



## NEW CHEETAHS IN THE TUSK REHABILITATION AREA

AfriCat's cheetah rehabilitation programme was initiated to give some of our captive cheetahs an opportunity to return to their natural environment. Although hunting in carnivores is instinctive, many of the cheetahs at AfriCat lack experience due to being orphaned or removed from the wild at an early age.

Zeus, Apollo, Athena and Artemis are four cheetahs that were deprived of the chance to learn hunting as well as life skills from their mother. She was shot, leaving them orphaned at the age of six months. Too young to be released on their own, they came into AfriCat's care in February 2001.

Now five years old these siblings, known to us as the "Greek Gods", are getting a second chance to live as they would in the wild and hunt for themselves. They are the third group of cheetahs to be released into the ten-thousand-acre TUSK Cheetah Rehabilitation Area since the programme started four years ago.

The cheetahs also form part of the study group for the thermoregulation research project (See page 3). During the surgery to implant temperature data loggers, they were also fitted with radio-collars, enabling daily monitoring of health and condition, as well as observation of behaviour and hunting successes. After



The release of the Greek Gods into the 10000-acre rehabilitation area - Carla coaxing Apollo from the holding-camp.

*Photo: Dave Houghton*



The proud four with their first big kudu kill, six weeks after their release into the TUSK Cheetah Rehabilitation Area.

*Photo: Dave Houghton*

surgery they were placed in a holding-camp adjacent to the rehabilitation area, where we could watch them closely for any complications that may have arisen. Two weeks later we opened the gate and coaxed them out with food.

All of them stayed fairly close to the release point for the first four days, with Athena moving off from her siblings from the start and only rejoining them again on the fourth day. Together they ventured a little further afield and settled down in an area in the south-west corner, where they remained for just over a week. Had this group remained in the wild they would have split up not long after their mother had left them, which is usually around the age of eighteen months. Adult female cheetahs are solitary, while male siblings may choose to go off on their own or stay together as a coalition or "brother group". Given time these siblings may still exhibit this natural social behaviour but, after the first five weeks, there have only been two other occasions when the four haven't been seen together. From these observations it appears that the separations have not been intentional, as the times spent apart were fairly brief and the distances between the separated individuals and the rest of the group were relatively short.

It may have been possible that the four were catching small prey in between the observation periods, but nothing that made a significant impact on the size of their stomachs. In comparison to the previous groups released into the

rehabilitation area, these cheetahs took longer to exhibit any form of hunting behaviour and have therefore required more supplementary feeds. Slight hunger obviously provides more of an incentive to at least initiate hunting behaviour but the cheetahs also need sufficient energy to chase and catch the prey they require to sustain themselves. It is difficult to determine the frequency, timing and quantity of supplementary feeds to maintain the right balance.

The first kill observed, a scrub hare, was lead by Artemis; hardly a square meal for four cheetahs, but it was a start. Just as we were thinking that the hare had been pure luck and the Greek Gods weren't ever going to cotton on to what they were supposed to do, they caught a steenbok. Although this presented a slightly larger meal, it still wasn't enough to sustain them for very long, but it was quickly devoured with not a scrap of meat left. Ten days later they caught another steenbok but since then, besides a few half-hearted chases, they haven't shown much interest in being self-sufficient.

Just before going to print, it looked as if the penny had finally dropped. Within two days Zeus, Apollo, Athena and Artemis had caught a steenbok and a female kudu.

### *Mo & Dewey*

Following the implant surgery, Mo and Dewey were kept together in a holding-

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## RAISING A LITTER OF WILD DOG PUPPIES – THE NEXT CHAPTER



Raine, Spot (Rex), Ruby, Ricki and Mouse (Rufus) were just under four months old when their new outside enclosure was ready. The area had to have a second perimeter fence to prevent direct contact with other animals and provision had to be made for a complicated double-door feeding-system, which would allow us to put the food down without being devoured by a hungry pack of puppies. This presented Dave with a few design and welding challenges. By this time they had all but destroyed the dining room, which had become too small for their vigorous play, and they were clearly bored with their surroundings. Feeding and cleaning was an absolute nightmare, as these activities provided the puppies with some extra entertainment. The first challenge was to get a bowl of food through the door and onto the floor with five puppies jumping up and down and chattering in anticipation. The next was to get everything cleaned and picked up before the food was demolished, as eating was the only occupation that was more appealing than trying to cause chaos with the wiping and mopping-up operation. But no matter how hard we tried there was no way we could manage to beat the feeding frenzy and we were being bitten on a daily basis. When the day for the move finally came I don't know who was more desperate to get out of the dining room.

