



Black-footed cat Research Project Namibia

miershooptier · klein gekolde kat · Schwarzfusskatze · #Nu#aibeb · !koirus · *Felis nigripes*

To study the distribution and conservation status of the black-footed cat in Namibia

The Black-footed cat Research Project, Namibia started in 2012, is looking at the distribution and conservation status of the black-footed cat (mierhoopstier; klein gekolde kat) in Namibia. The black-footed cat is the smallest and rarest of the African felids and little is known about its biology, behaviour and ecology. Also, the species is not legally protected in Namibia; it is merely scheduled as a “wild animal” and enjoys little protection from prosecution and indirect mortality. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species recommends further distributional research in Namibia and more ecological studies in drier habitat more typical of the species predicted range (Sliwa 2008). It is rarely seen and recorded and hence not well studied. This species is of conservation concern because of few historical and recent records, its restricted and patchy distribution and possibly decreasing population (Sliwa 2008). Namibia’s National Museum records indicate that few recent and historical records exist and that the distribution and habitat range of the species in Namibia is based on a predicted range map. Its distribution and conservation status has not yet been studied in Namibia. This species also forms part of Namibia’s unique biodiversity and should be conserved as a flagship species of our arid south Namibia. The predicted range of the species extends large parts of Namibia, yet few locality records exist (e.g. only two confirmed museum records).

The project is run by Martina Küsters, the Principal Investigator with a B-Tech in Nature Conservation. The project seeks to work with the farming community in the central and southern parts of Namibia in order to 1) collect more fine-scale distribution on farmland; 2) educate & raise awareness for this little known wild cat species; 3) investigate perception and attitudes/ tolerance towards the cat and to establish its conservation status and threats and 4) find strongholds for its conservation and future ecological studies. The project collaborates with the Ministry of Environment & Tourism, the National Museum and the Black-footed Cat Working Group South Africa.

The project will raise awareness in order to educate the public and farming community on biodiversity and conservation of this rare and flagship species.

Activities & Methodology

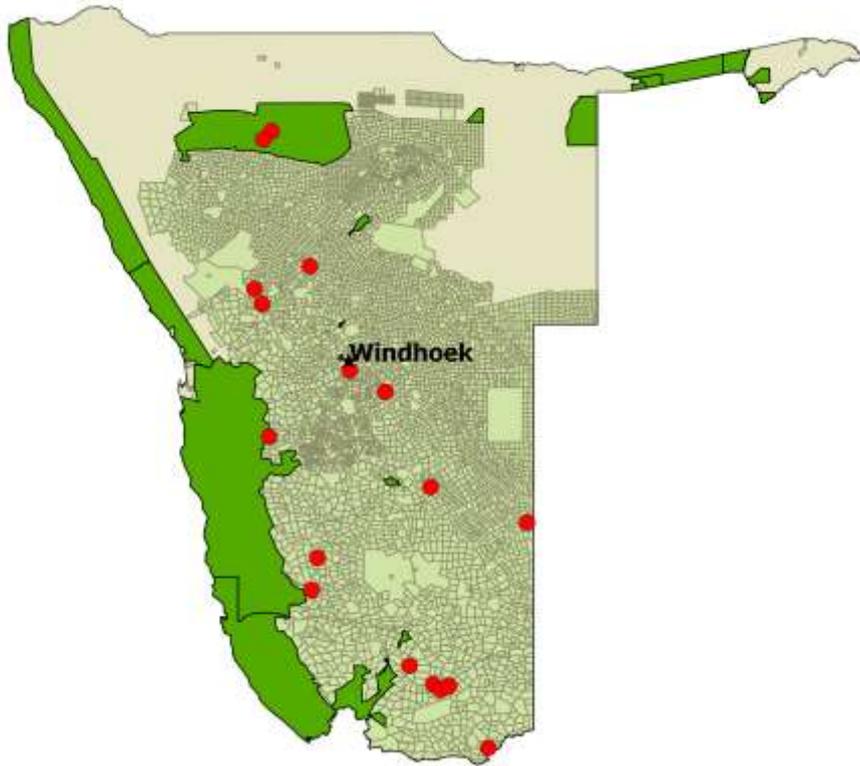
Survey email

As there are a large number of private farms covering a huge area of Namibia, the Namibian Agricultural Union has distributed a survey email to all its members with email addresses. The email was distributed to about 3000 farmers. Responses have been good, with 11 completed surveys received and many farmers have been made aware of the species and will in future be more vigilant of its possible occurrence on their farm. In addition, a survey and information email was distributed by email to at least 170 guest farms and lodges throughout Namibia.

