

## Namibia / Cheetah Conservation Fund Trip

### Photo1:

I left on Thursday night from NYC, traveled to Paris, then to Johannesburg and finally arrived in Windhoek (the capital of Namibia) on Saturday. There's really no easy way to get from the states to Namibia. This picture was taken at the Garden Terrace at my hotel. It was a nice relaxing way to enjoy my first evening in Namibia. Namibia, officially the Republic of Namibia, is a country in southern Africa on the Atlantic coast. It shares borders with Angola and Zambia to the north, Botswana to the east, and South Africa to the south. In fact, Namibia was part of South Africa until its independence in 1990.

### Photo2:

The Hotel Heinitzburg was commissioned back in 1914 by Count von Schwerin who commissioned castle Heinitzburg for his fiancée, Margarethe von Heinitz. It's not a very large hotel but very luxurious. When I arrived and made it to my room, they sent up a glass of sparkling cider and a small appetizer.

### Photo3:

The Wine Cellar is another restaurant at the hotel. This cellar of carefully selected South African vintage wines is built into the mountain rock. I didn't get a chance to try any South African wines until I got to the CCF but they are actually quite good. I really enjoyed the Nederburg wines, you might be able to find them at your local BevMo.

### Photo4:

Sunday morning breakfast at the Garden Terrace before pickup for our three hour drive to Otjiwarongo. Otjiwarongo is a town in north western Namibia. The name means "Pleasant Place" or "Place Where Fat Cattle Graze" in the native languages. The main interest for tourists is Otjiwarongo's proximity to the Waterberg Plateau Park. Namibia is the "Cheetah Capital of the World," and Otjiwarongo is home to the Cheetah Conservation Fund.

### Photo5:

This sign was in the shared bathrooms at the Cheetah Conservation Fund...it was something we were warned about on our first night there when we were being showed around the place. Why did it have to be snakes? I hate snakes...

### Photo6:

This was my home for the two weeks I was at the CCF. It is called a Rondavel, which is a traditional African-style house. It is usually round in shape and is traditionally made with materials that can be locally obtained in raw form with a thatched roof. My rondavel had two twin beds in it, a wardrobe and a small sink with a mirror. We had to walk over to the shared bathroom / showers which was quite scary at night given the danger of snakes. In fact, one night, there was a spitting cobra found curled up in one of the trees outside our rondavels.

### Photo7:

The Waterberg National Park is a national park in central Namibia on the Waterberg Plateau, east of Otjiwarongo. The Waterberg Plateau is a particularly prominent location, elevating high above the plains of the Kalahari of Eastern Namibia. It was declared a Nature Reserve in 1972. The plateau is largely inaccessible so in the early 1970s several of Namibia's endangered species were soon translocated there to protect them from predators and poaching to extinction. The programme was very successful and Waterberg now supplies other Namibian parks with rare animals. In 1989, black rhinoceros was reintroduced to the area. The Waterberg Plateau National Park is ecologically diverse and rich and has over 200 different species of bird with some rare species of small antelope on the lower hills of the mountain. The CCF, with their 96K acres, is an active member of the Waterberg Conservancy, a group of farmers who cooperatively manage the conservancy's wildlife for long term sustainability.

### Photo8:

This is the first cheetah I saw upon arrival at the CCF. The Cheetah Conservation Fund was founded by Dr. Laurie Marker back in 1990. Namibia is home to the largest free-ranging cheetah population (about 3K or 20% of the world's population), however, many of those cheetahs live and hunt on Namibian livestock farms (90% to 95% of Namibia's cheetahs). Since cheetahs can be a threat to ranchers' livestock, CCF Namibia focuses on aiding farmers in resolving their cheetah conflicts and educating the general public on the species to help save the cheetah from extinction. For example, in 1990, an estimated 100K cheetahs ranged across Africa. By 2000, the population had declined to less than 15K. In the last 60 years, cheetahs have since become extinct in at least 16 countries.

