

Project Update: April 2022

Note from the CCPZ Project Director

From our research base just outside Hwange National Park, I hereby send you a short update on our activities between January and April 2022.

Over the last 4 months, we have been busy putting up posters around safari camps, national parks, local schools and clinics to try and reach out as many people as possible and encourage them to send any information on cheetahs. We did a total of 954 km and managed to distribute over 100 posters in and around Hwange National Park. In turn received over 1,000 photographs.

Four months since the start of this research study, initial results suggest significant declines to cheetah populations, even in core protected areas such as Hwange National Park.

We hope you will enjoy reading our adventures as we work tirelessly counting cheetahs.

Background

Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) populations are racing towards extinction across much of Africa, though in Zimbabwe their current status is unknown (Durant et al., 2017; van der Meer, 2017). A lack of current information on cheetah populations has hindered the ability of the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority to make informed decisions. The last major cheetah census was carried out in 2015, and recorded huge population declines (ca. 90%) across the country from ca. 4,000 animals in early 2000s to between 150-170 in 2015 (van der Meer, 2017). Consequently, there is an immediate need to investigate the changes in cheetah population.

Our Goal

The goal of Cheetah Conservation Project Zimbabwe (CCPZ) is to conserve cheetahs through education, collation and research.

Our approach

For the next 2 years (2022-2023), we will increasingly use non-invasive research methods (i.e., citizen science) to collect robust, systematic, quantitative data on cheetah observations by engaging: park rangers; tour guides/operators; tourists (international/national); and community members/villagers. Information on cheetah observations will be analysed and individual animals positively identified using unique spot patterns.

Expected outcome

We expect this research will provide a more complete picture of changes to cheetah populations across the country over the past 7 years. With regards to conservation, this research will assist in setting priorities for cheetah conservation and help the authorities to come up with a meaningful long-term conservation strategy.

Citizen Science Programme

In January 2021, CCPZ had over 6100 followers on our Facebook page, this number has risen to 7,010 by 30th April 2022. Additionally, we have an active WhatsApp group

that citizen scientists can use to submit cheetah sightings. The WhatsApp group currently consisting of **79** citizen scientists scattered around Hwange National Park.

Cheetah Conservation Project Zimbabwe

SOUTHERN AFRICAN CONSERVATION TRUST
WILDLIFE & COMMUNITIES

Working in association with

WILDCRU
Wildlife Conservation Research Unit

FRIENDS, PLEASE HELP ME FIND OUR BEAUTIFUL CHEETAH!

Have you seen the cheetah?

WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHERE OUR CHEETAH OCCUR IN ZIMBABWE

"Sightings tell us where cheetah occur and photographs enable us to identify each individual!"

"LONG SLENDER BODY"

"BLACK ROUND SOLID SPOTS"

"TEAR DROPS"

HELP US FIND THE CHEETAHS OF ZIMBABWE

SIGHTINGS: If you have seen a cheetah please let us know and where possible note;

- **GPS location;** a GPS position and /or description of the location where you saw the cheetah,
- **Date & time;** the date and time at which you saw the cheetah.
- **Number;** the number of adult male or female cheetah, the number of Cubs
- **Size of cubs;** the size of cubs defined as, small/half adult size/adult size.
- **Distinguishing marks;** marks that might help to identify the cheetah, e.g. a scar or ear notch.

Your (historical) pictures will help us to identify the cheetah according to their coat pattern. Email us all your sightings and photographs to; cheetah@cheetahzimbabwe.org or call our **REPORT HOTLINE** +263 714 4692257

THE VUSA THEMED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM.
"VUSA, THE WILDLIFE GUARDIAN"
the comics published as part of our rural school educational program in SOUTHERN AFRICA by SOUTHERN AFRICAN CONSERVATION TRUST (SACT) - for more information on this program contact; BRIAN COURTENAY on bcourtenay@satibtrust.com

WILDLIFE & COMMUNITIES

Figure 1: Help me find the cheetah poster
In turn, we have distributed 212 'help me find the cheetah posters' (**Figure 1**) posters

across 25 safari camps, 13 schools, 29 local shops/clinics to educate and encourage citizen scientists to send us cheetah information.

Finally, we are about to launch an educational comic booklet- *Vusa the Cheetah Guardian*- that is now with the production company. The aim is to distribute the comic booklets to 2,000 school children around Hwange National Park by December 2022. Challenges:

Our biggest challenge so far has been the unexpected sharp increase in fuel prices from US\$1.40 per litre of diesel in September 2021 (when we submitted our grant application) to US\$1.80 per litre by 30th April 2022.

