necessary data.

Although the reality of losing collared cheetahs to illegal shooting by farmers is heart-breaking taking in consideration the time and effort it takes to capture these shy and elusive cheetah on farmlands, the data relating to these shootings remains valuable for the FRCC as it indicates the impact of illegal killings on this already threatened and very vulnerable free roaming cheetah population. It also highlights the need for more pro-active conservation awareness and conflict mitigation work within areas where these cheetah occur and finding solutions which will benefit the conservation of free roaming cheetahs as well as the livelihoods of the farmers that have to co-exist with these cheetahs.

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 and the definite pregnancy of one of the females and possible pregnancy of another should provide some eagerly waited for puppies for farmers waiting in anticipation.

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 part of the process of developing a Biological Management Plan (BMP) for cheetah together with SANBI and other role-players. This BMP will be included into legislation and policy for South Africa.

Although we has several major setbacks in 2024 including the loss of some major donors due to a shift in their funding focus which has created a major deficit in our funding, we continue with or conservation work within the cheetah distribution range. We continue to be grateful for the support that these donors previously gave to us through their financial support. The addition of our junior field officer through dedicated funding from an anonymous donor has also made it possible to expand our footprint and to further contribute with surveys and camera trapping towards the Free Roaming Cheetah Census. 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. We are very grateful to generous donors for reacting to some of the items on our wish list below. Thanks to Wildlife Warriors for purchasing the flatbed trailer and for John Horseman Trust, FIAA and National Zoo Canberra for contributing to the shade netting and snake proofing of the Irwin's Guardian Stud and for Toerbroers for making staff available to help with the snake proofing of the enclosures.

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.
- 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)
- Smart trap control units for two capture cages.
- Garmin GPS Devices. (x3)

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OUR LONG TERM DONORS

The following zoo's and facilities in the USA have contributed through the ZAA AMP program:
African Lion Safari, Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo, Animal Adventure Park, Austin Zoo, Carson Springs Wildlife Conservation Foundation, Cat Haven Project Survival, Frank Buck Zoo, Metro Richmond Zoo, Montgomery Zoo, Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch, Nova Wild, Pittsburgh Zoo, Safari North Wildlife Park, Six Flags Great Adventure, Southwick's Zoo, Tanganyika Wildlife Park, Virginia Safari Park, Wildlife World Zoo, Aquarium, and Safari Park, Wild Wonders

We also express our gratitude towards the John Horseman Trust for long time support to our conservation work.
All of our donors (long-term, short-term, and one-time donations) and supporters who provide services, products, and equipment in kind are critical to the success of our conservation programs, and they are friends and partners in our conservation efforts and triumphs.

"The quicker we humans learn that saving open space and wildlife is critical to our welfare and quality of life, maybe we'll start thinking of doing something about it." ~ Jim Fowler

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