

FELID TAG TIMES

A quarterly publication of the Felid Taxon Advisory Group of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums

IN THIS ISSUE

Calendar	1
News	1
Key Educational Messages	3
Conservation Program Updates	
Cheetah SSP	5
Black-footed cat SSP	5
Caracal PMP	5
Lion SSP	5
Serval PMP	5
Meet a Member: Shasta Bray	4
Carnivores, Livelihoods, and Landscapes	6
Meet Our Cats: Sarah	7
Steering Committee Members	7
Conservation Program Coordinators	7



November 2009
Felids of Africa

ASSOCIATION
OF ZOOS &
AQUARIUMS

It is my hope that the Felid TAG Times is valued as a source of information on the latest news and updates on felid programs in AZA institutions. I need your help to make sure the important announcements get in here and that more of our institutions are represented. Please consider submitting to the next issue, due to come out in February! (Submission deadline: January 4)

Calendar

April 19 to 25, 2010

- Felid TAG Annual Conference: Felid Husbandry and Safety, SSP meetings, and Husbandry Course, Louisville

News

Spawn of the Fishing Cats

On June 30, three healthy fishing cat kittens – all males – were born at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden. The kittens are being raised by their very protective first-time mother in the Zoo's Cat House. These are the first fishing cat kittens born at the Cincinnati Zoo since 1993 and the only litter of fishing cats born in any AZA-accredited zoo in almost two years. Because the kittens' father (on breeding loan from the Riverbanks Zoo) and mother (on loan from the Columbus Zoo) are descended from wild fishing cats in Thailand and Cambodia, respectively, these three kittens are extremely valuable genetically to the managed population. The Fishing Cat SSP population is strongly skewed toward females so the birth of this all male litter is very fortuitous for future breeding recommendations. If any zoos are interested in including fishing cats in their collections, the Fishing Cat SSP, coordinated by David Orndorff at the Mill Mountain Zoo, is currently developing a revised Master Plan for this species.



Program Animal Statement

The focus on the guest experience at AZA accredited zoos and aquariums has increased dramatically in recent years and program animals play an integral role in these activities. The interest in using felids as program animals has also increased during that time and the Felid TAG has developed a position statement to assist institutions that are considering initiating such a program or already have one in place. The statement is intended to complement the AZA Program Animal Guidelines and the position statements of individual felid programs (SSPs, PMPs, and DERP). The program animal statement will be available to download from the Felid TAG web site in the near future, and can also be requested from Hollie Colahan at hcolahan@houstonzoo.org.

Tiger SSP Master Plans

Master Plans for the Tiger SSP were published in August and can be downloaded from the AZA web site.

Snow Leopard SSP Master Plan

An updated Snow Leopard SSP Master Plan was published in September and can be downloaded on the AZA web site.

News (continued)

Bilingual Clouded Leopard Storybook Nears Completion

After many years in the making, a children's book sharing the story of a clouded leopard field researcher will soon be ready for distribution. The book, *The Clouded Leopard's Secret*, is being produced by the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and the Clouded Leopard Project. Two versions of the book, one in Thai/English and one in Malay/English will be printed for initial distribution to students in communities adjacent to protected areas in Thailand and Malaysian Borneo. We hope to expand distribution and develop other language versions in the future. The book will serve as the foundation for a comprehensive wild cat education curriculum to begin development soon in an effort to spread awareness and promote the conservation of clouded leopards and other wild cats in the region.



We would like to offer the opportunity for zoos to sell copies of the Thai/English book in their gift shops or through other avenues to enhance fund raising efforts for the project. If you are interested in purchasing books or supporting the development of other language versions please contact Karen Povey at karen.povey@pdza.org. Single copies of the book will also be available for purchase on the Clouded Leopard Project website at www.cloudedleopard.org.



