



The AfriCat Foundation



Based on the guest farm Okonjima, 50 kilometres south of Otjiwarongo in central Namibia, the *AfriCat* Foundation was founded in the early 90's and formally registered as a non-profit organisation in August 1993. *AfriCat* has since grown significantly and what started out primarily as a welfare organisation has over the years identified the need to include a focus on education and research as being essential to accomplishing our mission - *the long-term conservation of Namibia's large carnivores*.

Objectives

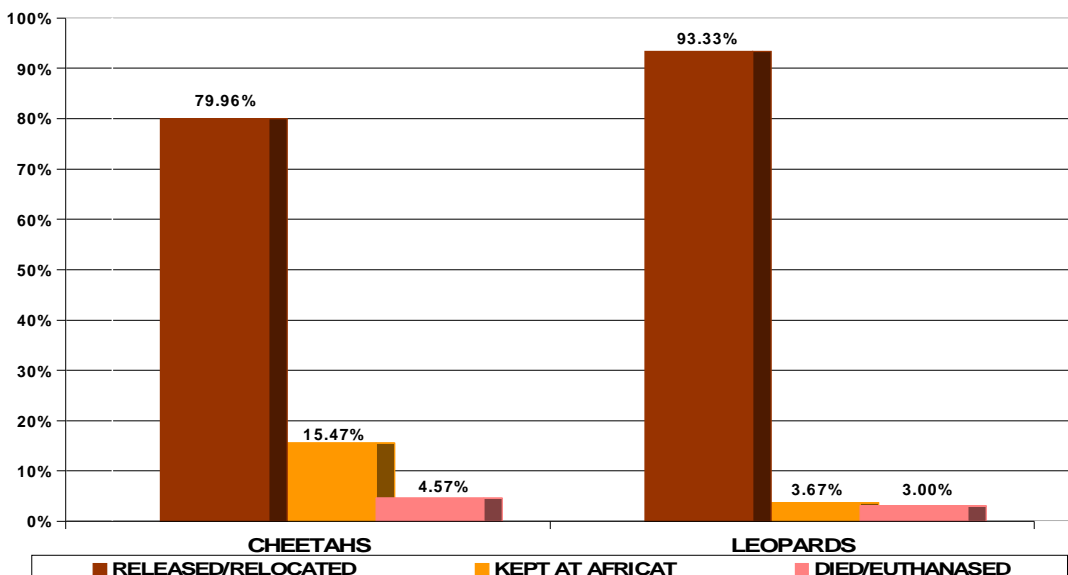
- To create awareness and promote the tolerance of large carnivores among the farming community by assisting farmers in effective farm management techniques including targeting problem predators as opposed to indiscriminate removal.
- To educate youth about large carnivores and environmental awareness.
- To research large carnivores, particularly cheetahs and leopards, on farmland and in captivity.
- To provide humane housing, treatment and care for orphaned and injured animals.

RESCUE AND RELEASE/RELOCATION PROGRAMME

AfriCat has rescued more than 850 cheetahs and leopards and over 85% have been released back into the wild.



RESCUED CHEETAHS AND LEOPARDS RETURNED TO THE WILD



AfriCat rescues an average of 70 cheetahs and leopards a year that have been trapped on farms throughout Namibia.

It has always been our aim to return as many cats as possible to their natural environment - only those that are unable to be released remain in *AfriCat's* care.

Background

Habitat loss is one of the largest threats to the cheetah and leopard populations in Namibia. Livestock and game farms in Namibia number over 7000 and spread over most of the country - the same areas where the majority of these animals exist. The resulting conflict between these predators and farmers protecting their livelihood reduces the natural habitat areas where the animals can safely exist.

With a shift in focus from cattle farming to a livelihood dependent on game for tourism and/or hunting, there has been an increasing trend where the predation of game has become the motivation behind the elimination of cheetahs and leopards. The perceived “problem animals” who in the past were removed for preying on livestock, are now also being captured for hunting one of their natural prey species.

General predator removal is often the “livestock-protection method” utilised by farmers who view all predators as “problem animals” and cheetahs and leopards are trapped, poisoned or shot on sight. In most cases an individual animal is responsible for stock losses and not the species in general and this indiscriminate removal leads to the unnecessary elimination of many innocent animals.



