

DiSabato LRSA. 1981. Aberrant coat pattern found in African Cheetah. San Antonio's News from the Zoo.

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Abstract: IN 1927 Major Cooper described a new species of cheetah *Acinonyx rex*. Our present knowledge of "King Cheetah" is limited to some skins and only six have been seen alive. 1981 a King Cheetah with this unusual appearance was born in captivity from an *Acinonyx jubatus* mother. Breeding programme with King Cheetah are planned.



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KING CHEETAH

Aberrant coat pattern found in African Cheetah

by Louis R. DiSabato

My friend and colleague, D.J. Brand, director of the Pretoria, South Africa, Zoo, recently visited San Antonio and brought with him pictorial proof of the existence of

several peculiarly marked cheetahs. I thought our readers might enjoy sharing the following paper that Dr. Brand prepared concerning these rare animals.

(next page)

**A "KING CHEETAH" BORN AT THE CHEETAH BREEDING AND RESEARCH
CENTRE OF THE NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS OF SOUTH AFRICA, PRETORIA
D.J. BRAND, DIRECTOR**

The occurrence of an aberrant form of the common cheetah, the so-called "King Cheetah", was first revealed in 1926 when Major A.L. Cooper came across a strange-looking skin in Zimbabwe. At the time he thought that the skin was that of an unknown felid. This skin was patterned with irregular spots and bars as well as distinct black stripes along the back.

Major Cooper was convinced that he had discovered a new species of cheetah. For confirmation of his views, he sent all the available data together with a photograph of the skin to Mr. Oldfield Thomas of the British Museum who referred this information to a colleague, Mr. R.I. Pocock, Curator of Mammals. The latter came to the conclusion that the animal was an aberrant leopard and informed Major Cooper accordingly.

Cooper could not agree with Mr. Pocock's views and soon discovered more skins and collected further information on these animals. Once more Cooper wrote to Pocock, placing at his disposal the new evidence together with a skin.

As a result, Pocock abandoned his initial theory and in 1927 described Major Cooper's felid as a new species of cheetah, *Acinonyx rex*. However, in 1932 Cabrera suggested that the "King Cheetah" should be considered an abnormal variation of the common cheetah, *A. jubatus* - a view to which Pocock agreed in 1939.

Our present knowledge of the "King Cheetah" is limited to 12 skins collected in Zimbabwe, Botswana and the Northern Transvaal, South Africa. "King Cheetah" have been seen alive on six occasions and the only photograph of a "King Cheetah" in the wild was taken in the Kruger National Park in 1974 (Wrogeman, 1975).

Hills and Smithers (1980) were confident that further specimens of this handsome and interesting form of cheetah would turn up, as indeed they did under a unique set of circumstances.

On the 12th of May, 1981 the birth of the 47th litter of cheetah cubs was recorded at our Cheetah Breeding and Research Centre with which most of you are well acquainted. This particular litter consisted of 5 young which raised the total number of cubs born at the Centre to 177. One of these cubs, a male, had a most unusual appearance and was almost immediately recognized for what he is - the first "King Cheetah" to be born in captivity. On the 14th of

May, two days after this birth, a female cheetah which had been sold by us to a private nature reserve near Port Elizabeth and which we had known to be pregnant when she left the Centre at De Wildt, gave birth to 3 young, one of which turned out to be a female "King Cheetah".

The father of both animals was wild-caught as a youngster in the Northern Transvaal. The mothers of the two "King Cheetah" cubs are sisters born from a male (Chris) captured in South West Africa and a female (Lady) from the Northern Transvaal.

Until such time as our "King Cheetah" is sexually mature, we will, in our breeding programme, concentrate on mating the same male with three sisters originating from Chris and Lady.

References:

- Hills, D.M. & Smithers, R.H.N. 1980. The "King Cheetah" - A historical review. *Arnoldia* 9(1): 1-23
Wrogeman, N. 1975. *Cheetah under the Sun*. McGraw-Hill. Johannesburg



Mr. and Mrs. Rugeley Ferguson (He is vice president of San Antonio Zoological Society.) and Aaron Penaloza at the Foley's Gala for San Antonio Children's Zoo.

GOOD NEWS FROM FOLEY'S

Mr. John Utsey, president of Foley's, presented a check for \$50,000 to Louis DiSabato, director of the San Antonio Zoo, at a special luncheon on Tuesday, October 6, 1981, at the San Antonio Country Club.

The check represents the balance of Foley's \$75,000 commitment to the San Antonio Children's Zoo for construction of the African Desert Scene, a display featuring the tiny, bat-eared fennec fox.

A \$25,000 check, the first installment of the Foley's pledge, was presented to the zoo on December 18, 1981, in San Antonio. A special gala for the Children's Zoo was held July 21 in the new Foley's store in North Star Mall to help fund the second \$25,000 installment of Foley's pledge.

Foley's was so gratified by the success of both the gala (which attracted 2,000 people) and the July 22 Grand Opening that the store decided to add the final \$25,000 installment a year early.

Foley's and zoo officials expressed delight that their association has been so mutually satisfactory and stated that they were looking forward to happy associations in the future.



Dr. Brand (R) and Mr. DiSabato study the newly-erected map of the Children's Zoo.