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AFRICAN FELINE BREEDING CENTRE

Vivian Wilson

In my book "Orphans of the Wild" published in 1977, I mentioned that I would very much like to see a Feline Research Centre established in Zimbabwe at Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage where rare felids could be bred in captivity.

In those days Chipangali was a private establishment owned and run by my wife and myself. However, from a small start in 1973, the orphanage grew rapidly and so did our breeding programme. Many caracals, servals and lions were bred at Chipangali, and also other rare carnivores such as brown hyena, leopard, mongoose, etc.

I continued my field research on the distribution and status of the cats of Zimbabwe and that information was supplemented with breeding data obtained from work carried out on the felids in captivity at Chipangali.

In order to raise additional funds for our Cat Research programme, in 1981 I wrote another book called, "Lions, Leopards and Lynxes", which sold very well locally. The profits from the sale of the book gave Chipangali the boost it needed. At the same time our annual Wildlife Calendar featured the Cats of Zimbabwe.

In my book "Lions, Leopards and Lynxes" I wrote:

"I appreciate as much as anyone that free-living wildlife in its natural environment is far more suitable for research purposes, but there are many aspects of research which cannot be done in the wild".

"Certain aspects of behaviour can only be carried out on captive animals, and although captivity is unnatural, there are many aspects of behaviour that are instinctive or inherited".

"Reproductive behaviour, for example, cannot be established in the wild, especially with nocturnal carnivores, gestation periods would be almost impossible to establish when studying a species in a National Park or Game Reserve. Periods of lactation, composition of milk, tooth development and replacement in individuals and selected animals etc, can only be studied in captive animals and there are also many species with unusual characteristics that can only be studied in captivity".

"Research into breeding of endangered species in captivity is long overdue, and although many zoos have made a start and are contributing a great deal, a lot more still needs to be done. It should be born in mind that conservation of endangered species is inseparable from scientific research, and if a species is already rare in the wild, then the studies would have to be conducted with captive animals. The knowledge provided can then be applied when dealing with the wild population".

"Nowhere in Africa has a place been set aside specifically for research on the cats of Africa. One should not forget that it is as a direct result of the activities of man that many of Africa's cats have declined drastically over the last 20 years, and several are now so rare that they are threatened with extinction".

"I feel that Chipangali could help solve many of the problems regarding the breeding of felids in captivity, and in the end, perhaps could build up good enough populations in captivity from which animals could be returned to the wild. I would therefore like to see a large breeding station established at Chipangali where studies on selected species could be carried out".

“Over the last seven years we have bred many felids in captivity - especially servals and caracals -and I believe that Chipangali could provide an excellent and unique opportunity for guest research workers. At the same time, field work could be conducted in one of the National Parks or other game areas and could be complementary to that done on captive animals”.

The captive breeding programme on felids at Chipangali continued to obtain good results and today (1984) the centre has very good breeding groups of servals, caracals, lions, leopards and other carnivores such as brown hyenas, mongooses, etc.

Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage has recently (1984) been taken over by a Board of Trustees and I have been appointed as Director. The Trustees are of the opinion that Chipangali Wildlife Trust, as it is now known, has a very secure future, and would therefore very much like to see the Feline Breeding Programme expanded.

In the past Chipangali concentrated only on the cats of Zimbabwe, but the Trustees now wish to include all the cats of Africa and therefore would like to establish breeding groups of the following species:

- 1.) Black-footed Cat (*Felis nigripes*)
- 2.) Golden Cat (*Felis aurata*)
- 3.) Sand Cat (*Felis margarita*)
- 4.) Swamp Cat (*Felis chaus*)

In addition large groups of cheetah and Cape wild cats will also be established at Chipangali, and therefore these species are also required.

With this new breeding and research programme in mind, we therefore require additional animals. If you feel you are in a position to help acquire any of the cats on our list, we would very much like to hear from you. However, we would like to emphasize that we would not encourage the deliberate capture of wild animals from the wild and therefore only animals already in captivity would be acceptable.

At irregular intervals and as sufficient news becomes available, a newsletter on the activities and developments at Chipangali will be produced. If you would like to receive copies of the newsletter and be placed on our mailing list, please advise us accordingly.