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Dear reader,

2012 has been a very interesting year for us and our Cheetah Conservation Project Zimbabwe. It is never easy to start a new project from scratch, after working in Zimbabwe for a conservation project for the past five years I knew what I would be getting ourselves into. You will have to put a feasible plan on paper, organise your paperwork and raise enough funding (which is difficult enough these days).



After receiving our research permit in March we applied for a work permit and focussed on fund raising. Bit by bit sponsors gave us their trust and awarded us grants. For the past years receiving a work permit, after receiving a research permit, was a matter of a weeks. This year was different though, it took seven months to receive a work permit and we left the country several times to wait for our applications to be processed.

We spent time in the Netherlands where we founded a foundation to support our work in Zimbabwe. We also spent time in Botswana and Namibia where we visited our colleagues of the Botswana Predator Conservation Trust, Cheetah Conservation Botswana and Cheetah Conservation Fund Namibia. Although our time out of the country was well spent, the long wait for our work permit did mean we experienced a delay in our field work.

We received our work permit at the end of September, when the rain season is starting and the tourist and hunting season is coming to an end. As it would be a waste of resources to travel through the northwest of the country while the operators are closing camp and the local communities are busy on their fields, we decided to start our questionnaire based survey after the rain stops early next year. During the last months of the year we instead focussed on PR, the distribution of our cheetah material around Victoria Falls and Hwange National Park (where tourism pretty much continues throughout the year), and a research project to determine the value of cheetah for tourism.

As you will read in this annual report, our efforts are paying off, people are getting to know us and we have managed to collect many sightings and pictures from cheetahs all over Zimbabwe and set up valuable collaborations with other organisations. This has provided us with a solid base to continue to build on in the year to come.

Kind regards,

*Esther*

Dr. Esther van der Meer  
Project director & senior researcher

# Spreading the cheetah word



If you like people to send you cheetah sightings and pictures they will have to know where to find you. Therefore, a lot of our time was spend on generating pr. We published articles in three issues of the Zambezi Traveller, a paper that is distributed throughout Zim-

babwe, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia (zambezitraveller.com). We also wrote articles for the newsletters of the Safari Operators Association of Zimbabwe, Birdlife Zimbabwe, Wildlife and Environment Zimbabwe, the Victoria Falls Newsletter, the Kariba Newsletter,

Zimbabwe Destinations and the website of Travel Zimbabwe. We gave a presentation at the annual meeting of the Safari Operators Association of Zimbabwe, in which we explained why it is important to conduct a population survey and how people in the field can help us with pictures and sightings.

***“ The cutest sighting at the Hwange game count was a cheetah mother with three cubs ”***

## Counting cheetah

On the 29th of September it was time for the yearly 24h game count in Hwange National Park. During this count, organised by Wildlife and Environment Zimbabwe, people sit at waterholes from 12 to 12 to count wildlife. The night before the count we gave a presentation about the

Hwange cheetahs, and asked people to fill in our sighting sheet that was included in their count packages. Our request did not fall on deaf ears; as many as seven cheetahs were reported back to us. The cutest sighting was a cheetah mother with three jackal sized cubs. The most

peculiar sighting was a cheetah trying to pass a troop of baboons in a posture that was something between threatening and fearful, the troop of baboons decided they didn't like to have this weird spotted intruder at their waterhole and chased it away.



## Children's education



The Lowveld Wild Dog Project recently started an education programme in the Lowveld region. We were lucky to be given the great opportunity to add a cheetah education package to their material.

We purchased a cheetah DVD and booklet and created a cheetah life history game, a cheetah puzzle and a colouring template that will all be added to the educational material used in the programme.