The immediate benefit of *AfriCat* offering to remove cheetahs and leopards from traps is that it prevents these animals from being shot, as this service offers the farmer an alternative to destroying them. An additional advantage is that this contact with the farmer provides us with the opportunity to create awareness about predator conservation, promote ecologically sound farm management practices and effective farm management techniques.

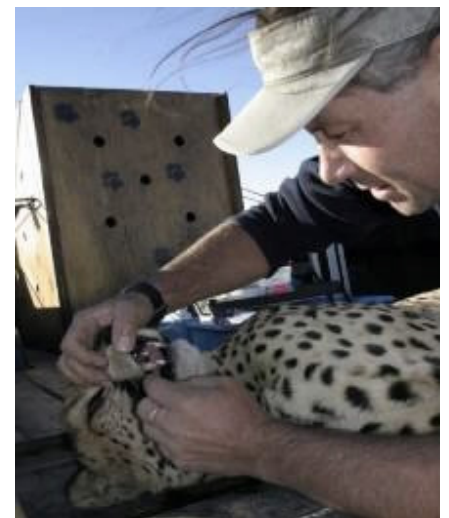
Once *AfriCat* is contacted, the necessary arrangements are made to rescue the animal from the trap as soon as possible, usually within 24 hours.

With the exception of very young cubs, the animals are anaesthetised for handling and transport. All animals are examined for any injuries that may have been sustained either prior to or during capture.

Minor wounds are treated immediately. *AfriCat's* veterinarian is consulted in cases where specialised treatment or surgery is required.



Measurements, weights and ages (from tooth-wear) are recorded for each cat and blood and hair samples are taken.



All the animals are marked with a microchip, enabling easy identification should individuals be recaptured in the future.

Where the farmer is in agreement, the animals are released at the place of capture. Otherwise they are released in or relocated to appropriate areas, usually within a day of their rescue. If recuperation time is needed, they are held temporarily at *AfriCat* until fit enough for release.

RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Ongoing collaboration with scientists and the conservation authorities and working closely with the farming community allows for studies to be conducted that provide valuable information on large carnivores and their long-term conservation in Namibia.

AfriCat is involved in a number of studies involving the cheetahs at *AfriCat*, as well as the cheetahs and leopards captured on farmland.

Studies Involving the Cheetahs at AfriCat

The annual health examinations of the cheetahs at *AfriCat* give invited specialist veterinarians the opportunity to research a variety of animal health aspects, particularly those relating to the health of large carnivores in captivity. As well as providing expert information on the health of *AfriCat's* animals, it also allows for the comparison of results of similar studies being conducted on large carnivores in other captive facilities.



Some of this information can also be used to gain insight into the health of large carnivores in the wild. This research includes studies on:

- Reversible, safe contraception in captive felids
- The incidence of gastric ulceration and the presence of *Helicobacter* spp. in cheetah
- Post vaccinal titres of antibodies against Anthrax
- Comparative animal behaviour and management of captive populations.

A study on thermoregulation in free-living cheetah was recently completed by the University of the Witwatersrand's physiology department. The research was conducted over a period of six months with six cheetahs in the 10000-acre Cheetah Rehabilitation Area as the study group.

Cheetahs and Leopards on Farmland

The data that is collected from each animal that moves through the *AfriCat* programme is recorded in a database that allows for easy access to information either on a particular cat or when providing statistics on these carnivores to researchers around the world.

The data from the captured cheetahs and leopards, i.e. where each animal was captured, its characteristics, such as gender, age, etc., gives us some idea as to the geographical distribution and demographics of the wild cheetah and leopard populations living on Namibian farmland.

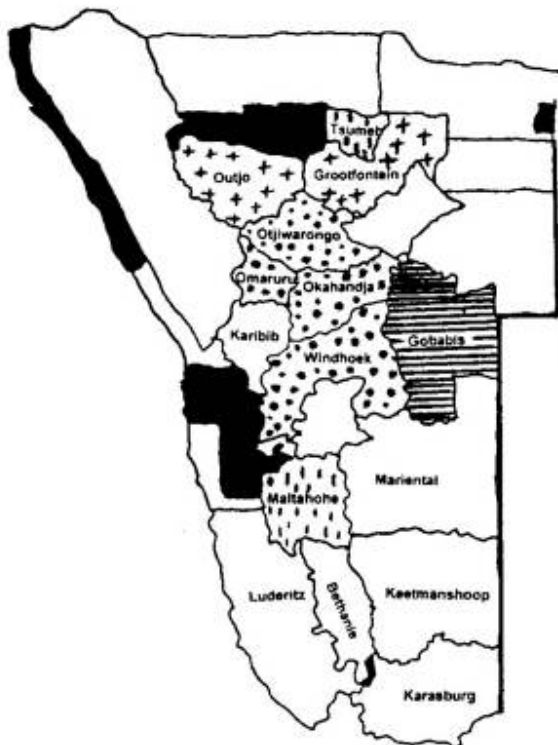
The biological samples (blood, serum and hair) can be used for various studies with analysis results potentially giving us insight into the health, as well as the genetic make-up of Namibia's wild cheetah and leopard populations.