Snow Leopard Trusts Debuts New Conservation Curriculum

The Snow Leopard Trust and Facing the Future have released Engaging Students in Conservation: Protecting the Endangered Snow Leopard, an interdisciplinary 1-2 week unit that includes five dynamic lessons and culminates with a service learning project. The unit is aligned with national science, social studies and environmental education standards and is designed for 5-8th grade students in science and social studies courses. Though the lessons are designed as a comprehensive unit, each lesson can stand alone. Each lesson includes student readings, action project ideas, lesson extensions, assessments, and links to relevant films and websites. This unit, valued at \$14.95, is available for FREE download at www.snowleopard.org.



Don't be alarmed, folks—he's completely harmless unless something startles him.

People & Wildlife

A partnership between the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU) and Born Free Foundation, People & Wildlife seeks to resolve conflicts between the needs of people and those of wildlife, and develop long-term, humane solutions. They are requesting help in funding or IT support to keep their web site updated, which is www.peopleandwildlife.org.uk. Contact Jorgelina Marino at info@peopleandwildlife.org.uk, if you're interested.

Updated Felid TAG Posters

Thanks to Nebraska Brand, Inc., for sponsoring an updated version of the Felid TAG poster. The purpose of the poster is to encourage zoo professionals to get involved with Felid TAG programs. The poster retains the original format and style yet reflects the revised Regional Collection Plan. Posters were distributed at the AZA conference in September, and will be available at the annual Felid TAG conference next spring. One copy of the printed poster also will be mailed to each of the Felid TAG IRs in November.



Key Educational Messages

What are the main things we would like our visitors to know and understand about felids? How do we support a consistency of messages regarding felids across all of our institutions? The Felid TAG developed a list of key educational messages related to felids on which institutions are encouraged to focus their educational efforts. The messages are printed on the following two pages and also will be available for download from the Felid TAG web site.

Felid TAG Key Educational Messages

The Felid Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) recommends the following key messages for AZA member institutions to use in their educational efforts relating to wild cats.

Message 1: Wild cats serve as key predators in a wide range of environments.

- There are 36 species of wild cats ranging in size from the three-pound rusty spotted cat to the Amur (Siberian) tiger, which can weigh over 600 pounds.
- Wild cats are found in most terrestrial habitats including grasslands, tropical and temperate forests, deserts, mountains, and wetlands.
- Cats are highly adapted for a predatory lifestyle, possessing:
 - acute binocular vision and camouflage for detecting and stalking prey
 - long, powerful legs and flexible skeletons to provide strength and speed
 - sharp claws and long canine teeth for subduing prey
 - scissor-like molars and a rough tongue for shearing meat and cleaning down to the bone
- Cats play an important role in maintaining balanced ecosystems by keeping prey populations in check.
- The presence of wild cats serves as an indicator of a healthy environment with abundant prey populations and intact habitat.

Message 2: Wild cats face significant and urgent challenges to survival in the wild.

- Despite legal protection, many wild cat species are threatened or endangered due to a lack of law enforcement resulting in declining populations, even in parks and reserves.
- The primary threats to wild cats, which continue to escalate, are habitat loss and poaching for furs and traditional medicines.
- Conflicts between wild cats and people are severe in some regions. Wild cat predation on livestock and wild cat attacks causing injury or death to humans frequently lead to retaliatory killing and negative community attitudes.
- The survival of wild cats requires immediate conservation action.



Message 3: Scientists around the world, many affiliated with AZA institutions, are dedicated to learning more about wild cats in order to conserve them.

- Scientific studies of wild cats are on the rise, providing data on the distribution, ecology, and population status crucial to conservation planning efforts.
- Wild cats are elusive, wide-ranging, and occur in low densities, making them challenging subjects for researchers.
- High-tech tools such as remote cameras, satellite tracking, laboratory testing of DNA and hormones, and powerful data analysis software assist researchers in learning more about cats in the wild.

Message 4: Wild cat conservation depends on local community members and other stakeholders valuing wildlife.

- Range country education efforts are important for raising awareness of wild cats and their role in a healthy ecosystem.
- Wild cat conservation is enhanced by the development of economic incentives for local communities to protect wildlife, such as tourism, marketing traditional crafts, and sustainable harvesting and farming of forest products, specialty crops, or livestock.
- Conservationists focus on building capacity for cat conservation by assisting local communities in creating action plans for their region and by training local people and government representatives in research, education, and law enforcement techniques.

