

Cheetahs return to Angola's south

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A Cheetah looks back while on display at the animal orphanage in Nairobi's National Park in October 2008. Wild cheetahs have returned to southern Angola for the first time in decades, having disappeared during decades of civil war, a researcher said.

Wild cheetahs have returned to southern Angola for the first time in decades, having disappeared during decades of civil war, a researcher said Friday.

"I was in southern Angola to make a survey, looking for signs of cheetahs, and we were just ecstatic to find cheetahs there," said Laurie Marker, from the Cheetah Conservation Fund in neighbouring Namibia.

"I actually saw two wild cheetahs, which is very rare, to visibly see them," she said.

"To be able to see wildlife starting to come back is a huge benefit for

Angola and it is wonderful news at a biodiversity level in general," she added.

The cats were seen in the Iona region in southern Namibe province, home to Angola's biggest national park, which was badly damaged during the 27-year [civil war](#) that ended in 2002.

Angola's environment ministry in January declared 2010 the "year of biodiversity", saying it wanted to restore its parks and create new conservation areas.

Marker said southern Angola could develop eco-tourism, which is the backbone of the tourist trade around the region.

"There is a great potential for tourism. But they have to be very cautious and delicate" not to destroy this wildlife that is only slowly returning.

Last year researchers discovered a rare Angolan [antelope](#) that had been feared extinct, spotting three of the giant black sable that are a national symbol.

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