### Photo9:

Resident captive non-releasable cheetahs need exercise to stay healthy. The CCF cheetahs chase a specially designed lure, which is basically just a bit of an old t-shirt with no scent or blood on it, around a square route. Watching these animals run is a rare chance to see them living up to their reputation as the fastest animal on earth.

Photo10:

The cheetah's flexible spine, oversized liver, enlarged heart, wide nostrils, increased lung capacity and thin muscular body make this cat, the smallest of the large feline predators, one that is "built for speed". They can reach speeds up to 70 mph but they can only achieve this maximum speed for a short period of time before requiring rest from exhaustion.

Photo11:

Sometimes during the exercise sessions, the cheetahs catch the lure as you see in this picture.

Photo12:

This is a picture of Blondi & Dusty...they are sisters born in May 2000. They arrived at the CCF when they were three months old. They were orphaned by unknown circumstances. Female cheetahs teach their young vital survival skills, including hunting. Without their mothers, they lack these survival skills and are often unable to live as wild cheetahs.

Photo13:

When the cheetahs catch the lure, the only way the handlers can get them to let it go is to give them a small piece of meat to distract them from the lure.

Photo14:

The non-releasable cheetahs at the CCF eat every day except Sunday. Cheetahs in the wild normally do not eat every day in the wild. The cheetahs are given an exact amount of donkey / horse meat. Calcium comes in a powder form, supplement, or a specially formulated predator supplement which is sprinkled on the meat rations. Captive cheetahs almost always eat their meals unless there is a health problem or a problem with the quality of the meat. Cheetahs can appear to be very aggressive and in a hurry when they are eating. This is an innate behavior that is the result of other animals that often steal their prey in the wild.

Photo15:

The characteristic black "tear marks" which run from the corner of a cheetah's eyes down the sides of the nose to its mouth, keep the sun out of its eyes and aid in hunting.

Photo16:

The cheetah, unlike the leopard or even a domestic housecat, has blunt semi-retractable claws which they use like "cleats" when running. They aren't very good climbers but this doesn't mean they can't climb trees at all.

Photo17:

We came across this cheetah print when we were out spoor tracking which basically means looking for tracks. That same trip, we also found leopard tracks, baboon tracks and porcupine tracks. The cheetah track can be distinguished from a leopard track because of their claws.

Photo18 / 19:

This picture was taken at CCF's Bellebeno Cheetah Monitoring Enclosure. There are several female cheetahs housed here, again they are all non-releasable. There is currently a government ban on breeding of cheetahs, so the CCF cheetahs are divided first by gender (males & females separated), then by age and relatedness. Females, like the large number found in Bellebeno, are often kept in larger groups because they are more sociable than males and less aggressive towards one another. This is "unnatural" in that in the wild, female cheetahs are solitary unless they are raising cubs. Male wild cheetahs live alone or in coalitions made up of brothers from the same litter.

Photo20:

Again, another of CCF's cheetahs enjoying the lure during another exercise session...

Photo21:

No matter how tame a cheetah looks, we were instructed and constantly reminded that they are wild and may take advantage of opportunities presented to them. We were instructed to never kneel, or sit down in a cage with them or stray from a group entering an enclosure as the cheetahs may think that we were prey.

Photo22:

In the Bellebeno enclosure, these cheetahs are also exercised to help them stay healthy but in a different way. Instead of chasing a lure around a route, they chase the feeders who are in the back of a pickup truck around the enclosure. Once the exercise session is done, the food is then tossed out to the cheetahs who carry it off into the bush to eat.

Photo23 / 24:

In Namibia, cheetahs use "play trees" (trees with sloping trunks and large horizontal limbs) to observe their surroundings

and mark the area. This is Chewbaaka, CCF's Cheetah Ambassador. He was born in July 1995 and arrived at the CCF three weeks later after being caught by a farmer with his mother. His mother became one of CCF's first radio-collared cats but because Chewbaaka was too ill to join her, he remained at the CCF and was hand-raised by Dr. Laurie Marker, CCF's Executive Director. He just turned 12 this year. He is the CCF's most famous resident.