Awareness & Education

Substantial effort to raise awareness for and to inform the Namibian farming community and general public of the black-footed cat has resulted in good responses and an interest in this rarely seen wild cat species. Posters, articles and information in newspapers and magazines and radio talks have enabled us to locate possible farms with a resident and potentially areas with a viable study population.

Records received



Posters

Informative, colourful posters (60) have been displayed throughout Namibia at Agra stores, Spar and Nampost post offices. Many good sightings and responses have been received as a result of the posters.



Media

Radio interviews & Talks

- NBC German service 'Die Frehaufsteher' 14/3/2013
- 'HitRadio' Namibia interview & website 18/3/2013
- NEWS AGM Talk 20/6/2013

Articles

- NEWSletter June 2012
- Allgemeine Zeitung 12/3/2013
- 'Barking Gecko' Newsletter 04/2013
- Republikein 'Die Boer' 5/4/2013
- Republikein 'Kollig' 23/5/2013
- Roan News May 2013



Farm Surveys

As a result of responses received from interested farmers, we were able to identify farms (n= 21) on which black-footed cats have been seen. Farms in the Omaruru, Windhoek, Gruenau and Mariental areas were visited and surveyed. Ten Tomahawk cage traps loaned from the Etosha Ecological Institute were set-up and the areas surveyed.

(1) Farm Panorama

Farm Panorama, situated 80km west of Windhoek in the Khomas Hochland was surveyed for three nights (31 July – 2 August 2013). The farm is owned by Sigi Eimbeck. The habitat and vegetation is typical of the Highland savannah, with steep mountain slopes, woody plants (*Acacia* spp.) and grass associations. Average rainfall is variable between 300-400mm/ annum.

Spotlighting

A total of 12 hours were spent travelling along farm roads spotlighting during the night time hours between 19h00 and 23h00. A total of 42 km was travelled at 5-10km/ h, while searching for the characteristic eye shine of nocturnal animals. **No black-footed cats were seen.** Animals seen included the small-spotted genet, black-backed jackal, scrub hare, porcupine, striped weasel, oryx, kudu and zebra.

After further discussions, it was established that the wild cats that have been sighted on Farm Panorama, are African wild cats and not black-footed cats. Khito, a cross-breed (African wild cat and Siamese) was taken from the farm as a kitten and now lives in Windhoek.

Top left: Farm Panorama.

Top right: Small-spotted genet seen during spotlight searching.

Bottom left: Khito, the African wild cat-Siamese cat cross-breed.

Bottom right: Sigi Eimbeck and his dogs.



I thank Mr Eimbeck for a wonderful visit at Farm Panorama, all the lekker meals we cooked in his solar oven and his kind invitation to stay at his house. ***Thanks Sigi, lovely meeting you!***





(2) Farm Ombu

Walter and Karen Schmidt, owners of Farm Ombu in the Erongo mountains near Omaruru, contacted me about a kitten they had found in the garden a few years ago. They believed that the kitten was a black-footed cat due to the coat pattern and black soled feet. The kitten stayed in

their house for a while until it became too wild and they released back into the veldt. On several occasions, Family Schmidt had sightings of wild cats on the grassy plains of their farm.

Farm Ombu was surveyed for 4 nights (7-11 July 2013), for presence of the black-footed cat. The habitat seemed optimal, open grassy plains with sparse cover of bush.

Spotlighting

A total of 14 hours during 4 nights were spent travelling along farm roads spotlighting during the night time hours between 19h00 and 23h00. A total of 40 km was travelled at a speed of 5-10km/ h, while searching for the characteristic eye shine of nocturnal animals. **No black-footed cats were seen.** Animals seen included the African wild cat (n=2), aardwolf (n=4), aardvark (n=2), bat-eared fox (n=11), small-spotted genet (n=10), black-backed jackal (n=1), springhare (n=>5), scrub hare (n=>10) and steenbok.