Cheetah Sightings

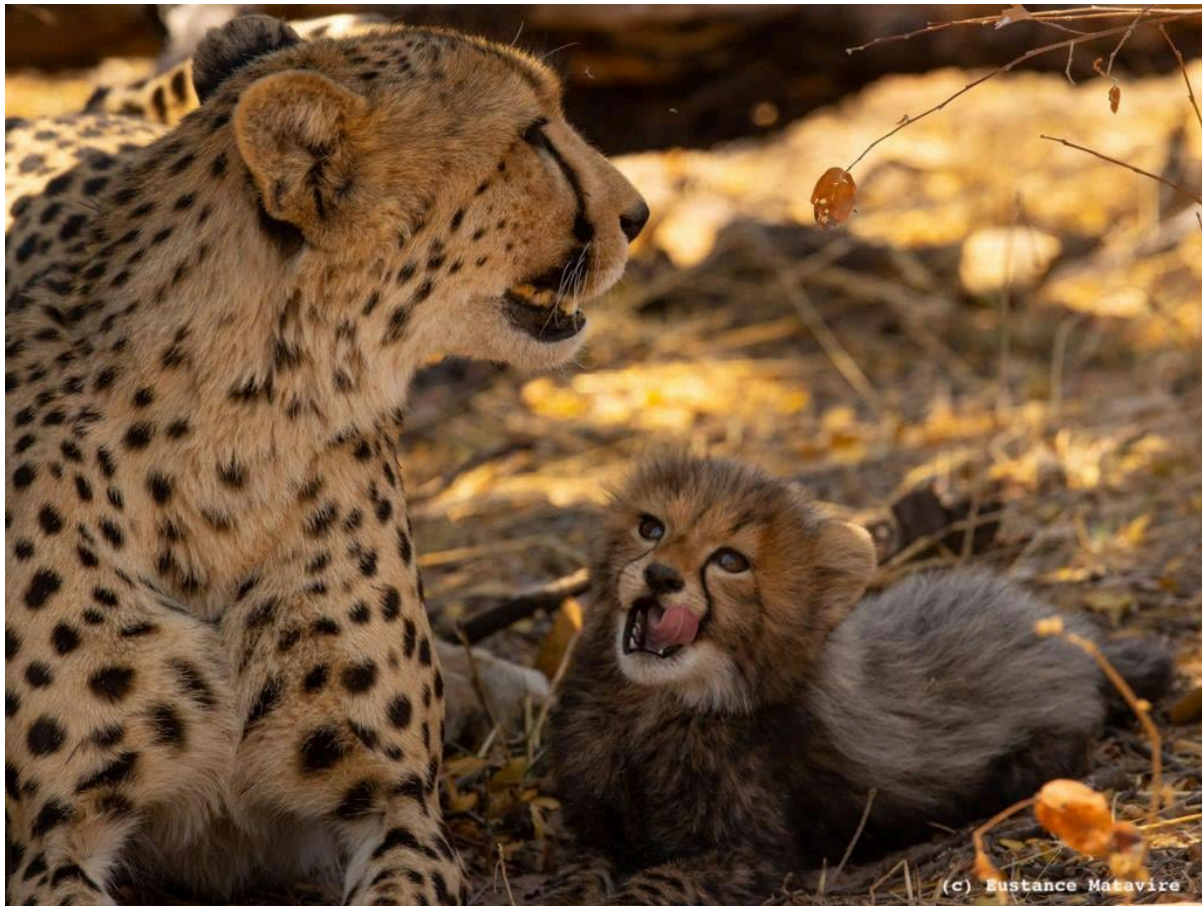


Figure 2: A cheetah (HNP047) and cub in Hwange National Park in October 2021. Initially, this animal had 3 cubs (2 males and 1 female)



Figure 3: A cheetah (HNP047) and cub in Hwange National Park in January 2022. Cheetah HNP047 can be easily identified by a missing tail tuft.



Figure 4: A cheetah (HNP047) and cub(male) in Hwange National Park in March 2022. Over a 6 months period cheetah HNP047 has lost 2 of her cubs and has only one remaining.

Sightings help us to establish where cheetahs occur, pictures help us to identify individual cheetahs. Since January 2022, we have received 1,450 photographs in 219 sightings. Most of these sightings were from 2019 up to 2021, sent to us via WhatsApp. These historic sightings enable us to follow life histories for different animals e.g. cheetah HNP047 shown in figures 2-4. Thanks to these photographs, we positively identified 17 individual animals across the whole of Hwange National Park.

“By comparison, the 2015 survey estimated a population size of approximately 42 cheetahs in the same area, suggesting a considerable local decline.”

Acknowledgement

We are very grateful to The Rufford Foundation for their generous donation. Also, all the citizen scientists that continue to send us information on cheetahs.