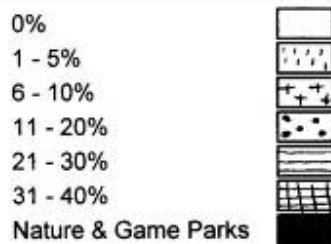
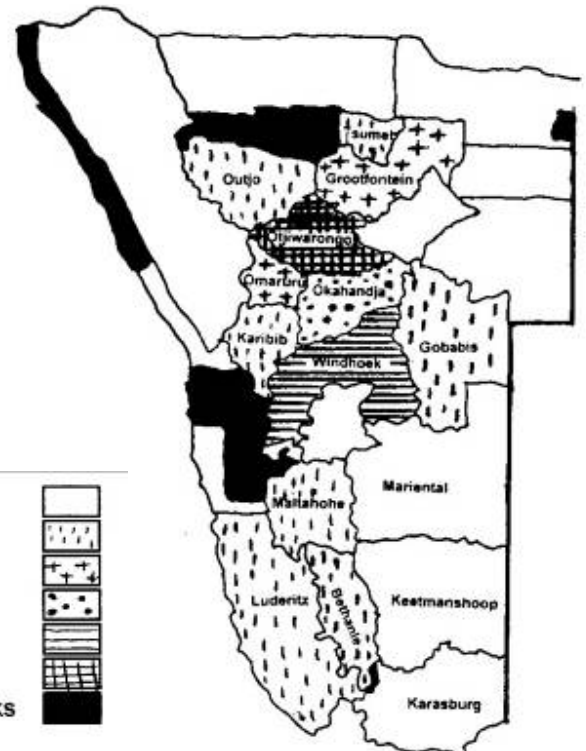
Geographical distribution of captured cheetahs and leopards

Namibia is a large country with an area of 824 300 km² (321 500 sq. miles) and a population of only 1.9 million people. Although all regions of the country still have wildlife, including carnivores, the population numbers are often unknown and vary dramatically. Namibia is home to approximately 25% of the world's cheetah population, of which 90% live on commercial and communal farmland.

Distribution of captured cheetahs



Distribution of captured leopards



Although there may be some correlation between the number of cheetahs and leopards captured in the various farming districts and the distribution and density of the wild population of these large carnivores in Namibia, the data doesn't prove this in any way. The information does however highlight those areas where there are varying degrees of conflict between predators and livestock and game farmers.

Cheetahs - Social Organisation

The categories that have been used to group the captured and recorded cheetahs in the analyses to follow are based on their social organisation:



- Solitary - adult male or female captured alone.



- Female with cubs – adult female and one or more male and/or female cubs captured simultaneously or within a short time span at the same capture point.



- Coalition – two or more males (2 years and older) captured simultaneously or within a short time span at the same capture point.



- Sibling groups – two or more sibling males and/or females (between 18 and 24 months old) captured simultaneously or within a short time span at the same capture point. The sibling group indicates those cheetah groups which are at the stage where they have recently become independent from their mothers, and therefore includes the younger brother groups (between 18 and 24 months) not included in the coalition group. These littermates are known to spend a short time together before the females move off on their own and the males form coalitions or become solitary.



