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For Immediate Release

**CHEETAH CONSERVATION FUND AND ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS
LEAD WORLD OBSERVANCE OF INTERNATIONAL CHEETAH DAY DECEMBER 4**

Dr. Laurie Marker Advises Animal Lovers on Emerging Threat Posed to Cheetahs by Illegal Pet Trade

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Nov. 30, 2018) – Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), the longest-running research, education and conservation organization dedicated to saving the wild cheetah, and the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) are leading the eighth annual observance of *International Cheetah Day* (ICD) Tuesday, Dec. 4, 2018. Cheetah activities and educational programs will be offered throughout the day for visitors at CCF's Field Research & Education Centre in Namibia and at participating AZA-member facilities across the United States.

With fewer than 7,500 cheetahs remaining in the wild (down from 100,000 a century ago), ICD reminds people of all ages that cheetah survival depends on human conservation action. Famous for being fast -- cheetahs can reach speeds of up to 70 mph in short bursts -- cheetahs are threatened by human-wildlife conflict, habitat loss, loss of prey, fragmentation, and lack of genetic diversity. These threats are being addressed by conservation programs, and progress is being made. But a disturbing practice is emerging in East Africa: the poaching and smuggling of cheetah cubs to supply the illegal pet trade in the Middle East.

Despite being outlawed in most parts of the world, keeping a cheetah as a status pet is still a popular practice in many Gulf states. The demand for cubs generated in this region is having a devastating impact on wild cheetah populations in East Africa. CCF research indicates an estimated 300 cubs are being poached each year to supply the trade, smuggled through the Horn of Africa into the Arabian Peninsula, most entering through Yemen from Somaliland.

“The facts are shocking: five out of six poached cubs will die before they can ever become pets. Once taken, a poached cub is likely to die within three weeks due to dehydration and malnutrition. If it survives to three months and becomes a pet, chances are it will not likely live longer than two years, due to improper diet, poor environment, lack of proper veterinary care and being taken from their mothers too early in life,” said Dr. Laurie Marker, Founder and Executive Director of CCF. “People put images of their pet cheetahs on social media to elicit admiration, but would animal lovers still ‘like’ those photos if they knew of the harms being done? ICD presents the ideal opportunity to shape young minds about the kind of healthy relationships we should be having with our wild animals. Cheetah cubs belong in the wild with their mothers; cheetahs are not pets. We must help humans understand before we ‘like’ a species to death.”

CCF and AZA are encouraging zoos and schools around the world to help drive interest in conservation by recognizing International Cheetah Day with cheetah-themed activities and classroom lessons. Teaching and outreach materials, including a downloadable activities packet designed for elementary-aged schoolchildren and a PowerPoint presentation with notes, can be accessed through CCF's websites, www.internationalcheetahday.org and www.cheetah.org. Cheetah photos, videos and social media links are also available for download.

“Families can visit their local AZA-accredited facility to see these popular big cats up close and learn about the species and its plight,” said Dan Ashe, President and CEO of AZA. “AZA members take very seriously their obligation to support cheetah conservation efforts, investing nearly \$2,300,000 over the past five years in conservation projects and educating thousands of zoo visitors about the threats cheetahs face, including the illegal wildlife trade. In addition, through SAFE: Saving Animals from Extinction (SAFE), AZA members are working with organizations like Cheetah Conservation Fund to enhance their mission and generate awareness for the need to save the species. AZA members are proud to support International Cheetah Day.”



Photo caption: Cheetah confiscated from the illegal pet trade and now living with CCF's caretakers at a site in Somaliland.

The two organizations offer suggestions for ways people everywhere can celebrate *International Cheetah Day*:

1. [Learn about cheetahs](#) – click [here](#) and scroll down the page to see our cheetah facts.
2. Participate in one of the ICD events listed on our site [here](#).
3. Get yourself a *Save The Cheetah* International Cheetah Day shirt from our [Bonfire fundraising campaign](#).
4. Read *Freda The Cheetah* by Picklefish Press! The Kindle version is [free to download](#) on Amazon.
5. Download the [Conservation Passport](#). When you finish the activities, print out your very

own *Certificate of Cheetah Achievement*!

6. Educators can get their classes (or school) involved by visiting [International Cheetah Day - Classroom Style!](#) and using one or more of the provided NGSS aligned STEM activities with their classes on December 4th
7. Join the conversation on Twitter by using hashtags #Loud4Cheetahs, #SaveTheCheetah, & #IntlCheetahDay. Use our Tweet Sheet to send tweets simply and easily. Just log in to your Twitter account and then open the [Tweet Sheet](#). Click the TWEET button to instantly post to your Twitter page.
8. [Share a cheetah image](#) on your social media profile for the day, week or month.
9. Share this special International Cheetah Day video message from *Born to Explore* TV host [Richard Wiese](#).
10. Consider visiting an AZA-accredited zoo on December 4th to see these big cats up close or donate to conservation organizations working in research facilities around the world and in the field to help save the cheetah. They need YOUR help, so please consider visiting an AZA-accredited zoo or donating to one of the organizations that is making a difference TODAY!

About International Cheetah Day

Dr. Marker is an internationally recognized expert on the cheetah. She designated Dec. 4 as International Cheetah Day in remembrance of Khayam, a cheetah she raised from a cub at Wildlife Safari in Winston, Oregon. Dr. Marker brought Khayam to Namibia to determine if captive-born cheetahs could be taught to hunt. Their efforts were successful and eventually the pair returned to Oregon. But during this trip, Dr. Marker witnessed African farmers removing wild cheetahs from the landscape as a perceived threat. In 1990, she launched CCF and relocated to the newly-formed nation to mitigate the problem of farmer-cheetah conflict. Because of her interactions with Khayam, Dr. Marker dedicated her life to becoming the cheetah's champion, and she chose Khayam's birthday for this important honor.

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Cheetah Conservation Fund

Founded in Namibia in 1990, Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) is the global leader in research and conservation of cheetahs. CCF is dedicated to saving the cheetah in the wild. CCF's mission is to be the internationally recognized center of excellence in the conservation of cheetahs and their ecosystems. CCF will work with all stakeholders to develop best practices in research, education, and land use to benefit all species, including people. CCF is an international non-profit organization headquartered in Namibia, with operations in the United States, Canada, Australia, Italy, Belgium and the United Kingdom, and partner organizations in several other nations. For more information, visit www.cheetah.org.

Association of Zoos & Aquariums

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, animal welfare, education, science, and recreation. AZA is the accrediting body for the top zoos and aquariums in the United States and eight other countries. Look for the AZA accreditation logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. Members of AZA are leaders in saving species and your link to helping animals all over the world. To learn more, visit

www.aza.org.

CCF's Conservation Passport, Activity Packet, cheetah photos, videos and social media links can be downloaded for free at www.cheetah.org/international-cheetah-day/ or www.internationalcheetahday.com

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