



**CCF is an international non-profit incorporated association dedicated to the long-term survival of the cheetah and its ecosystems.**

**RESEARCH**

**CONSERVATION**

**EDUCATION**



CCF tracks and combats cheetah cub trafficking, assisting in confiscations of cubs destined for the illegal wildlife trade. The trade involves live cheetahs or cheetah parts (skin, bones, teeth, claws) and is prevalent between East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, where cheetahs are popular pets. Cheetahs are sourced from wild populations in Ethiopia, Somaliland, northern Kenya, and Somalia, and smuggled primarily through Somaliland to Yemen. CCF's efforts aim to protect cheetah populations and stop this illicit trade.

## Illegal Wildlife Trade

### THE PROBLEM

CCF's research indicates that 200 to 300 cheetah cubs are smuggled out of the Horn of Africa annually, primarily through Somaliland. Unfortunately, many more cubs die before transport. These cubs, typically aged between 3 to 10 weeks, are separated from their mothers during hunting expeditions or as retaliation for perceived livestock predation. The adult wild cheetah population in the affected areas of the Horn of Africa is estimated to be less than 500 in total. Re-introducing confiscated cheetahs into the wild is unfeasible due to their poor condition after confiscation and close care required to restore their health.

### GEOGRAPHIC AREAS OF MOST CONCERN

**East Africa** - Active areas for trafficking include eastern Ethiopia, northern Kenya, Somaliland and Somalia. CCF supports governments from this region in the care for confiscations of illegally trafficked cheetah cubs, mostly in Somaliland, an autonomous region of Somalia. Somaliland is a preferred route for illegally trafficking cheetahs out of Africa. Cubs are taken to Yemen and distributed across the Gulf States to be illegally sold as pets.

Prior to 2016, confiscated cheetahs have been transferred to Born Free Foundation's sanctuary in Ethiopia and the DECAN Refuge in Djibouti. In 2016, the government of Somaliland reversed its policy in favor of keeping confiscated animals in the country. In response, CCF's team in Hargeisa, the capital city, began caring for cheetahs intercepted from the trade. Currently, there are cheetahs housed in two temporary shelters. CCF is working with the Ministry of Environment and Rural Development (MoERD) to develop strategies aimed to facilitate Somaliland's ability to fight the trafficking of wildlife including awareness as a top priority, capacity building, regional cooperation and, in the longer term, a sanctuary for confiscated wildlife.

**The Arabian Peninsula** - Wild, exotic animals are in high demand in the Gulf States. In addition to tigers, lions, sun bears, clouded leopards, jaguars, chimpanzees, orangutans and many other protected species, it is estimated that hundreds of cheetahs are kept as pets in houses and compounds, in the Arabian Peninsula. Evidence suggests that most of these cheetahs have been sourced illegally from the Horn of Africa.

CCF's Founder and Executive Director, Dr. Laurie Marker visited the UAE twice to raise awareness, and organized a workshop to train veterinarians in proper cheetah care. Additionally, CCF has formed alliances in the UAE to obtain samples of captive cheetahs for its growing DNA database.

In December 2016, the UAE enacted a national law banning private ownership of exotic and dangerous pets. To date, no cheetah confiscations have been reported; however, CCF continues to follow developments in the UAE closely, both directly and through its collaborators and allies on the ground.

**South Africa** - CCF has received reports of cheetah skins, skulls, and other body parts being sold in traditional medicine markets in South Africa, notably at the Faraday and Mai Mai markets in Johannesburg.

In 2017, during three separate visits to the Mai Mai market, a CCF supporter witnessed 56 cheetah skins or heads, while CCF's Executive Director, Dr. Laurie Marker, recorded 17 cheetah products during her visit.

The origin of these cheetah products remains unknown. South African experts speculate that they may come from free-roaming wild cheetahs, which often inhabit farmland along the borders, or from captive-breeding facilities.

South Africa is the world's largest breeder and exporter of cheetahs. Captive-bred cheetahs are traded under the regulations of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendix II. Concerns about the possibility of cheetahs being taken from the wild have been raised at the CITES level.

### CCF'S SOLUTIONS

CCF is actively researching and devising comprehensive, long-term strategies to combat the live trafficking of cheetahs. Their approach encompasses law enforcement, wildlife conservation, education, livelihood development, and demand reduction. Collaboration with all stakeholders is crucial for successful implementation.

To aid criminal investigations and identify the origin of cheetahs in illegal trade, CCF collects genetic material stored in a DNA database at their cheetah genetics laboratory in Namibia. DNA samples are gathered from cheetahs, both wild and captive, as well as deceased individuals to continually expand the database.

### PUBLIC POLICY

In 2007, CCF joined the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT), dedicated to addressing illegal wildlife trafficking, initially focusing on ivory and rhino horn. Cheetahs were formally included in CAWT's agenda in 2010.

CCF collaborates with governments and NGOs to advance the issue of illegal wildlife trafficking in cheetahs. After the CITES 65th Standing Committee meeting in 2014 (SC65), an inter-sessional working group surveyed laws and cheetah trade activities across CITES Parties, holding a workshop hosted by the State of Kuwait.

Utilizing their illegal cheetah trafficking database, CCF supported a proposal by Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda to include illegal cheetah trade in the CITES 16th Conference

of the Parties agenda (CoP16). This marked the first global discussion on this issue. A year later, a CITES-commissioned study on illegal cheetah trafficking was presented at the CITES 27th Animal Committee Meeting.

Furthermore, CCF engages with the CITES Big Cat Task Force and the CMS Advisory Committee on Illegal Killing and Trade for more comprehensive conservation efforts.

The Big Cat Task Force aims to strengthen law enforcement responses and develop strategies for species of highest concern: Cheetah, Mainland Clouded Leopard, Sunda Clouded Leopard, Lion, Jaguar, Leopard, Tiger, and Snow Leopard. These big cat species have faced threats from illegal trade for their furs, teeth, bones, and live animal trade. According to IUCN data, their global populations are decreasing, making illegal trade a significant threat to their survival.

The Task Force focuses on enforcement and implementation challenges, sharing information about illegal trade routes and methods, forensics for identifying big cat specimens in trade, and enhancing frontline cooperation and coordination among countries. It seeks to identify best practices and innovative approaches to address the illegal trade and build strong professional relationships with law enforcement counterparts worldwide.



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