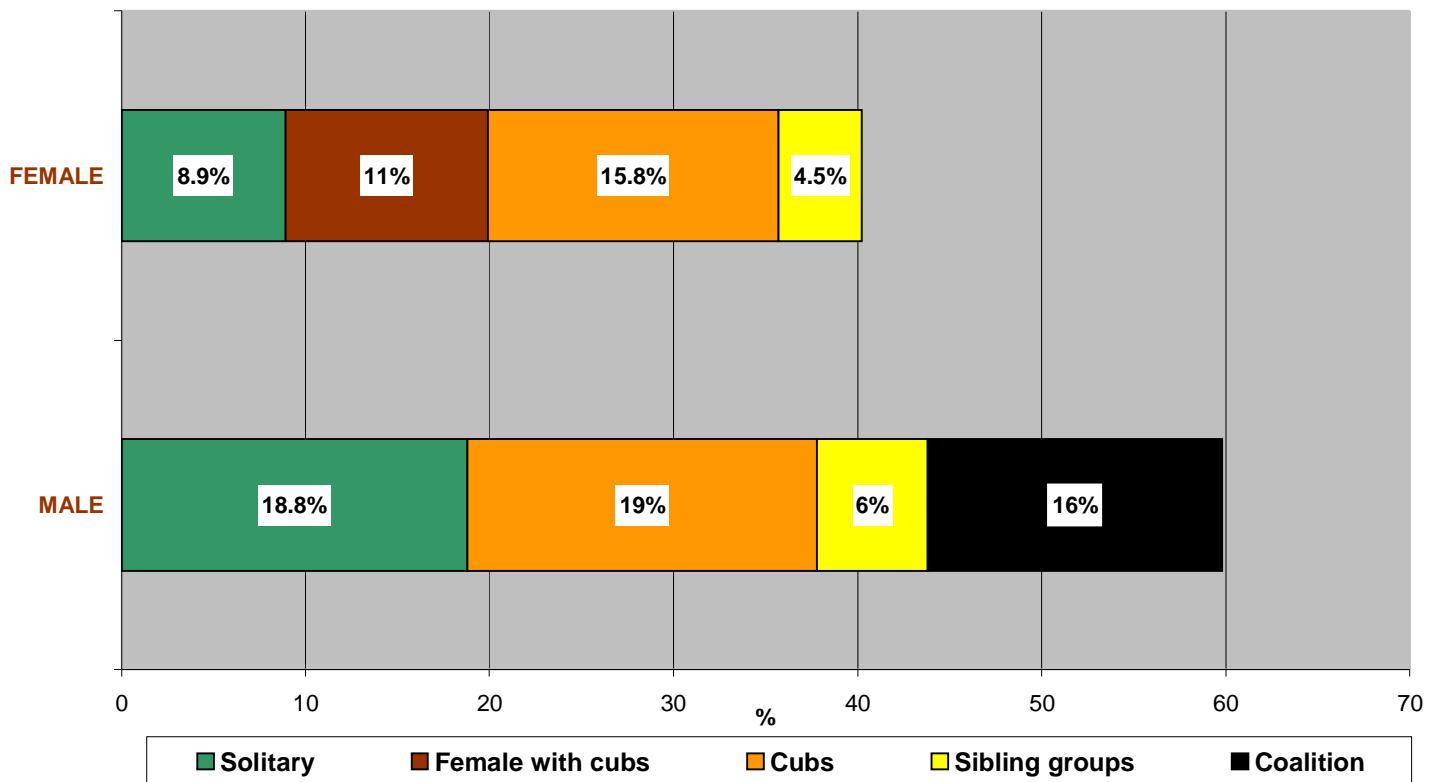
- Cubs - young males and/or females that have been captured simultaneously or within a short time span of an adult female.

Once a cheetah or leopard has been caught in a trap, the surrounding area is checked for any signs indicating that the animal might not have been alone before being caught, e.g. spoor around the trap. Capture situations differ but every effort is made to keep social groups together - coalitions, siblings and especially a mother and her cubs. If required, attempts are made to either capture those that have not yet been caught or release those that have been caught to reunite with the other members of the group.

Demographics of captured cheetahs and leopards

The figures used in the demographic analyses exclude all orphaned cubs as well as those animals that have been in captivity elsewhere before coming to AfriCat.