# Raising awareness

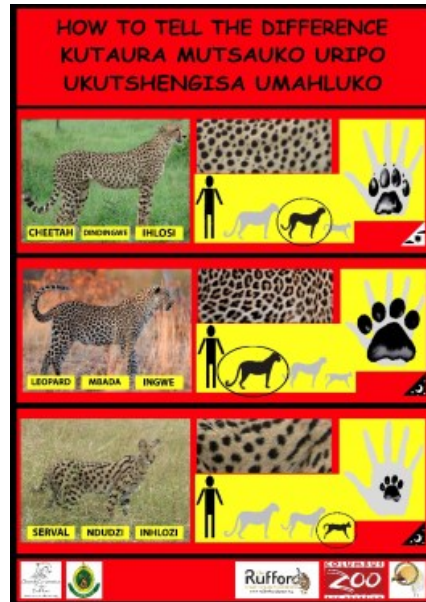
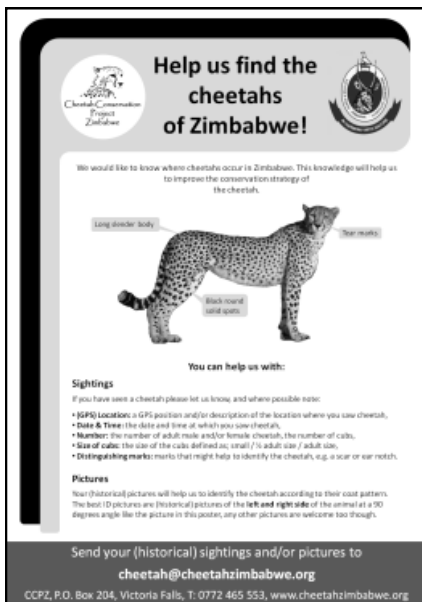
To encourage people to send us cheetah sightings and pictures we have developed a 'help us find the cheetahs of Zimbabwe poster' we have also printed a 'how to tell the difference poster' to explain to people how they can tell the difference between the spotted cats of Zimbabwe; cheetahs, leopards and servals. As cheetahs are part of the National Conservation Action Plan, our work is supported by the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, you will therefore find not only ours, but

also the National Parks logo on our materials.

We have so far distributed our 'help us find the cheetahs of Zimbabwe' posters throughout the tourism hotspots in Victoria Falls. Our 'help us find the cheetahs of Zimbabwe' and 'How to tell the difference' posters have also been distributed to the various Parks and Wildlife Management Authority offices and lodges in Hwange National Park, Victoria Falls National Park and Matetsi. We paid a 'poster visit' to the




Forestry Commission offices in Fuller Forest and Sikumi Forest.



In total we drove 1800 km to hang up our posters at 46 different places. We handed out 60 cheetah sighting booklets and pens to various national parks rangers, guides, hunters, anti poaching teams and others that are in the field on a regular basis. Rather than writing down sightings on loose paper, people will now hopefully write down their cheetah sightings in a cheetah sighting booklet which we will collect towards the end of next year.


## Additions to the CCPZ team

In order to facilitate capacity building, we are officially affiliated to the National University of Science and Technology. In September Mucha Badza, a third year student of the department of forestry resources and wildlife management, joined our team. She will be with us till August next year and is going to join us during our field interview assessment.



Aldwin Ndhlovu has already obtained his bachelor degree at the department of forest resources and wildlife management. He was keen to gain more experience in the conservation field and therefore joined our project in November. Aldwin would

ultimately like to combine wildlife conservation with veterinary science and hopes to be able to start with a masters in veterinary science next year. Till then he will be assisting us.



# Finding the cheetahs of Zimbabwe

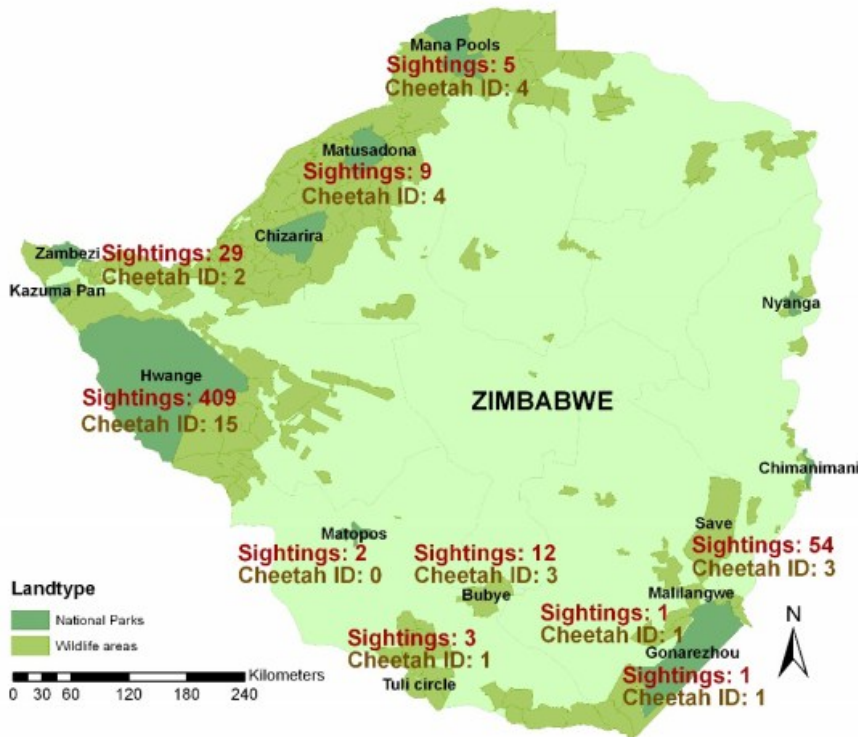
With the field season coming to an end it is time for us to make up the cheetah score. It is too early to speculate about cheetah numbers but one thing we know for sure is that they are there!



