

REAL CAT WOMAN

Meet a Woman of Action helping Save the Cheetah!

Dr. Laurie Marker is Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) based in Namibia, Africa. Having worked with cheetahs since 1974, Laurie set up the not-for-profit Cheetah Conservation Fund in 1990, moving to Namibia to develop a permanent conservation research Centre for the wild cheetah. In 1992 the Cheetah Conservation Fund became a registered Namibian Trust.

Today CCF's activities are housed at their International Research and Education Centre in the main cheetah habitat of the country. In July 2000 CCF opened their field research station to the public, having developed a Visitor's Centre, a Cheetah Museum and an Education Centre.

Laurie helped develop the US and international captive program to assist the cheetah, establishing the most successful captive cheetah-breeding program in North America during her 16 years (1974-1988) at 'Wildlife Safari' in Oregon, USA.

She first came to Namibia in 1977 when she brought a captive-born, hand-raised cheetah to Namibia to determine if a cheetah must be taught to hunt or if the process was fully instinctual. This was the first-of-its-kind research to better understand if there was a chance for captive-born cheetahs to be re-introduced into the wild. She learned about the conflict between livestock farmers and cheetahs in Namibia, discovering that wild cheetahs needed help.

For the next ten years she continued traveling to Africa to learn more about the wild cheetah's problems and what could be done to assist wild populations. In the early 1980's, along with collaborators at the National Zoo and National Cancer Institute in the USA, she helped identify the cheetah's lack of genetic variation, thus causing the species greater problems for survival.

In 1988, in collaboration with these two institutions she became the Executive Director of the Center for New Opportunities in Animal Health Sciences, based at the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo. She continues to serve as a NOAHS Research Fellow. In 1988 she developed the International Cheetah Studbook, a registry of captive cheetah worldwide, and is the International Studbook Keeper. In 1996 she was made a vice-chair of the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Species Survival Commission's (SSC) Cat Specialist Group.

In 2000 Laurie was recognized as one of Time Magazine's Heroes for the Planet and given the Burrow's Conservation Award from Cincinnati, Ohio. In 2001 Laurie was locally honored in Namibia, receiving the Paul Harris Fellowship from the Windhoek Rotary Club, and in 2002 she received a special award from the Sanveld Conservancy, signifying Namibia's farming community's public acknowledgment of Laurie and CCF's contributions. In 2003 and 2005 she was named Conservationist of the Year by Chevron-Texaco and Living Desert's Track's in the Sand, respectively.

Dr. Marker works actively to carry out CCF's mission: "To be an internationally recognized centre of excellence in research and education on cheetahs and their eco-systems, working with all stakeholders to achieve best practice in the conservation and management of the world's cheetahs." CCF's activities include: bio-medical research to learn more about over-all health, diseases reproduction and genetic make-up of the population; spatial, habitat and ecosystem research; and wildlife and livestock management to reduce predator conflicts. One of CCF's most successful non-lethal predator control programs is the Livestock Guarding Dog Program. CCF also supports extensive environmental education programmes throughout the country and at CCF's Centre. CCF also has a field operations base in Kenya, with close links to cheetah conservationists in Botswana, South Africa and Iran.

Dr. Marker's and Cheetah Conservation Fund's long-term goal is to develop a conservancy for cheetahs on Namibia's livestock farmlands in cooperation with farmers and local communities. Conservation of this last large stronghold for cheetahs will determine if the species will survive for future generations.



"People could learn to be kinder and gentler if they watched cheetahs more!"