Message 5: AZA accredited zoos and aquariums play a key role in the conservation of wild cats.

- Many species of wild cats are successfully managed in breeding programs at AZA institutions, maintaining genetically viable and stable populations that serve as ambassadors to promote awareness and conservation action in visitors through educational exhibits and programs.
- Discoveries from behavioral and veterinary research on cats at AZA institutions contribute to the conservation of wild cats.
- Zoos and aquariums contribute funding and staff support for wild cat field conservation and research projects and provide training for range country conservationists.



Felid TAG Key Educational Messages (cont.)

Message 6: AZA institutions provide high quality care for cats to meet their physical and behavioral needs.

- AZA zoos and aquariums employ well trained zoological professionals to provide care for their cats, utilizing the best practices in the industry to maintain high standards of husbandry, nutrition, and health care.
- AZA institutions develop comprehensive behavioral enrichment programs to offer their cats opportunities for mental and physical stimulation and make choices in their environment.
- AZA zoos and aquariums utilize training – with an emphasis on positive reinforcement – to enhance cat management, provide exciting and meaningful experiences for visitors, and allow cats to voluntarily participate in physical exams, blood draws, and other veterinary procedures.

Message 7: You can contribute to the conservation of wild cats.

- Visit AZA accredited institutions and support their research and conservation efforts.
- Support other organizations dedicated to wild cat conservation.
- Protect wild cats and their habitats by making cat-friendly choices in your daily life:
 - Avoid purchasing products made from wild cats.
 - Purchase sustainably-harvested wood products.
 - Buy palm oil-free products whenever possible.
 - Keep only domestic house cats, not wild cats, as pets.
- Support legislation that contributes to wild cat conservation.



Message 8: Wild cats are not appropriate pets.

- It is unsafe to keep any type of wild cat as a pet; all species are extremely powerful and exhibit behaviors that are dangerous or lethal, even when hand-reared and cared for by people their entire lives.
- Many state laws prohibit the keeping of wild cats as pets, and those that currently permit private ownership of wild cats are under review.
- Few people have the expertise and resources necessary to provide for adequate welfare of a wild cat kept as a pet, including its needs for sufficient space, exercise, nutrition, veterinary care, and enrichment.
- Keeping a wild cat is a long-term commitment that is expensive and time-consuming. When an owner is no longer able to provide for a wild cat, there are limited options available for placing it in a new home and euthanasia may be necessary.
- Instead of considering a wild cat as a pet, visit your local animal shelter and adopt a domestic cat. Spay or neuter your pet and provide it with a good indoor home.

Meet a Member: Shasta Bray

As a Zoology Master's student at Miami University, Shasta spent many late nights documenting territorial interactions between pine voles under red light in a basement lab. Exploring other career options, an internship with the World Wildlife Fund's Education department confirmed that her passion lay in learning about animals and sharing that knowledge with others in hopes of inspiring conservation action.

As the Interpretive Manager for the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, where she has spent the last 10 years, Shasta gets to do just that. In addition to writing and designing interpretive exhibits, signage, curricula, and articles, Shasta leads international graduate courses for educators on inquiry-based learning and community-based conservation as an Earth Expeditions instructor. Since 2007, Shasta has served as a Felid TAG Education Co-advisor to support TAG programs and produces the Felid TAG Times.



Shasta visits with the Maasai community in southern Kenya.

Conservation Program Updates

Cheetah SSP

Current captive population status is 250 animals in 53 institutions in 2009. To maintain the population, it will require 35 -45 births. The waiting list of zoos requesting cheetahs is long. Unfortunately, the population is not growing. The SSP is trying to import animals. A new Master Plan is targeted for early 2010.