Photo 25:

Much of Namibia's farmland is now thickly infested by thorn trees which have rapidly grown as a result of overgrazing. The CCF supports sustainable, environmentally appropriate activities that assure the economic well-being of people living within the cheetah's range. One example is the "Bushblok" program, through which harvested thorn trees are transformed into a household fuel, helping restore cheetah habitat while employing Namibians. In 2006, 5K tons were exported to the UK, South Africa and Germany. Coming soon to a Whole Foods near you.

Photo26 / 27 / 28

Due to competition with other predators in protected areas, most of Africa's cheetahs survive on agricultural lands which sometimes results in livestock loss. One of the CCF's key programs is their Livestock Guarding Dog program which they began back in 1994. To date over 200 Kangal Anatolian Shepherd dogs have been placed on livestock farms and farmers have reported an 80% decrease in livestock loss. CCF makes periodic "housecalls" to check on the progress of the placed dogs and to help the farmers with any challenges they may face with the dogs. CCF also has their own Anatolians guarding their herds.

Photo 29:

Look closely at this herd of goats. This is CCF's resident female eland who thinks she is a goat. She lives with this herd and is quite smart if you think about it, fewer predators, safe place to stay at night, no food problems.

Photo30 / 31 / 32:

Back to the Anatolians...while I was there, two of CCF's dogs were ready to have pups. Tylee had hers while we were there. Nine puppies were born but they unfortunately lost the runt the first night. CCF weighs the pups on a daily basis, has them vaccinated, spayed and neutered and then places them when they are about 8 weeks old. CCF's Dog Sponsorship Program helps cover the costs of placing, caring and following up on these working dogs.

Photo33 / 34 / 35:

Meet "Little C" a 14 week cheetah cub that was captured when he was 8 weeks old. He is also being handraised by Dr. Marker and the CCF Staff and could end up becoming Chewbaaka's successor as the CCF Cheetah Ambassador.

Photo36 / 37:

Sept 20<sup>th</sup> was a day of big surprises when the CCF team discovered that they had trapped a wild male leopard in one of their traps. We were told that you have to be very cautious with trapped leopards as they can be much more aggressive than a typical trapped cheetah. When CCF traps cheetahs or leopards, they tranquilize the animal and then do a workup on the animal before they release it back into the wild. It took several doses of their tranquilizer to put this particular guy down for the count as he weighed over 156 lbs.

Photo38 / 39:

Once the leopard is tranquilized, the CCF staff moved it out of the trap so they could start their writeup on it. The writeup included sample collections(blood, hair, skin) and several body measurements. They also tagged the ear so that if this one is captured again, they know they've already seen it at least once before. This is what the leopard looked like once it was fully tranquilized.

Photo40:

I took this picture as a way to remember the difference between cheetah and leopard markings. Leopards have the rosettes while cheetahs have the spots.

Photo41 / 42:

One of the measurements the CCF took of this leopard was of it's canine teeth. His upper teeth measured about 4 mm long while his bottom teeth measured about 3 mm long.

Photo43 / 44 / 45:

Paws and Claws and Tracks...as you can see, the leopard claws are retractable just like a domestic house cats claws are. So a leopard track can be distinguished from a cheetah track because there are no claw marks easily seen.

Photo46:

The scientific writeup takes time so the leopard is carefully monitored by taking temperature, heart rate and respiration rates

during the time it is tranquilized. The CCF works as quickly as they can to ensure that the trapped leopard is stressed as little as possible given the circumstances.

Photo47:

I was honored to have the opportunity to touch this wild leopard while he was out...he was absolutely gorgeous.

Photo48:

This picture was taken as the tranquilizer was wearing off. Once the writeup was complete, the CCF returned the leopard to the trap and monitored him until he woke up and left the trap on his own accord. They tried to record him leaving but didn't get much as he started heading towards their truck...scary!

Photo49:

Sometimes when we were in the cheetah pens gathering old bones and stool samples, only a stick like this stood between us and an angry cheetah. We were always told to be on our guard as they are always wild and therefore always unpredictable.

