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Non-detriment finding for cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus)*

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Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests in relation to this non-detriment finding (NDF).

Date: 21.10.2025

Scientific name: *Acinonyx jubatus* (Schreber, 1775)

Common names: Cheetah, hunting leopard.

Norwegian name: Gepard.

Type of permit: CITES Appendix I import; Norwegian CITES Regulation Annex 1, list A

Country of export: Germany (DE)
Country of import: Norway (NO)

Purpose and source: The proposal concerns the import of two live male cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*; CITES Appendix I; source code C) from a zoo in Germany (Zoologische-Botanischer Garten Wilhelma) to a zoo in Norway (Kristiansand Dyrepark AS) for the purpose of breeding in captivity (purpose-of-transaction code B). (According to the German export permit, the two cheetahs were born in France in 2018, not in Germany as stated in the Norwegian import application.)

For Appendix I species (Norwegian CITES Regulation Annex 1, list A), it is required to establish that import will not be detrimental to the survival of that species, in compliance with CITES Article III. In the Norwegian CITES regulation (Lovdata, 2018), the criteria for import to Norway are described in Chapter 2, Section 4.

VKM has adopted the definition of detriment, cf. Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) suggested by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Scientific Authority:

1. Harvest that is not sustainable.
2. Harvest that harms the status of the species in the wild.
3. Removal from the wild that results in habitat loss or destruction, or that interferes with recovery efforts for a species.

Conclusion: *Positive*

VKM concludes that the import of two live male cheetahs bred in captivity will not have a harmful effect on the conservation status of the species.

The conclusion is based on the following factors:

- The individuals in question, and their parents, were bred in captivity and have had no contact with wild conspecifics. Therefore, the import is not likely to have any harmful effect on the conservation status of the species in the wild.
- The transfer of the two individuals from Zoologische-Botanischer Garten Wilhelma (DE) to Kristiansand Dyrepark AS (NO) is recommended by and part of the Ex-situ Programme for cheetahs run by the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA).

1. Biological information

Distribution

Once widespread throughout Africa and southwestern Asia, cheetahs are now found in only 9% of their former range, with most of the remaining populations located in Southern and Eastern Africa. Cheetahs inhabit diverse African ecosystems—from deserts to grasslands—excluding tropical and montane forests, although they have been recorded at high altitudes. In Iran, they occupy arid landscapes with rugged terrain. Compared to other carnivores, cheetahs show low habitat selectivity (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

Current and former (extinct) range states include Afghanistan (extinct), Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi (extinct), Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic, Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt (extinct?), Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, India (extinct), Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq (extinct), Israel (extinct), Jordan (extinct), Kazakhstan (extinct), Kenya, Kuwait (extinct), Kyrgyzstan (extinct), Lebanon (extinct), Libya (extinct), Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco (extinct), Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan (extinct), Saudi, Arabia (extinct), Senegal (extinct), Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic (extinct), Tajikistan (extinct), Togo, Tunisia (extinct), Turkmenistan (extinct), Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan (extinct), Western Sahara, Yemen (extinct), Zambia, and Zimbabwe (UNEP, 2025).

Life history

In the wild, female cheetahs may live up to 14 years and males up to 10, although reproduction beyond 12 years has not been documented. Cheetahs typically give birth at two years of age after a three-month gestation (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein). Cub mortality is high (Durant et al., 2024); in the Serengeti, up to 95% of cubs died before independence, mainly due to predation (Laurenson, 1994). If they survive, cubs remain with their mother for about 18 months, then spend six months with siblings. Females later disperse to reproduce, while males often form lifelong coalitions. Generation length is estimated to be 4.9 years (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

Cheetahs have a unique social structure among felids. Females are solitary or with cubs, while males may be alone or in coalitions, usually of brothers, but sometimes also with unrelated individuals. Unlike lions, male cheetahs do not monopolize mates, and females display promiscuous mating behavior without evidence of mate fidelity (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