The response to our requests to send cheetah sightings and pictures has been overwhelming. So far we have collected 523 cheetah sightings from all over Zimbabwe (see map). With these sightings, we received as many as 1625 pictures.

Of course there were a lot of duplicates as people tend to take more than one picture when they get the unique chance to photograph cheetah, but the pictures helped us to identify 33 different cheetahs based on their coat markings. With 15 identified adults,

Hwange National Park seems to be a surprisingly good place to find cheetah. Saying this, it has to be kept in mind though that we inevitably receive more information from areas that attract a lot of visitors. In other words, if we haven't received cheetah sightings from an area it doesn't necessarily mean cheetah do not occur, it might simply mean no one has been there to spot them.



We would like to use this opportunity to thank everyone for sending us sightings and pictures; your help is invaluable as without it we would never be able to find all the cheetahs of Zimbabwe. Our population survey is ongoing, the coming year we hope to continue to collect more cheetah information. In addition to the collection of sightings and pictures, we will carry out a questionnaire based survey in the north west of the country. Apart from additional information on cheetah occurrence, this survey will provide us with information on what conservation challenges the cheetahs are facing.

## Cheetah Zimbabwe online

From November Cheetah Conservation Project Zimbabwe has officially gone online! Not only is our website up and going; [www.cheetahzimbabwe.org](http://www.cheetahzimbabwe.org), you can also follow us via facebook; [www.facebook.com/CheetahZimbabwe](https://www.facebook.com/CheetahZimbabwe). We use both facebook and the website to give regular updates about the project. The website also allows people to upload their cheetah sighting and pictures online, which is especially useful for tourists who would like to contact us once they're back home.

# Living with predators



Now that we are up and going we inevitably get questions from farmers on how to deal with predators killing livestock. Although we know of some livestock management techniques to reduce predation we are constantly trying to increase our knowledge. That's why we visited the

African Centre for Holistic Management's model farm. By managing livestock following the holistic management principles you can counter desertification, restore the land and increase both biodiversity and livestock production. This in

turn reduces livestock predation as there will be more natural prey available.



**“ Translocation of a problem animal often doesn't provide a long term solution to a conflict situation ”**

## Mitigating conflict

In June we followed up on a cheetah conflict report we received via our colleagues from the Lowveld Wild Dog Project. A cheetah mother with three cubs was thought to be killing calves on a farm close to Bulawayo. The farmers were not that worried about their loss, they were more worried that the neighbouring local farmers would decide to kill the cheetahs and initially asked us to translocate the animals.

As the Dambari Wildlife Trust used to work on cheetah in this area and therefore has a lot of experience in dealing with conflict issues we asked them to join us. Together with our colleagues Dr. Nicky Peggs and Faraimunashé Mavhinya, we visited the farm and the community. Although we didn't see the cheetahs we did see spoor in a dried up river bed.

Translocation most of the time doesn't provide a long term solution to a conflict situation as you simply create a vacant territory that will be filled by another animal. We explained this and left information on how to protect livestock against predators. Interestingly enough the main



worry of the local farmers was whether cheetah are dangerous to humans. When we explained that this wasn't the case they seemed to be at peace with the situation. We all agreed that we would give the cheetahs some more time and see how the situation would develop. After our visit we have been in touch with the farmers and, although the animals are still in the area, so far the cheetahs have not been causing any more problems.