Photo50:

I love this picture because it shows a remarkable cheetah feat. A cheetah can cover 7-8 meters (22 to 26 feet) in a stride with only one foot touching the ground at the time. At two points in their stride, no feet touch the ground.

Photo51:

The cheetah's coat is tan with small, round, black spots and the fur is coarse and short. As cubs, they have a mantle of longer fur on their back close to their heads but that grows out as they get older. The spots are great camouflage.

Photo52 / 53 / 54:

Meet Kanini, which means "Little One". She came to the CCF in 2006 at 5 months of age from a situation where she was not properly fed or cared for so she will always be small due to that poor care in those early months of her life. Kanini loves to purr, which all cheetahs do when they are content (but they don't roar). The picture of her and I was taken after she tried to eat my hat...it was amazing to have her lean up on me like that.

Photo55:

Another one of my favorite pictures of one of the CCF's resident cheetahs. They have beautiful eyes, beautiful coats and beautiful lines. This trip has made me more appreciative of them and their struggle for survival.

Photo56:

I took this picture in the CCF's Education Center and Museum. CCF's activities include conducting education programs to ensure the survival of the cheetah for future generations. While we were there, a group of students came to visit and it was great to see their faces during the cheetah exercise session. The education center and museum is a great resource for students to learn more about the cheetah and its fight. In 2006, they hosted 1000 students and youths at their Educational Center.

Photo57:

You can help the CCF in several ways because as the poster says "It's a Race for Survival". You can sponsor one of their resident cheetahs, sponsor one of their Anatolian Shepherds or just make a small donation, every bit helps. Visit [www.cheetah.org](http://www.cheetah.org) for more information.

Photo58:

My volunteer work with the CCF was through another nonprofit organization, Earthwatch Institute. Volunteers are the backbone of CCF and they have been working with EarthWatch since 1996 with up to 6 volunteers participating monthly for a two week period. Earthwatch engages people worldwide in scientific field research and education to promote the understanding and action necessary for a sustainable environment. Visit [www.earthwatch.org](http://www.earthwatch.org) for more information. This is my Earthwatch volunteer team...two of us were from the Bay Area, one was from Chicago, one was from Virginia, and then we had one from Brisbane Australia and another one from Japan.

Photo59:

Unfortunately, Dr. Marker was in California when I was at the CCF so I had the opportunity to hear her speak about cheetahs when I got home up in Santa Rosa. With almost 30 years experience working with cheetahs, Dr. Laurie Marker has become one of the world's leading authorities on the world's fastest land animal. In 1990, Laurie moved to Namibia, Africa, and co-founded the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) - an internationally known center for cheetah research and conservation. She serves as the Executive Director of CCF and is the keeper of the International Cheetah Studbook.

Photo60-75: Namibian Wildlife

Red-Headed Rock Agama: insect eating lizard that has the ability to change colors like a chameleon

Black-Backed Jackal: fossil record indicates that the black-backed jackal is the oldest member of the genus *Canis*, the same genus that the domestic dog also inhabits. They are mainly nocturnal, but Black-backed Jackals come out in the day occasionally. Their predators include leopards and humans. Jackals are sometimes killed for their furs, or because they are considered predators of livestock.

Oryx: An Oryx is one of three or four large antelope species of the genus *Oryx*, typically having long straight almost upright or swept back horns. An oryx, when seen from the side appears to have only a single horn (or the animal may have lost a horn), which has led to speculation that it may be the source of Unicorn myths. All oryx species prefer near-desert conditions and can survive without water for long periods. The horns are lethal—the oryx has been known to kill lions with them.

Warthog: The Warthog is a wild member of the pig family that lives in Africa. A warthog is identifiable by the two pairs of tusks protruding from the mouth. The tusks are used for digging, for combat with other hogs and in defence against predators -- the lower set can inflict severe wounds.

Termite Mound: They were all over the place in Namibia, all different sizes and colors. The colors of the mound came from the dirt that they were made from. There can be thousands of termites living in each mound but only one queen, unless she gets too "bossy" for the worker termites. If that happens, she risks the chance of being assassinated and replaced by a new queen. Namibians consider termites a local delicacy when they swarm from their mounds...also, there is a type of fungus that lives in the mounds that leads to mushroom growth and I've been told that those mushrooms are also quite tasty!! Not that I tried them...

