

SAVING THE CHEETAH

An FSC™ story
from Namibia



WHO IS DR LAURIE MARKER?

The list of CCF Executive Director Dr Laurie Marker's honours is longer than your arm. They include Time magazine naming her a Hero for the Planet in 2000. Just in 2015, she received an Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal Award, an E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Technology Pioneer Award and the Ulysses S. Seal Award for Innovation in Conservation.

Today, we find her sitting under a big thorn tree in the African way, talking with a group of girl guides. From the large enclosure behind her, "the boys" (male cheetahs who cannot be released into the wild for various reasons) watch and seem to listen.

Laurie is completely focused on the girls, talking about our stewardship of nature. She explains that we can't have wildlife without grasslands, nor predators without wildlife, nor biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem without predators.

FSC certification, she tells the girls, is about recognizing an integrated, sustainable ecosystem. "Integrating the ecosystem," she says, "means behaviour changes ... we can change the world with different behaviour."

She sees CCF's fuel log, Bushblok, as part of a healthy ecosystem – that's why it carries the FSC logo, she adds. "I'd like to see other products of these ecosystems, like beef, become FSC certified."

Laurie is an American who came to Namibia in the 1970s when she was researching cheetah re-wilding. She was horrified to find that farmers were killing hundreds of cheetahs each year because they believed cheetahs threatened their livestock.

She travelled between the US and Namibia for 13 years. "I kept thinking someone would come and save the cheetahs," she says. Nobody did. So in 1990, she gave up her job as Executive Director of the Center for New Opportunities in Animal Health Sciences at the Smithsonian Institution, moved to Namibia, and set up CCF. One of the first things she did was visit farmers in an old Land Rover.

CCF has become the world's leading cheetah research, education and conservation institution, and Laurie is recognized as a top world cheetah expert. And she has made Namibia her home. "I'm here to stay," she says.



DR LAURIE MARKER (FOURTH FROM LEFT) WITH GIRL GUIDES UNDER THE BIG THORN TREE

Photo: Janette Bennett



CATTLE FARMING NEAR CCF

Photo: Janette Bennett

MORE THAN MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Dogs play an important role in cheetah conservation, as is clearly shown by CCF's Livestock Guarding Dog Programme, now being used as model for roll out in other countries.

The Turkish dog breeds, Anatolian and Kangal shepherds, grow up with goats until they are eight to 10 weeks old, and then placed with farmers to bond with their own livestock herds. The dogs bark at cheetahs, which are non-confrontational, scaring them from their herds.

The programme began in 1994 as part of a drive for the cheetah's survival on farms. Today, 92% of farmers say the result is either no loss or much less loss of livestock.

Paige Seitz, who heads the programme, says more than 550 dogs have gone to farmers, and there is a waiting list. CCF staff visit the dogs regularly to monitor their wellbeing.

The goats are more than nannies for puppies. CCF set up the Dancing Goat Creamery, making goat-milk products like cheeses and soaps. Behind it, of course, is a bigger goal: to promote goat farming (it has less grazing impact on landscapes than cattle farming) and development of small-scale dairies for nutritious goat milk.



DOGS AND GOATS - BEST FRIENDS

Photo: Janette Bennett

THE JOURNEY OF BUSHBLOK

1. ASSESSMENT

The encroached land is assessed. Then the bush is harvested by hand or mechanically (FSC certifies that CCF's woodland management practices are sustainable, and the Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network certifies that products deliver improvements for wildlife).



2. HARVESTING & MILLING

Harvested bush is dried in the sun and fed into a mechanical chipper. The chips are then milled in the processing plant.



3. EXTRUSION PRESS

These fine chips are dried and passed through an extrusion press. The heat and pressure cause the chips to bond.



4. CUTTING & LABELLING

The bonded chips are extruded, like a sausage, as Bushblok. These are cut to size, bundled, wrapped and labelled.



5. USAGE

The high-heat, low-emission logs are used for cooking and heating.





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