

Camera trap survey snaps cheetahs in Algeria

February 24 2009



Researchers working in Africa's central Sahara have captured images of the elusive Saharan cheetah using camera traps. They are the first camera trap photos of cheetahs in Algeria. Credit: Farid Belbachir/ZSL/OPNA

A Wildlife Conservation Society-supported survey of the Sahara has captured the first camera-trap photographs of the critically endangered Saharan cheetah in Algeria. The survey was conducted by researchers from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), the Office du Parc National de l'Ahaggar (OPNA), and the Université de Béjaïa, with support from WCS and Panthera.

The photographs were taken as part of the first systematic camera trap survey across the central Sahara, covering an area of 2,800 square kilometres (1,081 square miles).

Overall, the survey identified four different Saharan cheetahs—a subspecies of cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus hecki*)—using spot patterns unique to each individual.

"The Saharan cheetah is critically endangered, yet virtually nothing is known about the population, so this new evidence, and the ongoing research work, is hugely significant," said Dr Sarah Durant, Zoological Society of London Senior Research Fellow.

"This first camera-trap confirmation of cheetahs in Algeria is a landmark success toward our efforts to save these big cats," said Dr. James Deutsch, Director of WCS-Africa. "Findings like these help us refine our conservation strategies for the cheetah across its entire range."

Farid Belbachir, who is implementing the field survey, said that "This is an incredibly rare and elusive subspecies of cheetah and current population estimates, which stand at less than 250 mature individuals, are based on guesswork. This study is helping us to turn a corner in our understanding, providing us with information about population numbers, movement and ecology."

The Northwest African cheetah is found over the Sahara desert and savannas of North and West Africa, respectively, including Algeria, Niger, Mali, Benin, Burkina-Faso and Togo. The populations are very fragmented and small, with the biggest thought to be found in Algeria. The ongoing surveys in the region will also work with the local Tuareg pastoralist community to find out more about the ecology of the cheetah and identify threats to it.

Dr Luke Hunter, Panthera's Executive Director, said "This is very exciting news. The photos are the first new data on this endangered subspecies, which also represent months of hard work by a very talented Algerian scientist and his team. Panthera is delighted to support Farid as

part of our Kaplan Graduate Awards Program"

The species as a whole has just been put on Appendix I on the Convention of Migratory Species, at the request of Algeria with support from other parties. This affords protection of the species from all signatory countries.

Source: Wildlife Conservation Society

Citation: Camera trap survey snaps cheetahs in Algeria (2009, February 24) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-02-camera-survey-snaps-cheetahs-algeria.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.