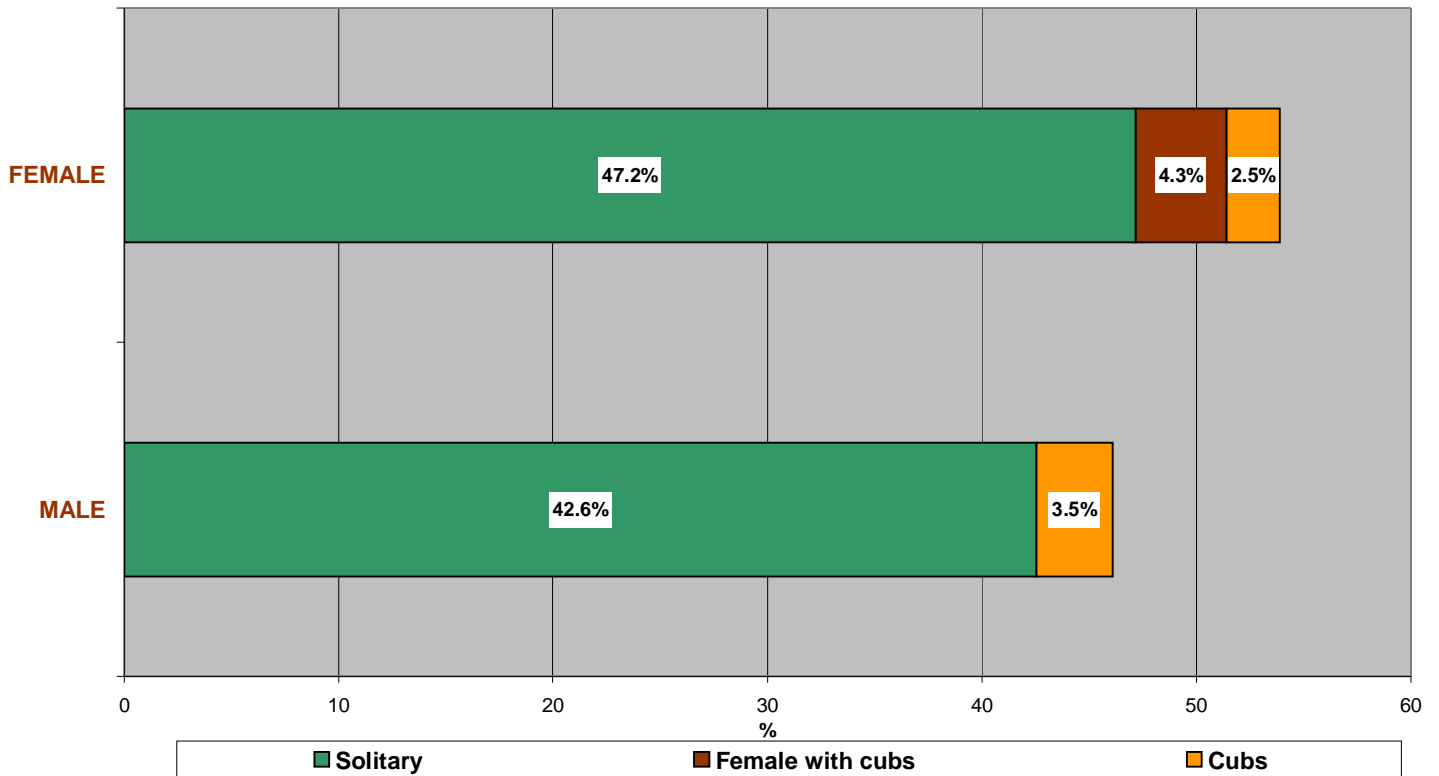
SEX RATIO AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF CAPTURED CHEETAHS



The total ratio of male to female cheetahs caught (adults and cubs) is 1.5:1. Excluding cubs, the ratio of males to females is 1.67:1. This poses the question as to whether the male cheetah population is larger than the female population - or are adult males easier to capture? With the ratio of cubs captured with their mothers being almost equal at 1.21 males to every female, is it a possibility that females are more vulnerable from the time they reach independence? Could this be explained by the fact that male siblings often stay in groups forming coalitions, giving them the advantage of strength in numbers - as opposed to the solitary female, that not only has to hunt on her own, but also has to provide food and protection for her offspring?

