



# Carnivore NewsBites!

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The newsletter of the  
Tanzania Carnivore Programme

## The New Tanzania Carnivore Unit

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### In this issue:

The new Tanzania Carnivore Unit	1
The Carnivore Atlas Project	1
The Cheetah and Wild Dog Watch Campaigns	2
The first Carnivore Monitoring Workshop	2
Cheetahs and Tourism: Sad news from the Serengeti	2

Welcome to the first edition of *Carnivore NewsBites*, the newsletter of the new Tanzania Carnivore Programme. This first edition covers the main goals and activities of the new Carnivore Centre, which is being established by the Programme at the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute's (TAWIRI) headquarters in Arusha. We also bring you news of the first Tanzanian Carnivore Monitoring Workshop held in Arusha earlier this year and about an unfortunate event in Serengeti National Park. Through *Carnivore NewsBites*, we hope to keep you regularly informed of major national carnivore news and of the Programme's activities. We really hope that you will send in your news and photos about unusual carnivore sightings or information about activities relating to carnivore monitoring and conservation and help us make this newsletter interesting, informative and useful. Any suggestions on how to improve the newsletter are also welcomed!



We are looking for contributions to future issues of *Carnivore NewsBites*. We would like to hear your carnivore news: special sightings, carnivore related activities or anything that you think is relevant. Please send your articles to us at [carnivores@habari.co.tz](mailto:carnivores@habari.co.tz).

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### Aims & Activities

Carnivore species across the world are facing unprecedented levels of threat due to various factors such as illegal hunting, persecution and habitat destruction. Some 24% of species are globally threatened. Yet many carnivores are also highly charismatic and important in attracting tourists and generating revenue - Tanzania being a case in point. The country is home to 35 species of carnivore, i.e. nearly half of all African carnivore species, and holds important populations of five globally threatened species: spotted-neck otter, African wild dog, cheetah, African lion, spotted hyena and striped hyena. Tanzania is thus critically important for the long-term conservation of Africa's carnivores.

The current status of carnivores in Tanzania is unknown as there has been little systematic monitoring of most species to date. Indeed, we do not even know the precise distribution of most species, particularly the smaller or nocturnal ones. Such monitoring is a prerequisite if we are to be able to identify and respond to threats to the long-term survival of different species.

The Tanzanian Carnivore Programme (TCP) has been initiated to fill this need to monitor Tanzania's carnivores with the ultimate aim of developing a national action plan for carnivore conservation. The TCP is funded by the Darwin

Initiative Scheme of the UK government, and is a collaborative project between TAWIRI and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) with additional funding from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The TCP operates out of the new Carnivore Unit at TAWIRI, built by the project. The main activities of the Tanzanian Carnivore Programme are to:

- 1. Collect and manage data on Tanzania's carnivores:** We are establishing a network of individuals who are willing to provide information on carnivores in Tanzania. The network includes tourists, tour companies, hunting companies, researchers, wildlife professionals and enthusiasts. Network members are being asked to contribute information to the carnivore atlas and the cheetah and wild dog watch databases.
- 2. Training in carnivore monitoring and identification techniques:** Carnivores are often shy and/or difficult to see and identify, making assessment of population size problematic. Consequently, different monitoring techniques are often needed for different species and/or habitats. Training in all aspects of carnivore identification and monitoring techniques will be provided at the Unit.
- 3. Internships:** There will be opportunities for students and wildlife professionals to spend internships at the Unit to study carnivores. Interns will be provided with office space and

access to computers and the internet and will be given supervision for their research projects from the scientific staff at the Unit. Scholarships will also be provided.

**4. Programme outreach:** we will keep you informed of the TCP's activities and of major news on Tanzanian carnivores through our newsletter, articles in magazines, newspapers, seminars, and the media.

#### **The Carnivore Atlas Project of Tanzania**

The Carnivore Atlas Project draws on the interest and expertise of the growing number of naturalists interested in carnivores in Tanzania by asking them to contribute information on the carnivores they see during the course of a year. The project is modelled on the successful Bird Atlas Project, but has a more modest aim: to monitor the distribution of Tanzania's 35 carnivore species on an annual basis rather than the country's nearly 1000 bird species on a monthly basis. Anyone contributing data to the project will ultimately be helping to promote carnivore conservation in Tanzania. So please participate! We need your help. Please contact the Unit for more information and copies of the checksheets.

