

Project Update: October 2013

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Farm surveys

A total of six farms were visited and surveyed on which black-footed cats have been seen. Farm Panorama, Farm Ombu, Farm Goedgevonden, Farm Grünau NO no. 19 and NW no.18, Farm Sonop and Farm Aandblom were visited from July to October 2013. Collectively, a total distance of 457 km was travelled and a total of 88.5 hours were spent spotlighting on farm roads. No black-footed cats were seen.

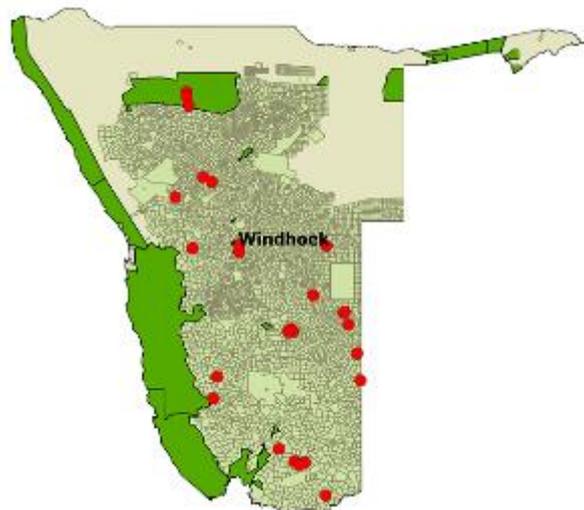
Live trapping

195 total trap nights were operated, yet no black-footed cats were caught. Trapped animals included polecats, small-spotted genets, Cape fox and yellow mongoose. The traps were checked in the first two hours after sunrise and animals released.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Records received

We were able to record 30 reliable sighting records of black-footed cats in Namibia. These records represent the most recent more fine-scale distribution data in Namibia (see map). However during farm surveys (n=6), no black-footed cats were seen or trapped. Through consultation with farmers, nine farms in southern Namibia have been identified as potential study sites for future research on the distribution, population density and ecological factors determining abundance and fecundity of the species.



trap in 2012 (Above © Dana Joubert).
Setting and baiting the cage traps on Farm Gruenau NO 19. (Right) © Anette Kuesters 2013)

The only physical evidence (except for hearsay of sightings and trapping) was received by a farmer in Aranos of a photo taken of a black-footed cat trapped in a cage



Conservation status

Through farm visits and communication with farmers, it seems the cat is unusually rare, even though through problem animal control on farms most of the cat's enemies persist at low densities. Factors for this may include: 1) only a few cats being present on the farms; 2) that they roam over several farms and move over large areas; 3) that specific threats, not yet known, may keep population numbers low; and 4) that habitat limitations/ alteration may limit population density. Unfortunately, black-footed cats are sometimes accidentally shot during problem animal control, which could potentially keep population numbers low. However, most farmers do not directly target the black-footed cat does not pose a threat to their livestock and tolerate them on their farms.

Important Outcomes

- Through extensive media and consultation, the farming community and wider general public has become more aware of the black-footed cat and its rare and restricted distribution.
- I have identified study areas in which black-footed cats are known to occur and on which future research activities can continue.
- It is hoped that in future farmers will be more cautious of shooting non target animals, especially the farms that were visited in order to protect the population present.
- Collaborate with the Ministry of Environment & Tourism to enhance the protection and conservation of this possibly threatened small wild cat species.
- Build a partnership with the Black-footed Cat Working Group to ensure a better regional understanding of distribution and conservation threats of this species.

Planned activities

In November 2013, I will go to the farms in South Africa where the Black-footed Cat Working Group (BFCWG) has been studying black-footed cats for more than 10 years. I will help with the capture, sampling and collaring of black-footed cats on three farms. I have been given the opportunity to track the collared cats once the capture has been completed. This will enable me to gain invaluable experience and to observe wild black-footed cats. This project plans to collaborate closely in the near future with the BFCWG, to either expand the study area into new farms in South Africa and/ or hopefully find farms in Namibia with a viable study population.

The project will continue to raise awareness for black-footed cats through media and radio and will continue to monitor sightings on the surveyed farms. This rare species of wild cat should be seen as a flagship species of our unique arid southern Namibia.