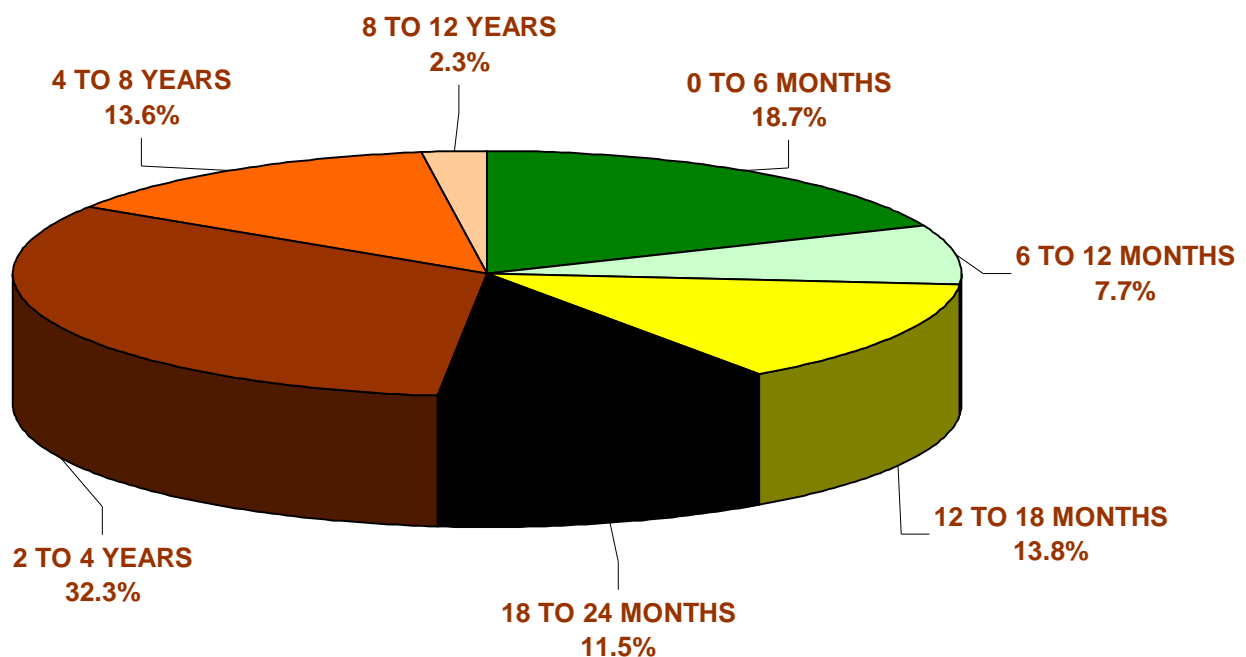
The social structure of leopards differs from that of cheetahs, with the only “group” observed being that of a female with her cubs. Once cubs reach independence both the males and females become solitary.

SEX RATIO OF CAPTURED LEOPARDS



The ratio between adult males and females captured is relatively equal at 1:1.2. The number of females with cubs as a percentage of total adult leopards captured is 4.53%, which is significantly lower in comparison to the same group in cheetahs (16.89%). Although the number of cubs captured with their mothers only represents 6% of the total, the ratio of male to female cubs is 1:0.7.

AGE GROUPS OF CAPTURED CHEETAHS



Just over half the cheetahs captured are under the age of two years (51.7%), with the largest majority of adults being captured between the ages of two and four years.

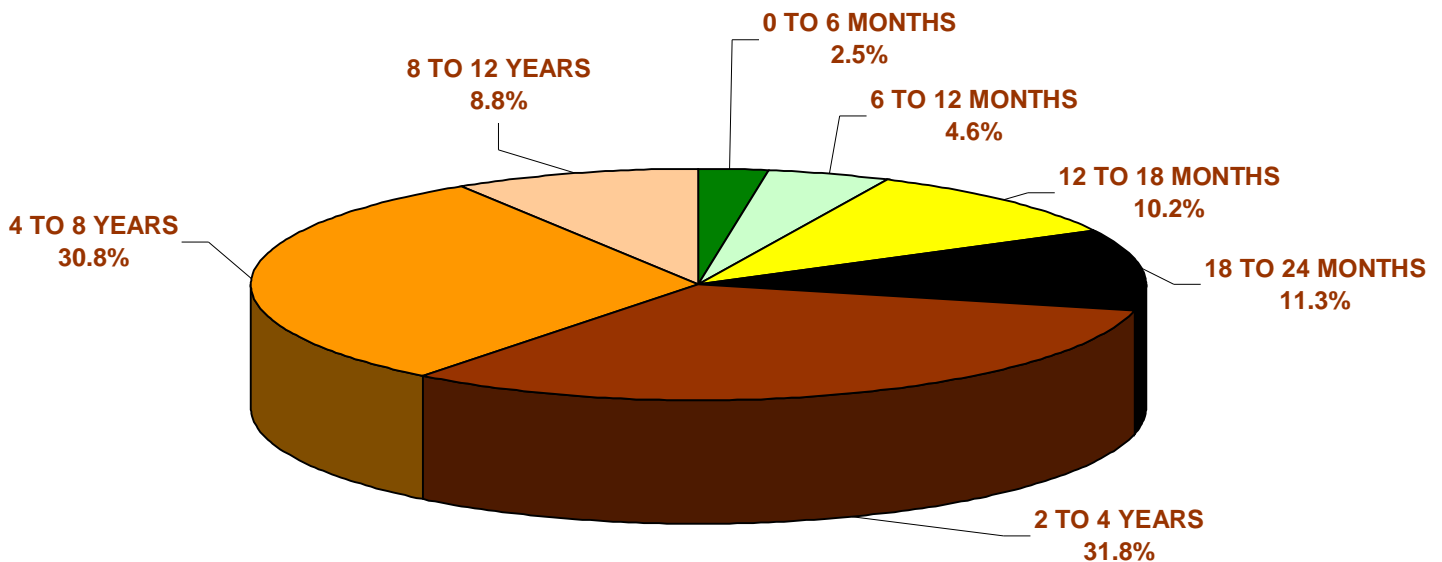
Does the phenomenal decrease from the number of cheetahs in this segment to the number of cheetahs that are captured between the ages of four and eight years, give any indication as to the average age of the cheetah population in Namibia?