At this stage the puppies were still using the crate as their den and slept in it at night. We attached the door, managed to get all five in together and carried them across to their new home. The excitement that followed was reward enough for the long awaited release. They were like kids in a candy store, running from one end of the enclosure to the other, not knowing what to explore first - paddling in their water bowl, digging in the sand, chewing the branches on the shrubs. It wasn't long before they were covered in dust and mud and completely exhausted. In spite of the new den Dave built for them they are still very attached to their crate, although we eventually managed to separate them from the "comfort" blanket that we used to put inside. Their growth has been phenomenal and the crate now only fits two with a squeeze, but the possessiveness is still there. If they just hear us moving that crate an inch, they all come running to see what we are up to.

Weighing only nine hundred grams when we got him, Rufus, still known as Mouse, was constantly playing catch-up in the puppies' various stages of development. He was always the smallest and was the last one to get his "painted" coat but at the age of five months we could safely say that he had finally caught up and, from a distance, it became more difficult to identify him from the rest of the group. Close-up he still has that very distinguishable mischievous "Mouse look". They all seem to have kept their individual characters, which emerged at an early age, with Raine and Rex, still called Spot, holding their status as alpha female and male. Ricki is still the main chewer and digger, and has also developed a habit of preying on the black millipedes (about twenty centimetres in length) that emerged with the first rains of the season. These things don't stand a chance if their path happens to cross the dogs' enclosure. As soon as one is spotted, Ricki starts flicking it around with her paws, rolls around on it, picks it up in her mouth and starts a high-speed chase with the others running after her, twittering in excitement. I assume the secretion expelled by this arthropod tastes pretty nasty and is the reason it is not eaten. Ruby seems to get the most pleasure from the waterhole, which is filled every morning from a hose strung over the top of the fence. Although a little wary at first, she soon became fascinated with the jet of water, snapping at it, digging where it splashed onto the sand, wallowing in the pool; it wasn't long before the others joined in.

Their significant growth has meant a notable increase in the amount of food consumed, although thankfully we are now down to only two feeding sessions a day. The morning meal is a big bowl of mince mixed together with the powdered vitamin and mineral supplements, the only way we can ensure that the puppies are getting the required daily amounts. In the afternoon they get an enormous hunk of meat and bone, which is attacked with vigour. The meat is ripped off and swallowed and within minutes a completely bare bone is all that remains. This is then dragged and pulled around for a while before one of them manages to snatch it up and streak triumphantly across the enclosure with the other four in hot pursuit - a game that lasts until they are all exhausted.

Thankfully all the puppies have been in good health since recovering from a bacterial infection at the age of seven weeks, and in spite of their very rough and energetic play, Ricki's injured knee ligament is the only incident that we have had to deal with.

*(Continued on page 3)*



*(Wild Dog Puppies - Continued from page 2)*

The wild dog puppies are now six-and-a-half months old and I can safely say that the second three months have been a lot easier than the first. The initial trials, tribulations and sleep deprivation are becoming a dim memory. Unable to endure the painful bites that came with their enthusiastic greetings, we now no longer have direct contact with them, but the vocal reception we get every time they see us is extremely rewarding. Watching them grow up and observing their behaviour and antics is endlessly fascinating and on many occasions a great source of amusement.



PS. I spoke too soon. The day after completing this article the puppies had a close encounter with what we think was a spitting cobra. Ruby and Raine were obviously the most curious (or bravest), as they were the ones to get venom in their eyes: Ruby in one eye, Raine in both. Going into their enclosure to administer medication would probably result in emergency medical treatment for both of us, as well as the two puppies, so we tried rinsing their eyes out with water from the hose through the fence. Although not keen on having water squirted directly in their faces and eyes, we managed to get some in before they had had enough and refused to come anywhere near it. Ointment was out of the question; the only possibility of getting anything into the eyes was to pretend to feed them. They would then press their noses to the door and be close enough to allow us to spray liquid medication directly into the sore, red and swollen eyes. This was the theory anyway and our only hope besides anaesthetising them, which we weren't very keen on doing. Murphy's law: the medication you need is the type that you don't have in stock. A mad dash to the vet clinic in Otjiwarongo followed and two hours later I returned with a bottle of medication. With all five puppies leaping up and down with the anticipation of getting food, Dave, by means of a makeshift spray bottle and syringe, managed to aim the liquid into the three out of ten fast-moving targets. An hour later, Raine was almost back to normal, but Ruby's eye was still quite swollen and she was keeping it closed most of the time. A second dose later in the afternoon sorted everything out and the next morning all was well once again.