Left top: African wild cat.

Right top: Aardvark foraging.

Bottom: A picture of an aardwolf taken by the motion sensor camera.

Live trapping

I operated 10 Tomahawk cage traps 3 nights (7-10 July 2013) and caught three small-spotted genet. The traps were baited with pieces of Guinea fowl.

Camera traps

One camera trap (Reconyx HC600 RapidFire) was set-up and baited with pieces of Guinea fowl and feathers. The motion sensor was triggered by movements of aardwolf, scrub hare, steenbok and black-backed jackal.



Top right: Tomahawk cage folding trap used. Bottom right: A small-spotted genet caught. Left top: Nigi's, named after the species name *nigripes*, as a kitten. Middle: Nigi's as a young adult and clearly identified as an African wild cat. Left: Family Schmidt.

Family Schmidt is sincerely thanked for their hospitality and the opportunity to survey this amazingly beautiful farm !





(3) Farm Goedgevonden

Farm Goedgevonden is situated 24km east of Grünau on the D270 gravel road. Mr Mallan, owner of the farm kindly contacted me to inform me that over the years there have seen sightings of black-footed cats, however rarely. Recently, his son, Andre saw three in the southern area of the farm. It was decided to set the traps and survey the particular area at night. Unfortunately, during problem animal control, at least 3 have been accidentally shot, as a result of species misidentification.

Farm Goedgevonden was surveyed for 3 nights (11-13 September 2013), for presence of the black-footed cat. The vegetation is characteristic of the Karas dwarf shrubland within the Nama Karoo, with a dominant dwarf shrub layer and good cover of grass, with only a few *Aloe dichotoma* and *Acacia* species as tree cover. The ground is very rocky and dolerite mountain ridges and outcrops are dominant throughout. Average annual rainfall is very variable between 100-150mm.

Farm Weltevrede, also owned by Mr Mallan was also surveyed for one night (13 September 2013). Animals seen included 2 polecats, many springhare and small spotted genet. No black-footed cats were seen. The habitat seemed favourable, with grassy plains, lots of ground-roosting birds and sparse bush cover.



Spotlighting

A total of 15 hours during 3 nights were spent travelling along farm roads spotlighting during the night time hours between 18h00 and 22h00. A total of 22 km was travelled at a speed of 5-10km/ h, while searching for the characteristic eye shine of nocturnal animals. **No black-footed cats were seen.** Only ground-roosting birds and an owl were seen during spotlighting. As also seen by the lack of pictures of the motion sensor cameras, there are very few small mammal/ nocturnal animals present in the area.

Live trapping

We operated 10 traps for 3 nights (11-13 September 2013) and caught only one small-spotted genet on the 3rd night. The traps were baited with defrosted chicken giblets and cod liver oil.



Camera traps

Three camera traps (model: Reconyx HC600 HyperFire) were set-up for 3 nights (11-13 September 2013). The trigger area was baited with a combination of cod liver oil/ chicken giblets and wild cat lure or only lure. The motion sensor of only one camera was triggered by a small-spotted genet.



Left: Mr Mallan and me. Top middle: Mmh, cooking time. Top right: Our camp abluion. Bottom middle: My mom and trusted field assistant! Bottom right: Our home for 4 days.

Thank you Mr Mallan for an unforgettable visit to Farm Goedgevonden ! Was baie mooi by julle en die lekker skaap vleis !



(4) Farm Grünau No. 19 & Grünau NW 18

Mr van der Merwe, the owner of the farms, contacted me and said that they do see black-footed cats during night hunting. In the time that he can remember, they have seen at least 3 cats in a specific area on the farm. It has also happened (at least 5 cats) that black-footed cats are accidentally shot when mistaken as one of the problem animals or when the animal is too far to be properly identified.

Farm Grünau No. 19 and Grünau NW 18 are situated west of the B1, about 5km south of Grünau. The vegetation can be described as grassy shrubland and seems optimal habitat for the black-footed cats, with an abundance of ground-roosting birds (e.g. larks and sandgrouse).



