

Letters

Cheetah reintroduction—more to add

The report that the cheetah might be re-introduced to India in *Oryx*, October 1984, page 245, contains misleading background. When the cheetah existed in India, its range was in the north, including what is now Pakistan, and in central India as far south as Mysore (now Karnataka). It was never found in what is now Bangladesh. Suggestions that it occurred in Sri Lanka arise from the writings of Sir Samuel Baker in the 1880s, but he may have meant leopards, for the name 'cheetah' means spotted, and confusion continues today.

The last definite evidence was not 60 years ago, but in late 1947 when the Maharajah of Korwai (otherwise Korea) state in Madhya Pradesh shot three by spotlight at night. He claimed to have killed two of them with one bullet. His 'feat' enraged the Bombay Natural History Society, which roundly condemned him.

There have been reports of skins since then from the area around the Iran–Pakistan–Afghanistan borders. The only known survivors of the Asiatic cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*, or hunting cheetah, are now in Iran.

The Cat Specialist Group of IUCN's Species Survival Commission has approved investigations of the feasibility of reintroducing cheetah in India, but stressed that IUCN guidelines must be followed. They specify that the reasons for extinction must have been removed, and the habitat restored before any reintroduction is attempted, and that the same subspecies, or the nearest, must be used—in this case *A. j. venaticus* from Iran.

A reintroduction programme faces great problems because of the degradation of former cheetah habitat and the wiping out of blackbuck and gazelle everywhere, except in a few reserves. Furthermore, experience in Africa has shown that cheetah can have a devastating impact on the populations of prey animals, and they may disperse and take livestock.

Peter F.R. Jackson
Chairman of the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, 1171 Bougy-Villars, Switzerland

This letter has been shortened. Editor.

Letters

Time for action in Botswana

As a veterinary surgeon employed by the Botswana Government, I was most interested in the article on Botswana's veterinary cordon fences by Douglas and Jane Williamson in the October 1984 issue of *Oryx*.

There can be little doubt that the cattle industry in Botswana is of major economic importance to the population. The cordon fences have enabled the Government Veterinary Department to control cattle movements and, thus, allay EEC fears concerning foot and mouth disease.

There can also be little doubt as to the disruptive effects of the fences on game movements. However, what is needed is a precise figure for game losses of all affected species.

The European Commission claim that they have not specifically called for the erection of cordon fences, but rather the Botswana Authorities have, on their own initiative, extended the cordon fencing system. The EEC do not insist on cordon fences but, in order to satisfy article 15 of the 1972 Veterinary Directive, the fences are necessary if Botswana wishes to continue exporting meat to the lucrative European market. A classic 'catch-22' situation.

At a recent EEC/ACP Consultative Assembly held in Burundi, the Botswana delegation successfully prevented the tabling of a resolution condemning Botswana's wildlife and fencing policies. It appears that there was no agreement on losses attributable to the cordon fences. This serves only to support the need for an authoritative study on the Kalahari ecosystem as proposed by the Williamsons. However, there should be specific reference to the effect of the fences. It is essential that the EEC, the Botswana Authorities and the public are made aware of incontrovertible figures for losses attributable to the fences and current land use practices.

The European Commission has already expressed its willingness to reconsider the need for maintaining the cordon fence system. Now is the time for action—before it is too late.

Dennis Cryer
Private Bag 12, Lobatse, Botswana