Project Update: June 2016

DISTRIBUTION RECORDS AND AWARENESS

A new poster in Afrikaans sparks new interest and new records. The local language spoken among the people (and farmers) in southern Namibia is predominantly Afrikaans and a poster in the language, displayed at farmer's market, agricultural stores and post offices has resulted in more reports. Distribution records of *Felis nigripes* in Namibia are sparse and are mainly from privately owned farmland, emphasising the importance of conservation outside protected areas. The support, cooperation and assistance of the farmers will be vital to conserve the species in the long-term, as most threats are from human activities (e.g. hunting, predator control, poison baits, dogs, etc.).

Ongoing media coverage in local newspapers has been an important tool to keep the general public interested and aware of the efforts to conserve the black-footed cat. Many more people are now aware of the species' existence, its habits, ecology and farmers have become more cautious of their activities and monitor sightings more regularly.

STUDENT TRAINING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Nature conservation student helps on the project as part of her training year and learns about the ecology, biology and behaviour of black-footed cats (BFCs) in the wild. This resulted in the Namibia University of Science and Technology (formerly Poly Technicon Namibia) getting involved in black-footed research and conservation in Namibia New research on the species has resulted in other areas being surveyed.

Local farmer and project assistant Dana Joubert assisted in the tracking of radio-collared cats in South Africa, finally seeing BFCs in the wild. His interest and enthusiasm in the species' conservation has resulted in farmers contacting him to record sightings. Camera traps are set-up on the farms where BFCs have been reported in the hopes to capture one on camera. So far, no sightings but many other nocturnal animals are regularly seen. This also gives an indication of the health of the ecosystem, especially the status of smaller mammals.

ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON FARMLAND

The need exists to obtain information on priority habitats and prey abundance of BFCs for the long-term conservation of these habitats and the species on farmland. As part of a Master's study, small mammal trapping, bird counts and vegetation surveys are done to estimate prey abundance. GPS location data is collected to assess seasonal home range size and habitat use. This is especially important for reproductive female BFCs.


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