Role in the ecosystem

Cheetahs are primarily diurnal, wide-ranging predators that rely on short bursts of high-speed pursuit—the fastest among land mammals—to capture prey. Their diet mainly includes small- to medium-sized ungulates such as gazelles, kob, and impala, but can also extend to smaller animals like hares and birds, as well as larger prey like wildebeest, kudu, and eland (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

Cheetahs occur at relatively low densities compared to other large carnivores, with natural populations rarely exceeding 2.5 individuals per 100 km². This is likely due to interspecific competition and predation risk to cubs (see Life history section above), although prey availability may also be a limiting factor (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

2. Population trend

The global cheetah population is estimated at 6,517 mature individuals and is both declining and severely fragmented. Among the 33 remaining populations, only two contain more than

1,000 mature individuals (Durant et al., 2024, and references therein).

3. Conservation status

Cheetah is assessed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species under criteria A4b; C1 (Durant et al., 2024; scope: global; assessment made in 2021) because its population is small (6,517 mature individuals), continues to decline (37% over past three generations), and is projected to keep declining based on observed trends and threats.

4. Threats

Cheetahs face major threats from habitat loss and fragmentation, intensified by their low density and need for large, connected landscapes due to their wide-ranging behavior. Additional pressures include human–wildlife conflict, road networks, tourism, illegal hunting and pet trade, infrastructure expansion, and climate change (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

5. Conservation and management measures:

International legislation

Cheetahs are listed under Appendix I of CITES and CMS (UNEP, 2025) and are legally protected across most of their current and some former range (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein). However, several countries allow lethal control in response to human–wildlife conflict, often without systematic monitoring (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein). In some cases, retention of cheetah parts is permitted, potentially incentivizing removals (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

Conservation measures

Due to their low density and wide-ranging behavior, cheetah conservation requires large-scale efforts, including cross-border collaboration (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

In Africa, cheetah conservation is guided by regional strategies and national action plans developed through the African Range-Wide Cheetah Conservation Initiative (CCI), covering 96% of the known range. These plans address key threats and promote coordinated action across all 30 African populations. The CITES-CMS African Carnivore Initiative further supports conservation of cheetahs and other threatened carnivores (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

In Iran, the cheetah is fully protected, but conservation is hindered by limited funding and habitat pressures. Afghanistan lists the species as protected, although it is likely extinct there (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

In response to the continued decline of wild cheetah populations, conservation efforts are increasingly integrating in-situ measures with ex-situ programs in zoological institutions, as part of a so-called One Plan Approach aimed at coordinated and comprehensive species management (Schwartz et al., 2018). The import of the two cheetahs in question is recommended by and part of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) Ex-situ Programme for cheetahs (Helene Axelsen, pers. comm., October 2025).

6. Trade/use

Legal

In 2025, CITES export quotas for live cheetahs and hunting trophies are: Botswana – 5, Namibia – 150, and Zimbabwe – 0. All trade in such specimens is regulated under Article III of the Convention (UNEP, 2025).

According to CITES Wildlife TradeView (2025), legal trade in wild specimens (source code: W) in the period 2015-2024 almost solely consists of specimens imported to Germany from Namibia for scientific purposes (10,250 out of 11,194 specimens; purpose-of-transaction code: S). Some trophies (653; purpose of transaction code: T and P) and live specimens (93; purpose-of-transaction code: N (reintroduction or introduction into the wild) have also been reported as well as a small number of other specimens including skulls (27) and skins (21).

Illegal

Illegal trade remains a major threat to cheetahs. Despite CITES protections, enforcement gaps persist, and actual trade volumes far exceed official reports (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein). One recent study identified 1,884 trade-related incidents between 2010–2019, involving an estimated 4,184 cheetahs, averaging nearly 200 incidents and over 400 animals per year (Tricorache et al., 2021). Illegal trade is dominated by live trade from the Horn of Africa, where live cubs are trafficked to Gulf states for the exotic pet trade. Most are smuggled by boat via Somalia and Yemen, with high mortality rates, and inappropriate captive care further threatens survival. Small, isolated populations in Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan are especially vulnerable. Illegal skin trade also persists in Africa and Asia, with even low levels posing serious risks to already vulnerable populations (Durant et al., 2024 and references therein).

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