

Veterinary Team Assists Cheetah Rescue Effort

Duo focuses on cheetahs' reproductive biology.

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Two veterinary specialists from the University of California, Davis' School of Veterinary Medicine recently stayed in Africa to help save wild cheetahs from extinction.

For three weeks this summer, Autumn Davidson, DVM, and ultrasonographer Tomas Baker joined researchers from the Smithsonian Institution at the Cheetah Conservation Fund International Research and Education Centre in Namibia.

The reserve, one of the world's largest, is dedicated to ensuring the long-term survival of the cheetah. A small gene pool threatens the cheetah rescue effort, making the species vulnerable to disease or other environmental threats, according to the reserve.

The collaborative research team from UC Davis and the Smithsonian focused on developing a better understanding of captive female cheetahs' reproductive biology, which have proven difficult to breed.

Davidson and Baker conducted exams on the reserve's female cheetahs to help develop techniques that will improve their reproduction and further the cheetah rescue effort.

In a news release, Davidson explained the team's mission:

"We hope to identify when is the best time to harvest eggs from the female cheetahs for in vitro fertilization and eventual transplant, and to develop a better understanding of why the females' fertility declines after eight years of age," she said.