Of the cheetah cubs captured together with an adult female, 54.66% fall into the age group of 6 months and under, 23.82% are between the ages of 6 and 12 months and 21.52% are over a year old.

Can these decreasing numbers merely be explained by the fact that younger cubs are more vulnerable to being caught and are then followed by their mothers into the traps?

Or does the decrease in average litter size from 3.87 (where cubs are 6 months or younger) to 2.58 (between 6 and 12 months) to 2.52 (over 1 year) provide an alternative explanation by way of a high cub mortality rate?

AGE GROUPS OF CAPTURED LEOPARDS



As with cheetahs, most of the leopards captured are between the ages of two and four years (31.8%), although this majority is marginal with 30.8% falling into the four-to-eight-year age-group. The majority of leopards captured are over two years of age (71.4%), indicating that the average age of leopards captured is significantly higher than that of cheetahs.

This figure could however be influenced by the fact that the number of leopard cubs captured with their mothers is substantially lower in comparison to cheetahs, with smaller litter sizes also having an impact. The average litter size for leopard females caught with cubs is 1.42, whereas with cheetahs the average litter size (including all cubs from birth to 18 months) is 2.99.

Although the data gathered over a thirteen-year period gives us some idea as to the demographics of the cheetahs and leopards living on farmland, it also raises numerous questions. In order to determine the demographics, population size and density of the wild cheetah and leopard populations, a national census is required.

As Namibia is a large country, studies of this nature would take a number of years to complete and involve and require the co-operation and expertise of many people and organisations. *AfriCat* hopes to collaborate with other large carnivore conservation organisations in Namibia to conduct a cheetah population census in the near future.

EDUCATION PROGRAMME

After many years of working with the farming community it became clear that youth education was vital to the long-term conservation of large carnivores.

The WSPA/*AfriCat* Environmental Education Centre opened in April 1998 with the objective of promoting predator and environmental awareness among Namibian youth.



By visiting the centre and participating in the *AfriCat* education programme, it is our hope that the children and young adults of Namibia gain a new sense of understanding for the natural world and the importance of wildlife conservation.

Schools and learners from all over Namibia are invited to participate in a three-day/two-night environmental education programme.

The programme is adapted to the various ages of the different groups, but includes activities that are focused on predator conservation and general environmental awareness, i.e. nature walks, outdoor games, and cheetah viewing.

Since its inception the *AfriCat* Education Programme has reached over 20 000 children and young adults at the Education Centre or through the Outreach Programme.



WELFARE PROGRAMME



AfriCat provides a home, food and care for over 100 animals that currently cannot be released back into the wild. These are mainly cheetahs and leopards, but also lions, caracals, spotted hyaenas and African wild dogs, that are unsuitable for immediate release or require permanent captivity.

There are several reasons as to why these animals have had to remain in our care, the primary one being orphaned cubs that would be dependent on their mothers for food and protection and are too young to cope on their own. These cubs have either been captured without their mothers or their mothers have been killed.