*Carla Conradie  
Photos: Dave Houghton*

## THERMOREGULATION RESEARCH PROJECT

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the purpose of this study is to look at the effect of environmental temperatures on cheetahs and how these temperatures influence the cheetah's activity and body temperature regulation.



Shaving the hair from Mo's abdomen in preparation for surgery.

*Photo: Dave Houghton*

At the end of September Dr Mark Jago anaesthetised the six cheetahs in the study group so that the miniature data loggers for recording the cheetahs' temperatures and movements could be implanted. Dr Leith Meyer, a vet from the School of Physiology at the University of the Witwatersrand, performed the surgery. He was assisted by Brenda de Witt who is conducting the research as part of her masters degree, and her colleagues, Linda Fick and Robyn Hetem.

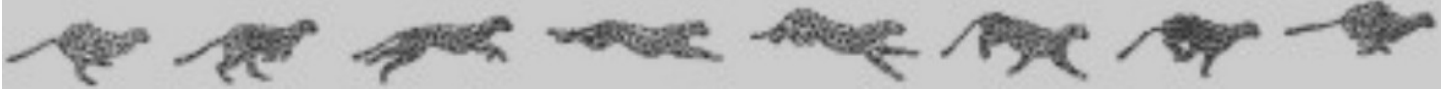
The temperature-sensitive data logger (which records core body temperature) was placed in the abdominal cavity and sutured to the muscle to prevent it from moving. The activity meter (which records movement) was implanted under the skin on the thigh and also sutured in place. Both the implants will record and store data until they are removed at the end of the six-month study. A weather station was erected to continuously record on-site microclimate measurements, such as temperature, wind speed and radiation, indicating the heat load experienced by the cheetahs.

The surgery went without a hitch and all the cheetahs were fitted with radio-collars before being placed in crates to recover from the anaesthetic. They were then released into holding-camps where they would remain for two weeks and be closely monitored in case any complications should arise.

In the middle of October the cheetahs were released into the ten-thousand-acre cheetah rehabilitation area, where the study would take place. Brenda and Robyn tracked the cheetahs that afternoon, the start of their daily observations to record thermoregulatory behaviour.

At the end of the study the data from the temperature and activity loggers will be downloaded using specialised computer software. This data will then be correlated to the microclimate and behavioural records.

*Carla Conradie*



## ANIMAL INCIDENTS

Although we would prefer it if injuries and illness didn't occur at all, these incidents are actually fairly infrequent considering that we care for over one hundred animals at AfriCat. For some reason it seems as if the limps, scratches, cuts, scrapes, loss of appetite,

### RHETT

At feeding time Rhett, as usual, was standing at the fence waiting for his meat, seeming completely oblivious to the fact that he was covered in blood. Most of it was concentrated in the chest area leading us to believe that this was where the injury had occurred. Seeing so much blood we thought it was extremely serious.

Dave shut Rhett and his two siblings, Heathcliffe and Scarlett, into the catch-camp and rushed back to the office for the dartgun. An anxious twenty minutes later he returned with a sleeping cheetah on the back of the car.

Washing off the blood we found the source, an inch-long gash at the end of his tail. It was an enormous relief to discover that he wasn't going to bleed to death. Since a vein had been nicked, the cut hadn't stopped bleeding and Rhett, flicking his tail in irritation, had spread the blood everywhere.



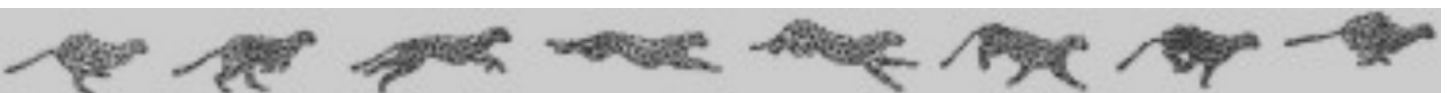
The wound was stitched and bandaged and Rhett was returned to the catch-camp where he remained for the next five days for close observation and a course of antibiotics.