# Large carnivores and tourists

Over the past weeks our students have tried to determine the value of cheetahs and other large carnivores for tourism by interviewing tourists at the Victoria Falls airport. They interviewed 325 departing tourists from 39 different nationalities who came to Zimbabwe to see wildlife. Preliminary results show that most tourists hope to see elephant, lion, giraffe, rhinoceros and leopard when they go on safari. Not many tourists mentioned cheetah, African wild dog and spotted hyena as animals they were hoping to see. Overall, the large cats (lion, leopard, cheetah) seem to be more popular than the large canids (African wild dog, hyena), and of the

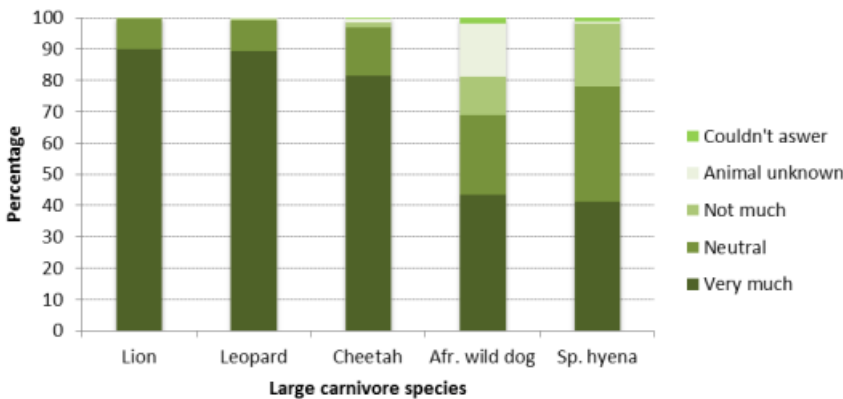
large cats, lion and leopard were more popular than cheetah.

When asked whether people were willing to pay extra money to see a particular large carnivore, people often said no as they felt their holiday was already so expensive it should be included in the price. The tourists that were willing to pay extra money were willing to pay between 10 and 1000 USD extra to see any of the large carnivores, people were more willing to pay more than a 1000 USD to see large cats than to see large canids. The likelihood that a tourist would come to Zimbabwe or book a lodge when there was a high chance to see any of the large carn-



vores was higher for the large cats than for the large canids.

It is interesting to note that there were several people (23%) that couldn't correctly identify a cheetah. Although cheetah weren't the most popular large carnivores they also weren't the least popular. It's possible that they are less popular than lion and leopard, partly because they are less known and less often seen. Most people didn't see a cheetah while on safari, the ones who did often visited a tame ambassador cheetah. We will soon start with a more rigorous analysis of the data.



## Scientists get together



In order to bring the scientists in the Victoria Falls region together and create an opportunity for the researchers and attachments students, to present their projects, we, together with the ecologist from the Victoria Falls region Henry Ndaimani organised a scientific get together in the Victoria Falls National Park town office. Of course we gave a presentation about the why, how and when of

our cheetah population survey. The meeting was a success and provided us with the opportunity to get to know each other. We are planning to organise our next get together at the beginning of 2013.

*“ the meeting provided us with a great opportunity to get to know each other and learn about each other’s work “*

# Visiting our colleagues



While waiting for our work permit, we visited our colleagues at Cheetah Conservation Fund Namibia, the Botswana Predator

Conservation Trust and Cheetah Conservation Botswana. With many cheetahs being killed by farmers, both CCF and CCB try to promote co-existence between cheetah and people by lots of education, providing livestock guarding dogs and practical advice on cattle management to local farmers. All three projects were incredible projects where we were able to talk to many



interesting people that have provided us with valuable information and future contacts.

## Dutch support

At the beginning of this year we set up a foundation in the Netherlands to



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support our work in Zimbabwe. We found

four of our friends willing to become members of the board of our Dutch foundation; Stichting CCP. With Dr. Esther van der Meer as the chairwoman, our Dutch support team exists of Ingrid Paul, treasurer of the foundation, Barbara Pieters, secretary, Marcella Mekenkamp, pr coordinator and Prof. Vera Baumans, general advisor.



CCPZ

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Cheetah Conservation Project Zimbabwe (CCPZ) was founded in 2012 by Dr. Esther van der Meer. The aim of the project is to help to conserve cheetahs through research, education, collaboration and capacity building. CCPZ tries to improve the knowledge on the conservation biology of cheetahs and to promote co-existence between cheetahs and the people of Zimbabwe. CCPZ sees research as a tool to improve the conservation strategy of the species and tries to build capacity in conservation by working with Zimbabwean students.

Cheetah Conservation project Zimbabwe is affiliated to the National University of Science and Technology and works in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority.

**Cheetah Conservation Project Zimbabwe is supported by Columbus Zoo, INNO fund, National Geographic's Big Cat Initiative, the Rufford Foundation, the Van Tienhoven Foundation and the Wilderness Wildlife Trust**