

Sayre R. Striped and polka-dot cheetahs.

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Abstract: Can the cheetah change its spots? Since cheetah have begun to be bred in captivity, it has become clear that the king cheetah is just a result of a recessive gene.

CREATURES

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Striped and polka-dot cheetahs: A recessive gene produces a king.

Can the leopard change its spots? The answer traditionally has been no. But while this may be the case with the leopard, consider the cheetah—that streamlined, polka-dot cat designed to streak across the African savannah and pounce on its prey.

Over the years there were reports of sightings of a distinctive-looking cheetah, with big dark blotches on flanks and legs and wide stripes down its back. Eventually a few were killed and their pelts preserved. Some believed this to be a new species and named it the king cheetah.

But since cheetahs have begun to be bred in captivity, it has become clear that the kings are not royal, just the result of a recessive gene. When both parents carry the gene, their offspring bear the stripes.

At a cheetah research station in South Africa, a female king cheetah was born recently. The breeding stock there includes two king cheetahs and four normally patterned animals known to be carriers of the gene. There should be more kings around before long.

Floodlit towers that lure migrating birds to their deaths have been added to the list of hazards the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team worries about. (The en-

dangered bird's population is down to only about two hundred nesting pairs.)

The Kirtland's belongs to the wood warbler family, all of which are particularly prone to collision deaths. The recovery team quotes some statistics compiled at Ontario Hydro, where two floodlit 653-foot smokestacks caused the deaths of 28,000 birds between 1970 and 1977. When the lights were altered during migration, to small warning lights, bird mortality stopped.

But a few years later the bright lights were left on and 5,818 birds died in one night—a record number. Of the forty-nine species represented in that kill, twenty-four were warblers.

The recovery team's report warns that "spectacular as this tragedy was, it is not an isolated occurrence, as floodlights are in use all over North America to illuminate tall buildings, monuments, transmission towers, and other obstacles to birds." It is particularly tragic that this lighting is used principally for esthetic, rather than safety, reasons. In fact, red warning lights or strobe lights are not a problem to birds.

Anyone knowing of floodlit structures along the Kirtland's migration route—between central Michigan and the Bahamas—is asked to notify the Endangered Species Coordinator, Wildlife

Division, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, P.O. Box 30028, Lansing, Michigan 48909.

The wood stork has been added to the U.S. endangered species list, thus ending a long campaign by National Audubon and Florida state biologists to secure federal protection for the only stork native to this country.

Wood stork numbers in the four states where the bird nests (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama) have declined by 75 percent in the last half-century, from 20,000 nesting pairs to about 4,000. (See "The Abundant, Endangered Flinthead," *Audubon*, January 1983.)

Man's manipulation of the water table, by logging of large cypress trees and by building drainage canals and levees, has altered or destroyed much of the wetland habitat the storks need to breed and gather food for the young. The federal-state rescue effort will be aimed at management of the remaining habitat to provide the water levels needed by the storks at nesting time.

The horned guan is the first bird that hunters wipe out when a new area is cleared in the Central American cloud-forest. Indians consider it a big wild turkey that makes a choice meal. Even so, there has been little activity to protect the guan, though it is listed as endangered. Its numbers are now probably



THEOR JANSSON

Horned guan: a choice meal.