Many of the cheetahs and leopards that we have taken in have been in captivity elsewhere for extended periods of time; they have become habituated to people or completely tame, making them unsuitable for release. These animals are either no longer wanted, have become too expensive to care for, or have been confiscated by the authorities for being held illegally or with improper care.

Most of the cheetahs and leopards that have suffered injuries have been returned to the wild after recuperation, but in cases where the injuries have been too extensive, the cats have had to remain in captivity.



Once a year the animals are anaesthetised for a thorough health examination by *AfriCat's* veterinarian.

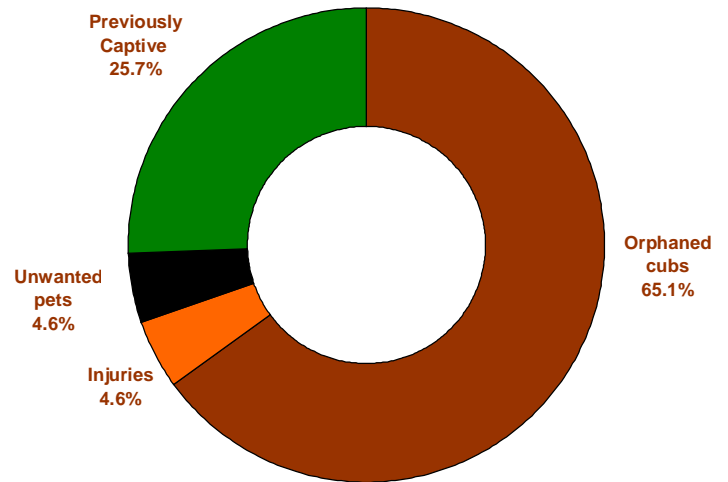


Veterinary specialists in the fields of dentistry, ophthalmology, gastroenterology and reproduction are also consulted to give input to the health assessments and perform various procedures that may be required.

The animals are vaccinated, blood samples are taken and contraceptive implants are administered.

Although our animals receive a high standard of health care, illness and injuries cannot be prevented altogether. Animals requiring veterinary treatment or surgery are anaesthetised and taken to *AfriCat's* on-site clinic.

AFRICAT WELFARE PROGRAMME



Providing a healthy living environment for large carnivores in captivity is fundamental to minimising illness and injuries. The animals are housed in spacious enclosures of between five and four hundred acres in a natural, stress-free environment. They are fed a well-balanced diet with additional vitamin and mineral supplements to prevent deficiencies. The animals are observed on a daily basis to monitor their wellbeing and condition, allowing a quick response and treatment for any illness or injuries that may occur.



Animals requiring isolation for recuperation or while on medication are placed in the special holding facilities constructed within their enclosures.

The animals in captivity at *AfriCat* provide opportunities to increase awareness of their wild counterparts and their conservation priorities to children at the *AfriCat* Education Centre as well as foreign visitors to Namibia.



CHEETAH REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

AfriCat's cheetah rehabilitation programme was initiated to give some of our captive cheetahs an opportunity to return to their natural environment. Although hunting in carnivores is instinctive, many of the cheetahs at *AfriCat* lack experience due to being orphaned or removed from the wild at an early age. This inexperience, as well as their conditioning to captivity, makes these animals unsuitable for release on farmland.

The 10 000-acre TUSK Trust Cheetah Rehabilitation Area provides these cheetahs with the opportunity to hone their hunting skills and become self-sustaining.

The cheetahs are fitted with radio-collars before their release so that their welfare and progress can be closely monitored.

The objective is that once they have proved that they can hunt for themselves and cope on their own, they can be relocated to a private game reserve, where their progress will continue to be monitored.



Besides giving the cheetahs a chance to return to the wild, the success of this project provides other substantial benefits. It gives us the opportunity to assess whether rehabilitation is a successful means of conserving an endangered population and also allows for the number of cheetahs in captivity to be reduced.

Registered Namibian non-profit organisation number: T48/93

Bank Details

AfriCat Foundation, Standard Bank Namibia
Otjiwarongo Branch, Branch Code: 08-45-73-45
Account Number: 04160-2870
Swift Code: SBNMNANX



The *AfriCat* Foundation
P.O. Box 1889, Otjiwarongo, NAMIBIA
Tel: ++264 (0) 67 304566/687127
Fax: ++264 (0) 67 687129
E-mail: africat@mweb.com.na
www.africat.org