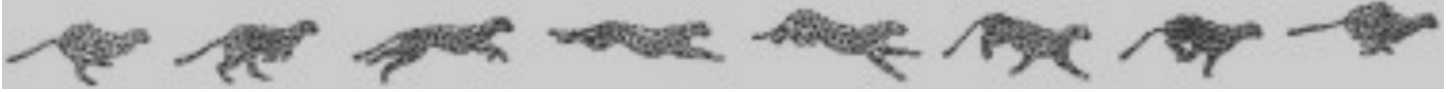
The bandage was removed on the third day and, since the wound was healing well, it was left open. Two days

### TYKE

Tyke and Spike are two cheetahs that are getting on in years, both being thirteen-and-a-half. The fact that he only has three legs and hardly any teeth to speak of didn't stop Tyke from joining Spike in catching a warthog that had managed to enter their enclosure. He did however receive what we thought was a minor wound from the tusk. We put him on a course of antibiotics but five days later he wasn't really interested in his food and the way he moved indicated that he was in pain.

He was darted and taken to the vet, where the wound was cleaned. The injury wasn't severe and there was no infection present; after a thorough examination the reason for his loss of appetite and pain was unclear. The following morning he was returned to his enclosure and whatever the cause of the problem, it had been miraculously cured, as he seemed fine as soon as he walked out of the crate and has been ever since.





## CHINGA & CHUI

Chinga, at sixteen-and-a-half years, is one of AfriCat's oldest cheetahs. She currently shares an enclosure with Caesar who is the same age, and Chui, four years younger. There are nine cheetahs in the adjacent one-hundred-and-twelve-acre area. An interleading gate joins the catch-camps of the two enclosures, where each group is fed. Trying to have a go at his three neighbours, Puck jumped at the gate, which flew open and Epako immediately attacked Chinga. Thankfully Dave was nearby, so was there to separate the two. Chinga was completely dazed and had bite wounds on her right front leg and shoulder. We were not keen to dart her because of her age but because she was still in shock we managed to get her into a crate quite easily.



Once at the vet clinic in Otjiwarongo, she was anaesthetised so that she could be examined and the wounds could be cleaned. The next morning she had her first antibiotic tablets before she was released back into the catch-camp with Chui to keep her company.

The following morning while checking on her condition, we noticed that Chui wasn't walking normally. He wasn't too keen to let us take a closer look but we managed to find the problem: a swollen toe on his right front foot.



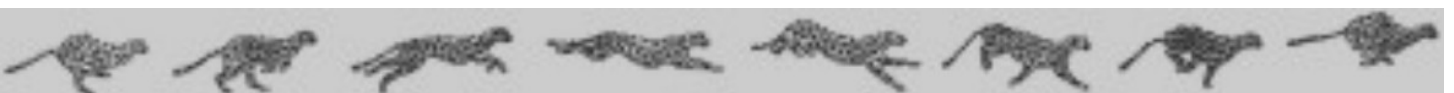
Luckily Dr Leith Meyer, the vet who performed the implant surgery for the thermoregulation project, was still at AfriCat at the time and on hand to clean and flush out the injured and infected toe. After recovering from the anaesthetic, Chui was released into the catch-camp, where he and Chinga remained for the next week until they

## VAX

Vax and her two siblings, Hoover and Dyson, orphaned at the age of eight weeks, came to AfriCat in October last year. They were later introduced to Glynton, a five-month-old cheetah that had been hit by a car. My first thought when we saw Vax with an obviously broken and very swollen back leg, was that she hadn't been getting enough calcium. A calcium deficiency results in weak bones which fracture easily, a very common problem with cheetah cubs in captivity. The x-rays however revealed that this wasn't the case with Vax; her bones were normal. From the nature of the fracture it appeared that her leg had gone into a hole while she was running. Dr Mark Jago performed the surgery: a metal plate was screwed into the two sections of bone to secure them in place. Vax spent six days at the vet clinic for observation. When she returned she had to be confined to a small camp to limit her movement. Five days later the bandage was removed as the sutured incision had almost healed. After seven weeks Vax returned to the clinic for x-rays which revealed that the fracture had healed. The plate was removed and the leg was bandaged again, to protect the suture wound. The bandage was removed after six days and Vax was allowed to leave the confines of her camp and return to her siblings and friend. It wasn't long before she was back to running around and climbing trees and termite mounds.