#### **The Cheetah and Wild Dog Watch Campaigns**

Cheetahs and wild dogs are the most threatened carnivores in Tanzania and their populations are in global decline. However, because both species range so widely and always occur at low density, they are very difficult to monitor. They are best monitored by individual recognition, which is made possible by the distinctive spot patterns on every cheetah and the unique tan and white blotches of every wild dog.

In November 2000, the Serengeti Cheetah Project launched a pilot Cheetah Watch Campaign, which used leaflets to encourage tourists to send in photographs of the cheetahs they saw on safari. So far, photographs of nearly 400 cheetah groups have been received, showing that the Serengeti's cheetah populations can be monitored effectively in this way. Such an approach has also been used successfully for cheetahs and wild dogs in Kruger National Park, South Africa, and offers a low cost method of monitoring in the long-term.

The Carnivore Programme has extended the Serengeti Cheetah Watch into a national monitoring program for both cheetahs and wild dogs, with a number of improvements to the original campaign. Two full time research assistants have been employed, increasing the capacity of the programme to process photographs received. We have also installed a software program that automates the cheetah matching, allowing us to process photographs more quickly. Finally, we are developing a web-based feedback system to acknowledge the contribution of people who send us photos and to provide information through the following web sites: [www.wcs.org/cheetahs](http://www.wcs.org/cheetahs) and [www.wcs.org/wilddogs](http://www.wcs.org/wilddogs). The cheetah web site is already up and running and provides information about individual cheetahs living in the Serengeti. Please contact the Unit for more information and copies of these leaflets.

#### **The first Carnivore Monitoring Workshop**

The first Tanzania Carnivore Monitoring Workshop was held in Arusha on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2003 to launch the new Tanzanian Carnivore Programme. The purpose of the workshop was to disseminate information about the programme and to obtain feedback about the Programme's aims and proposed activities.

The workshop was attended by 62 participants from various stakeholder groups, including TAWIRI, TANAPA, the NCA,



academic institutions, major tour operators, professional hunting companies and wildlife lodges. The active participation of individuals from these groups is key to the success of the Carnivore Programme. All participants at the workshop had considerable and varied experience and knowledge of the wildlife sector in Tanzania. Unfortunately, due to limited resources, only the larger safari and hunting companies could be invited to this initial meeting. But it is hoped that with extra funds, future workshops can involve a wider section of the private sector. The morning session of the workshop comprised a series of papers introducing the Carnivore Unit, while in the afternoon participants divided into working groups to discuss their carnivore-related 'needs and wants'. By the end of the workshop we were tremendously heartened by the level of support expressed by participants for the project and we hope that we can all work together for the long-term conservation of carnivores in Tanzania. Workshop proceedings can be obtained from Maurus Msuha at the Carnivore Unit.

#### **Cheetahs and Tourism: Sad news from the Serengeti**

On 24<sup>th</sup> July 2003, a female cheetah with seven small cubs was surrounded by 15 tourist vehicles in a sand pit south of Seronera in Serengeti National Park. Vehicles came within a foot of the cheetahs, who were resting under the shade of a tree in the Unit of the pit. Terrified by the noise of engines and voices, two cubs ran away from the vehicles into tall grass. An hour later, one cub returned, but the other cub was never seen again, although the pit was later closed off to visitors by TANAPA. Without its mother for protection, the cub was probably killed by lions or hyenas in the night. In the days that followed, the mother cheetah would not leave the sand pit area despite the presence of lions, including one near fatal encounter. Instead, she kept calling and searching the area for her missing cub, putting her remaining cubs and herself at greater risk. Two days later another cub disappeared.

With the help of TANAPA and TATO, the Serengeti Cheetah Project is trying to make sure that such unfortunate incidents do not occur again by increasing awareness about cheetahs among tourists and driver-guides. Cheetahs are more easily disturbed by large numbers of cars and people than other species of big cat, especially as they usually hunt by day. The project is producing posters to encourage 'Cheetah Friendly' viewing practices, and ask visitors to help prevent such things from happening again by following a few simple guidelines when they come across cheetahs. The posters will be displayed at Park gates, the Visitor Unit and lodges. Leaflets with the same information will also be distributed to visitors and will be available at the Carnivore Unit. While cheetahs do have special needs, there is also a need for improving visitor behaviour around all wildlife in the Park. Any thoughts and suggestions on these issues are welcomed by the Serengeti Cheetah Project at [cheetah@habari.co.tz](mailto:cheetah@habari.co.tz).