Black Mamba: The black mamba is the largest venomous snake in Africa and the second largest venomous snake in the world. Only the King Cobra is larger. The black mamba is the fastest moving snake in the world, capable of moving up to 20 km/h (12.5 mph). However it uses this speed to evade danger, rather than catch prey. The Black Mamba is one of the deadliest snakes in the world. A single bite may inject enough venom to kill from 20-40 grown men, easily killing one unless the appropriate anti-venom is administered in time. When cornered, they will readily attack. When in the striking position, the mamba flattens its neck, hisses very loudly and displays its inky black mouth and deadly fangs. It can rear up around one-third of its body from the ground which allows it to reach heights of approximately four feet (1.21 meters). This one, before it got run over, did just that and tried to attack the CCF truck that killed it.

African Giraffe: The giraffe is an African even-toed ungulate mammal, the tallest of all land-living animal species. Fossil records show that early giraffids had shorter necks and were more stout in structure. Some had a leg length 83% that of the modern giraffe. The modern giraffe first appeared 1 million years ago. I took this photo and several of the next ones at the Etosha National Wildlife Park.

Etosha was established in 1907. Due to political changes since its original establishment, the park is somewhat less than a quarter of its original size, but still remains a very large and significant area in which wildlife is protected.

Zebra: The Zebra is a member of the horse family, native to eastern and southern Africa. They are best known for their distinctive white and black stripes which come in different patterns unique to each individual. Like horses, zebras walk, trot, canter and gallop. They are generally slower than horses but their great stamina helps them outpace predators, especially lions who get tired rather quickly. When chased, a zebra will zig-zag from side to side making it more difficult for the predator. When cornered the zebra will rear up and kick its attacker. A kick from a zebra can be fatal. Zebras will bite their attackers as well. A zebra can run at at least 60kmph it is thought if they can stay ahead of a lion for 6 seconds or more they're most likely going to escape.

Elephant: Elephants are mammals and the largest land animals alive today. Elephants are increasingly threatened by human intrusion and poaching. Once numbering in the millions, the African elephant population has dwindled to between 470,000 and 690,000 individuals. The elephant is now a protected species worldwide, with restrictions in place on capture, domestic use, and trade in products such as ivory. Elephants generally have no natural predators, although lions may take calves and occasionally adults. In some areas, lions may regularly take to preying on elephants.

Wildebeest: Wildebeests are an antelope like mammal. Wildebeest can live more than 20 years if they are not snatched by crocodiles, lions or illness. Wildebeest are an important part of the plains ecosystem, since their dung fertilizes the soil, and their grazing and trampling encourage new growth. However, wildebeest stampedes are notorious for the amount of destruction they cause. A typical stampede often features approximately 500 wildebeest traveling at speeds of up to 55 km/h and can last for 30 minutes. This mammal is also an important food source for predators such as lions and hyenas.

Springbok: A small brown and white African gazelle. They used to be very common but their numbers have diminished significantly since the 19th century due to hunting and land being fenced off as farm land. The Springbok is currently the national animal of South Africa.

African Hoopoe: Their habitat is open cultivated ground with short grass or bare patches. They spend much time on the ground hunting insects and worms. Like those of its relatives the kingfishers, the nest tends to contain copious amounts of feces and smell very foul as a protection against predators. Nesting hoopoes are capable of squirting fecal matter at intruders.

Ostrich: The Ostrich is a flightless bird native to Africa (and formerly the Middle East). It is the only living species of its family and its genus. It is distinctive in its appearance, with a long neck and legs and the ability to run at speeds of about 65 km/h (40 mph), the top land speed of any bird.

Kori Bustard: The Kori Bustard is a large bird native to Africa. It is a member of the bustard family. It may be the heaviest bird capable of flight but this is a large and heavy bird, and avoids flying if possible. It spends most of its time on the ground, foraging for the seeds and lizards which make up most of its diet.

That's all folks....