Carla Conradie  
Photos: Dave Houghton & Alan Hufton



## CHEETAHS, LEOPARDS & BROWN HYAENAS

Almost all of the cheetahs that have been fetched from farms in the last six months have been from the Otjiwarongo and Okahandja districts; after more than two years of no calls to collect cheetah mothers and cubs, we have recently had three. The ages of the mothers ranged from four to eight years and the cubs, two litters of three and one of four, were between nine and fifteen months old. All were in good health and excellent condition. A three-year-old single female; a fifty-three kilogram, five-year-old single male caught at a playtree; and a pair of young coalition males were also collected.

At the end of September we received an anonymous call from someone who had just shot a cheetah with a numbered marking collar. In our records, the number corresponded to one of a pair of two-year-old brothers that was captured, marked and released in July 2001. A second marked cheetah, a five-and-a-half year-old male, was recaptured in the same area where it was caught and released nine months previously.

In the middle of October a young male cheetah, around sixteen months old, wandered into a barn on a farm near Grootfontein. He had been shot and injured, the bullet shattering the right elbow joint. The wound was severely infected. Obviously unable to hunt, the cheetah was extremely thin and in very poor condition. Sadly he had to be euthanased, the injuries being too extensive.

A lot more mileage has been covered to collect leopards that have been caught in traps. Two trips to farms situated south of Windhoek were to rescue a large five-year-old male leopard and a four-year-old female.

We don't often receive leopard cubs that have been caught without their mothers but in the last five months we have taken in three orphans, an eight-month-old male and two six-month-old females. Romeo, Juliet and Gemini will stay at AfriCat until they are old enough to be independent and suitable release areas have been found.

Three leopards came from farms in the Grootfontein area: a battle-scarred eight-year-old male, the old wounds probably resulting from a fight with another territorial male; an eighteen-month old female; and another male that had minor facial abrasions from being in the trap. These were treated before his release.

In just over a week a farmer from Okahandja caught two leopards in a trap set in a riverbed: a three-year-old male and a five-year-old female. Closer to home, four females were collected, ranging in age from eighteen months to six years. A farmer with a keen interest in the movements of predators on his land, called us to mark and release a male leopard. He was darted and measured, blood and hair samples were taken and a tag put in his ear. On recovering from the anaesthetic he was released at the capture site.



Calls to fetch brown hyaenas from traps are usually few and far between, although talking to farmers, there seems to be a marked increase in the number of actual sightings as well as tracks. A farmer in the Khorixas area asked us to come and mark a brown hyaena, as he was keen to follow its movements on the farm. From tooth-wear its age was estimated to be about six years. An eartag was inserted, blood samples and measurements taken and the animal was released from the trap a few hours later.

Carla Conradie

(Mo & Dewey - continued from page 1)

camp for two weeks before they were released back into the TUSK cheetah rehabilitation area. Mo was on the move immediately, re-exploring his old territories and covering vast distances. A day later he caught a warthog. Dewey met up with three of the Greek Gods during their initial separation from Athena but this was only for a day; when Athena returned, they left him to his own devices. Later in the week he was seen eating a jackal, not the first time he has chosen this unusual prey.

Mo stayed true to form, completely independent and an excellent hunter, with prey ranging from small steenbok to large kudu. Dewey, however, wandered around aimlessly and seemed to have lost the will to find his own food. We fed him on a number of occasions and then he surprised us by catching an adult warthog. Two days later he had moved away from the kill site but, from his appearance and behaviour, it didn't seem as if he had eaten anything. He looked a bit thin so we decided to feed him. We realised that something was wrong when we checked on him the next day. He was still in the same place, lying next to his piece of meat, having only eaten a few mouthfuls.

We brought him in, putting him in a holding-camp so that we could keep a close eye on him. He ate for the next two days and then started vomiting undigested food. He lost his appetite and a lot of weight. He was treated for gastritis and eventually the vomiting stopped. His appetite returned and we gradually increased his food intake. He is still very thin but the old cheeky Dewey behaviour is back: he stalks and chases us every day when we have to go into his camp to clean up.

Once his condition has picked up and we are assured that he has fully recovered, he will be released back into the rehabilitation area under close observation.