Cheetah Mate Choice

Regina H. Mossotti (Southern Illinois University-Carbondale), George A. Feldhamer (Southern Illinois University-Carbondale), and Cheryl Asa (Saint Louis Zoo) presented the following study at the 2009 American Society of Mammalogists meeting:

Female reaction to male urine scents as an indicator of mate choice in captive cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*)

Abstract:

Individual captive cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*) are assigned mates based primarily on genetic relatedness; however, evidence from many species suggests that allowing animals to choose mates increases breeding success. Several studies of small mammals have shown that animals are able to decipher genetic compatibility from urine. This study tested whether female cheetahs appeared to differentiate genetic relatedness to males by their urine scent. Females (n=7) were offered three urine scents: one from an unrelated male (a good mate choice), another from a male that was equivalent to a second cousin (an average mate choice), and one from a male that was closely related, equivalent to a brother/father (poor mate choice). Every female was offered a "blank" scent as a control. Time spent and specific behaviors displayed toward each scent were recorded. Voided male urine was collected following scent marking. The estrous cycling of each female was monitored through fecal hormone evaluation for the 2 weeks prior, during and the 2 weeks after the urine scent trial. Preliminary results do not reveal a significant preference by the females for any urine sample type, although additional test are being conducted to increase the sample size.

Mate Choice Workshops

Funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Saint Louis Zoo will hold three workshops that bring together scientists and AZA breeding program leaders to assess the feasibility of improving captive breeding by incorporating mate selection. For more information, contact Cheryl Asa at asa@stlzoo.org.

Global Cheetah Management

Cheetah SSP is exploring the potential of working with other countries to manage a world population of captive cheetahs through metapopulation management.

Carnivore Survey Support

The Sahara Conservation Fund (www.saharaconservation.org) is requesting support to assess the conservation status of carnivores in Niger, which include sand cat, African wild cat, cheetah, and caracal.

Vote for the CCF Bush Project

The Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) has begun a program to clear the thorn bush that is taking over the cheetah's savannah habitat and turn it into cheap fuel briquettes. The project creates jobs and restores habitat.

The CCF Bush Project is a finalist in the World Challenge 09, a global competition aimed at finding projects or small businesses from around the world that have shown enterprise and innovation at a grass roots level. World Challenge 09 is brought to you by BBC World News and Newsweek, in association with Shell, and is about championing and rewarding projects and business which really make a difference.

Voting ends on **November 13** so vote for CCF now at www.theworldchallenge.co.uk.

Black-footed Cat SSP

Keep up with the activities of the Black-footed Cat Working Group at <http://black-footed-cat.wild-cat.org/>.

Caracal PMP

Current captive population of the managed subspecies (*Caracal caracal caracal*) is 11.7 in 12 AZA institutions. The next PMP Master Plan is due in mid-2010.



Lion SSP

The 2009 Lion SSP Master Plan was published in August and can be downloaded from the AZA web site. Although breeding recommendations will not be made for generic lions, all lions, pedigreed and generic, will now be managed by the SSP. The SSP will continue an aggressive breeding strategy of pedigreed lions to meet the high institutional demand. Generic lions will be phased out. The SSP is working on the Animal Care Manual.

For carnivores, the AZA Wildlife Contraception Center at the St. Louis Zoo (www.stlzoo.org/contraception) now recommends GnRH agonists, e.g. deslorelin, as a safer alternative to progestin-based implants for contraception.

Oregon Zoo opened a new lion exhibit in 2009. El Paso Zoo and Dallas Zoo will open new lion exhibits in 2010.

Serval PMP

Current captive population status is 53.51 in 50 facilities. The target is 80 animals.

CARNIVORES, LIVELIHOODS AND LANDSCAPES (CaLL)

Mary Wykstra¹, Mordecai Ogada² and Shivani Bhalla³

¹ Action for Cheetahs in Kenya, ² Panthera ³ Ewaso Lions Project

Human activities have caused declines in carnivore population levels and contraction of their geographic ranges throughout the world. Even where carnivores are not directly persecuted, they are often vulnerable to incidental declines due to their large ranges, high energy requirements, and small population sizes. Human pressures on predator populations in Kenya are an example of the problems facing predators throughout their range. Carnivores, Livelihoods and Landscapes (CaLL) is a newly formed not-for-profit organization in Kenya which will link carnivore researchers and encourage joint efforts in carnivore conservation throughout Kenya and in affiliation with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). CaLL stresses the focus of carnivore co-existence with people in a sustainable environment for the future of carnivore conservation. The organization accept membership under the mission: *To link Kenya carnivore programmes under an integrated organization through which conservation efforts can be strengthened to assure carnivore survival in sustainable human influenced ecosystems.*