Spotlighting

A total of 18 hours during 3 nights (15-17 September) were spent travelling along farm roads spotlighting between 19h00 and 00h00. A total of 124 km was travelled at a speed of 5-10km/h, while searching for the characteristic eye shine of nocturnal animals. **No black-footed cats were seen.** Animal seen included >10 bat-eared fox; many springhares and scrub hares; 2 polecats; yellow mongoose; 3 steenbok; springbok; 1 Cape fox and 1 aardwolf.



Live trapping

We operated 10 traps for 3 nights (15-17 September 2013) and caught three polecats (two on 2nd night and 1 on 3rd night). The traps were baited with defrosted chicken giblets/ cod liver oil. Wild cat lure was used as an attractant.





Camera traps

Three camera traps (model: Reconyx HC600 HyperFire) were set-up for 3 nights (15-17 September 2013). The trigger area was baited with a combination of cod liver oil/ chicken giblets and wild cat lure or only lure. The motion sensors were triggered every night by various animals (i.e. bat-eared fox; scrub hare; polecat; Cape fox and aardwolf). Unfortunately no black-footed cats were seen passing by the camera. The number and diversity of species seen confirms that the habitat may be optimal and that the ecosystem is still fairly in tact.



Farm Grünau No. 19 and Grünau NW will remain a farm of interest and possible study area. Mr van der Merwe and his son will now record all sightings of black-footed cats. This way we may be able to identify specific areas and a pattern of occurrence. I hope to visit this farm again, spend more time searching for black-footed cats.



J wish to thank Mr van der Merwe and his family for support, the luxurious camping facilities and a wonderful time on this beautiful farm!

Photos below: Our time on Farm Grünau No. 19 and Grünau NW



Planned Activities

In November I will go to the farms in South Africa where the Black-footed Cat Working Group (BFCWG) has been studying black-footed cats for more than 10 years. I will help with the capture, sampling and collaring of black-footed cats on three farms. I have been given the opportunity to track the collared cats once the capture has been completed. This will enable me to gain invaluable experience and to observe wild black-footed cats. This project plans to collaborate closely in the near future with the BFCWG, to either expand the study area into new farms in South Africa and/ or hopefully find farms in Namibia with a viable study population. For more information on the BFCWG go to www.black-footed-cat.wild-cat.org.

The project will continue to raise awareness for black-footed cats through media and radio. This rare species of wild cat should be seen as a flagship species of our unique arid southern Namibia.

I still have three farms near Mariental to survey for black-footed cats. These farms will be visited in mid October for 10 days.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Mr Eimbeck of Farm Panorama for accommodation facilities and our solar cooked food. Karen & Walter Schmidt of Farm Ombu for an enjoyable visit, all the help and support and the opportunity to set traps and survey at night. Mr Mallan and his son Andre are thanked for accommodating us and for the unforgettable field base we were lucky to use. Mr van der Merwe and his family are thanked for allowing us to visit at very short notice, for the use of the camp site and that we could do as we pleased. I really appreciate your interest in the project and thank you for contacting me! I will continue to search for black-footed cats and will surely visit these farms again.

I sincerely thank my parents, Anette and Reinhardt Küsters, for their unconditional support and guidance! Thank you! To my mom, thanks for all your help with field work and the unforgettable experiences! Family Graupe is thanked for all their help and support on the project.

I thank Wilferd Versfeldt from the Etosha Ecological Institute for loaning me the 10 cage traps for the farm visits.

I thank all the farmers and members of the public who have as a result of media coverage, contacted me to tell me their experiences and record their sightings of black-footed cats. Please keep an eye for this rarely seen cat and please report your sighting. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Funds for fieldwork were received from the **Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society** and the **Rufford Small Grant Foundation**. I thank my funders for their continued support!

Please report your sighting with the following information:

- Observer's name and contact details
- Location of sighting: Name of farm or location (GPS or nearest town)
- Date of sighting
- Number of cats
- Frequency of sighting (i.e. regular sightings on farm or in an area)
- Road and other mortalities

Please report the information to:

Martina Küsters (Researcher)
Black-footed cat Research Project Namibia
P.O. Box 11391 Klein Windhoek
Tel: (+264) 081 361 0982
Email: bfcats@mail.com or kusters.m@hotmail.com

Funded by



NEWS
NAMIBIAN
ENVIRONMENT & WILDLIFE
SOCIETY



Black-footed Cat Research Project Namibia

in collaboration with