Carla Conradie

### TJ - Prince of Shadows..

*Ongwe, the local tongue would call you...*

*Your ways mystify those who seek you...*

*You see without being seen, move without being heard*

*A lonely track is all that betrays your presence.*

*You stay in the shadows, and shadows grasp mystery*

*With a coat fit for a Zulu king, proud and strong...*

*You put a smile on hundreds of lonely travelers.*

*Your portrait will tell your tale, but hide your secrets.*

*The night belongs to you, it fears you, we fear you...*

*Every day we seek the grace that is your presence.*

*To see a yellow stare engulfed in mystery.....*

*But disappointment often lingers in the shadows of hope.*

*Yet it is hope that drives us to find you*

*If a mane makes one a king....*

*Your ways justify you as a Prince...*

André Rossouw

TJ is a five-year-old leopard living in the ten-thousand-acre rehabilitation area. As a guide, André sees TJ regularly when accompanying Okonjima guests to radio-track and view these magnificent animals in their natural habitat.

The *AfriCat* Foundation would like to thank the following people and organisations for their help and support:



Céline & Zarah Abeln	Mr H Freyer	Wolfgang Lechner	Holger & Birgit Ruhnau
Nancy Abraham	Rita Frommer	Klaus Leimkuehler	ER & JCN Russell
Ruth Albersmeyer	Mrs Gaerdes	Horst & Karla Leinweber	Christine & Johann Sanda
Dr Brigitte Albrecht	Pat Garcia	Joe Levey	Maureen Scammell
Cesar Alho	Udo Göbel	Ulrike & Horst Lindner	Angela Schmidt
Animal Park - Endemol UK Productions	Robert & Penny Greenwood	Monika Löhn	Dr Felix Schneier
John & Suzanne Arnold	Judith Grellman	Douglas Lowenthal	Walter Schramm
Gloria Arzberger	Dr Thomas Grittinger	Christiane Maerkle	Hayley Smith
Linda Baker	Barry & Margaret Harding	Rick & Frances Magaldi	Tracey Smith
Dr Marietta Bartels	Maria Pellen Harvey	Carsten & Stefanie Marks	Leon Smith
Martin Baumanns	Mark & Liz Harvey	Carol Matheson	Lydia Stevens
Giovanni Berardi	Adelheid Hausdorf	Rossella Mauri	Jürgen Stoll
Colin & Maureen Beveridge	John Hayward	Charles Mayhew	Olof Svensson
Sergio Bianchi	Yvonne & Ronald Hazewinkel	Debbie McLeish	Antje & Andy Taylor
John & Dawn Bickers	Mr Hellweg	Alexa Michl	Carlos Teles
Kimberly Bisger	Roderick Henney	Sharon Miles	Kelly Teoh
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Martin Buehler	Brigitte Huber	Dirk Ohlmer	Nicola Vernon
Lisa Bukalders	Alan & Sue Hufton	Rob & Joanna Oliver	Wabi Lodge
Dieter & Karin Burgert	Tony & Glynis Hughes	Jolan Onodi	Wentscher Poultry Farm
Bürologistik GmbH	Jock & Judith Hutton	Ruth & Karl Osborne	Vicky West
Claire Carter	Tim Jackson	Ozandjache	Nina & Lara White
Ivan Carter	Giuseppe Jammetta	Alan & Yolande Parry	Philipp Wicki
Alex & Amy Case	David Jones	Greg & Sally Peel	Cees & Monic Wijffels
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Brenda & Brian Commins	Sheena Judd	Marcus Pohlenk	Colin Wilken
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Tom & Maggie Davison	Irina Kisseloff	Andreas Reuter	Julian Wolff
Anthony Dickman	Carolyn G Kriebel	Richard & Diana Reynolds-Hale	Janet Wright
Grit Diener	Stefanie Krüger	Philip & Eugenia Righter	
Mrs Ruth Dodds	Erika Kupferschmidt	Stella Rogers	
Peet & Annette du Toit	Jochen Kútscherúk	Stefani & Florian Rückert	
David & Sue Fletcher	Maurice Lebowitz	Gunnar & Rita Ruffart	

## **CAMERA EQUIPMENT DONATED**

Thanks to Ivan Carter and Becci and Mark Crowe, AfriCat's photographer, Dave Houghton, will no longer have any excuses for bad photographs. With a Canon EOS 10D digital camera, a Canon 24-85mm lens, a Canon 100-400mm lens with image stabiliser, a high speed USB card reader, two 512MB flash cards, two batteries and a charger, top quality photographs for cat sponsors and the newsletter are instantaneous.

Thank you so much for your overwhelmingly generous donations. Now Dave can only blame the clouds, sun and rain, the long grass, the shadows and - oh, I forgot - the uncooperative animals and people!