The objectives for which CaLL is established:

- To provide a platform through which national and international carnivore researchers generate, store and disseminate information and findings on carnivores through affiliation in Kenya and abroad with like institutions;
- To open and operate banking accounts in order to accept grants and donations from international and national organizations, private donors, supporters and well wishers for distribution to the intended project;
- To strengthen opportunities for national and international partnerships and networking between researchers, affiliated organizations, local communities and government institutions;
- To compliment KWS and other partners in providing resource materials, networks and preliminary advice on study proposals.

Membership levels include:

Corporate/Institutional: This category is for organizations which would like to financially support the efforts of CaLL, but that do not necessarily feel that they need to specify how their funds are used. Operational costs of CaLL will be taken from this category to pay for web site, printed material and for CaLL to designate into affiliated programmes. Any organization or Institution can be a member at this level by making the financial contribution. The member at this level will receive semi-annual reports and financial statements and an annual auditors report, and will have access to library and list serve if requested.

Partner: To be a member at this level an individual must have research authorisation as required by the Ministry of Science, Education and Technology. This includes an affiliation with an approved Kenya institution. The member will need to provide proof of validity of research authorization and affiliation, and will sign an agreement that grants using the CaLL name/logo will be reviewed with a two week notice for a letter of affiliation from CaLL for wiring funds into the CaLL account. Also, a board member of CaLL will serve as a reviewer and will submit reports to the other members. Benefits include recognition of the partner on the web site (each will have their own page to update) and have a link to the sites requested by the partner. A board member will serve as a peer reviewer for publications resulting from the CaLL affiliation. The partner will have access to submitted papers in the library and links with other partners and donors via listserve.



Photo: Dave Jenike

Affiliate: Any individual (Student or independent researcher) seeking research authorisation wishing to receive annual updates or participate in the activities of CaLL. At this level the member will be given assistance in making links to ongoing research, and library of articles.

If you are interested in becoming a member, supporting carnivore programmes or conducting research on carnivores of all species please contact CaLL through Mary Wykstra (cheetah@africaonline.co.ke). As a newly formed organization in Kenya, the time frame for functional operations is delayed, but expectations for full function by the end of the year (2009) are anticipated.



Photo: Dave Jenike



Meet Our Cats: Sarah

Sarah, the Cincinnati Zoo's eight-year-old female cheetah, is now the world's fastest of all land mammals. Sarah earned her spot in the record book when she crossed the finish line in the 100-meter sprint with a time of 6.16 seconds in her very first attempt, breaking the previous mark of 6.19 seconds set by a male South African cheetah named Nyana in 2001. Then, in her second attempt, she broke her own record with a time of 6.13 seconds. For comparison, the fastest human on Earth, Jamaican Sprinter Usain Bolt, recently posted a 9.58 in the 100-meter dash. Watch Sarah break the record at www.youtube.com/user/CincinnatiZooTube.

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Happy Turkey Day!

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Jaguarundi Phase-in
 Caracal PMP
 Serval PMP
 Fishing cat SSP
 Amur leopard SSP
 Canada lynx PMP
 Lion SSP
 Cheetah SSP
 Snow leopard SSP
 Sand cat SSP
 Ocelot SSP
 Pallas' cat PMP
 Puma PMP
 Clouded leopard SSP
 Tiger SSP
 Jaguar SSP
 Black-footed cat SSP

Submissions

Felid TAG Times is edited by Shasta Bray, Felid TAG Education Co-Liaison. Please send comments, suggestions, and submissions to Shasta.bray@cincinnati zoo.org. Submission deadline for the February 2010 newsletter, highlighting Felids of Tropical Asia, is January 4.