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Abstract: Visiting Kruger National Park and the Umfolozi-Hluhluwe Game Reserve - the conservations and traveling I did with staff members allowed me to see the many problems they face to keep these small islands of wilderness afloat. Cheetah breeding centers hasn't been terrible successful in re-introducing cats back into the wild. The farmers view them as a predator on their wild and domestic hoofstock calves. With endangered species, we have international blanket rules such as CITES regulations. It is currently illegal to hunt cheetah throughout Africa.

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I recently returned from a trip to South Africa and Namibia. I wanted to understand the problems cheetah are facing in these two countries. Plus, see how our work at Wildlife Safari fits into



Cheetah in Kruger National Park

conservation efforts on the cheetah's behalf.

Many people knowledgeable of African wildlife point to South Africa as a leader in coping with the struggle that rages on between the interest of humans and wildlife. This appears to be true with my observations from visiting the two largest wildlife reserves in the country—Kruger National Park and the Umfolozi-Hluhluwe Game Reserve. They are well staffed with wildlife biologists, and more importantly, have stable populations of most of their animal species. The conversations and traveling I did with staff members allowed me to see the many problems they face to keep these small islands of wilderness afloat. Small meaning hundreds of square miles.

Conditions such as water supply to the rivers, wood gathering by the natives, animal poaching, invasion of non-native plant species and increasing tourism numbers cause a great deal of concern to the managers of these parks. As more of these issues become a part of managing animal groups, more emphasis is put on understanding the needs of each species. Here, the cheetah fits into South Africa's parks in a very tentative way.

There is estimated to be fewer than 400 wild cheetah through the entire country. The majority of these within Kruger Park. However, accurately counting cheetah is very difficult. They

tend to travel in small numbers, have large territories, and aren't easily baited into traps or waterholes. In Kruger, a count was taken several years ago by correlating tourists' photos through a massive visitor campaign. That number in 1992 was thought to be 200

individuals. Elsewhere in the country there are pockets of 20 and fewer, but, as you can appreciate, a small change in the life of these cats could make a significant change in the cheetah numbers.

There are two cheetah breeding centers in South Africa with world-wide fame. They are the De Wildt and

Hoedspruit projects. Both centers have sold cats world-wide to zoos and parks such as ourselves. They are each run by strong-willed women who discovered the beauty of these cats early in life. They have also tried to strengthen the wild population of cheetah. To date, neither has been terribly successful in re-introducing cats back into the wild. In many of the areas cats once lived, tall game fences have gone up or the cats have simply been shot as livestock killers. If South Africa is to have a stable future for cheetah in its game parks, some concessions will need to be made for expanding land use.

In the country of Namibia, or as the old timers say, South West Africa, the cheetah faces a unique pressure. Unlike South Africa, most of Namibia's 2,500 cheetah live on private land. Keep in mind, however, this census was done nearly ten years ago with a small staff and in a huge area with brushy terrain. The past 20 years have brought droughts and overgrazing to Namibia's open ranch lands. This in turn has promoted brush to grow where damaged perennial grasses once flourished. The net result is poor grazing and unnatural habitat for cheetah. The farmers view the cheetah as a predator on their wild and domestic hoofstock calves.

There are two couples in Namibia now spearheading the attempts to convince farmers to change their attitudes. One couple is from the U.S.

and actually got started caring for cheetah here at Wildlife Safari. Laurie and Danny Kraus have been in Namibia for three years trying to find solutions to this problem. Many conservationists are convinced they know the solution, however, the rest of the world may not be ready to accept their answer. Trophy hunting is thought to be a way to balance many of the wildlife protection issues. In a simplified form, the reasoning is if cheetah are worth money as with other endangered species like the rhino, people will develop their habitat and ensure their survival. In a simplified form that is what the Fish and Game department has been doing for the past century in the United States. With endangered species, we have international blanket rules such as CITES regulations. It is currently illegal to hunt cheetah throughout Africa. As you can see, there are many approaches to conservation.

In my travels to both countries, I was continually awed by the diversity of life. I had a great deal of pleasure watching the ostrich chicks on the Etosha Pan in Namibia. Twenty and thirty to a group, they followed their surrogate mother searching for food. They all did dances that the animators of the movie "Fantasia" captured so well. It was a treat to watch the gemsbok in the morning sun as it highlighted their muscular bodies and hid their horns in the rising heat waves. The beautiful sycamore fig tree was found at the water's edge. It was typical to see a troop of vervet monkeys scrambling around, always looking for a better branch to sit on. We seemed to have good luck on our night game viewing with bushbabies, porcupines, servals, genets, jackals and spotted eagle owls.

The bird life is fabulous and my favorite clowns of the sky were the yellow billed hornbills. The bird our guide described as the flying banana! A common goal on an African trip is to see the "big five", which I did. This

includes the rhino, leopard, elephant, lion and buffalo. A true safari coup is to also see the "little five": rhino beetle, leopard tortoise, buffalo gnat, lion ant and the elephant shrew!!

My journey to South Africa reaffirmed my commitment to what we



Dr. Jack Mortenson on Safari

are trying to accomplish at Wildlife Safari. The single mission of reaching people's hearts and minds with our animal collection will ensure some will fight to save our wilderness. It made me also realize that we have work to do right here in Oregon. The countries we



Cape buffalo

live in are changing each day and we have a perspective deserving of being heard and listened to.