The Black-footed Cat Research Project, Namibia was 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).

Below is an update on research activities undertaken and preliminary results obtained to date.

**RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

**Farm surveys**

A total of 6 farms were visited and surveyed on which black-footed cats have been seen. Farm Panorama, Farm Ombu, Farm Goedgevonden, Farm Grünau NO no. 19
& NW no.18, Farm Sonop and Farm Aandblom were visited during July to October 2013. Collectively a total distance of 457km was travelled and a total of 88.5 hours were spent spotlighting on farm roads. No black-footed cats were seen.

Live trapping
195 total trap nights were operated, yet no black-footed cats were caught. Trapped animals included polecats, small-spotted genets, Cape fox and yellow mongoose. The traps were checked in the first two hours after sunrise and animals released.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Records received
We were able to record 30 reliable sighting records of black-footed cats in Namibia. These records represent the most recent more fine-scale distribution data in Namibia (see map). However during farm surveys (n=6), no black-footed cats were seen or trapped. Through consultation with farmers, nine farms in southern Namibia have been identified as potential study sites for future research on the distribution, population density and ecological factors determining abundance and fecundity of the species. The only physical evidence (except for hearsay of sightings and trapping) was received by a farmer in Aranos of a photo taken of a black-footed trapped in a cage trap in 2012 (see photo by Dana Joubert).

Conservation status
Through farm visits and communication with farmers, it seems the cat is unusually rare, even though through problem animal control on farms most of the cat’s enemies persist at low densities. Factors for this may include 1) only a few cats being present on the farms, 2) that they roam over several farms and move over large areas, 3) that specific threats, not yet known, may keep population numbers low and 4) that habitat limitations/alteration may limit population density. Unfortunately, black-footed cats are sometimes accidently shot during problem animal control, which could potentially keep population numbers low. However, most farmers do not directly target the black-footed cat does not pose a threat to their livestock and tolerate them on their farms.

Important Outcomes
- Through extensive media and consultation, the farming community and wider general public has become more aware of the black-footed cat and its rare and restricted distribution.
- I have identified study areas in which black-footed cats are known to occur and on which future research activities can continue.
- It is hoped that in future farmers will be more cautious of shooting non target animals, especially the farms that were visited in order to protect the population present.
- Collaborate with the Ministry of Environment & Tourism to enhance the protection and conservation of this possibly threatened small wild cat species.
- Build a partnership with the Black-footed Cat Working Group to ensure a better regional understanding of distribution and conservation threats of this species.

Many thanks to my project funders, the Namibian Environment & Wildlife Society and the Rufford Small Grants Foundation. Should you have information or would like to record your sighting of a black-footed cat seen in Namibia, please forward your info to:
Martina Küsters (Project leader); P.O. Box 11391; Klein Windhoek; Windhoek; Tel: (+264) 081 361 0982 · Email: bfcat@mail.com

Please report sightings · Your record will help the species!
Top - Martina Küsters setting traps; Middle - black-footed cat caught in box trap (© Dana Joubert) & Bottom - map indicating known sightings of black-footed cat in Namibia.
The following developments have come to the attention of NEWS and should members be interested in registering as interested and affected parties or require more information, please contact the Environmental Practitioners directly:

1) **Walvis Bay harbour developments, Walvis Bay**
   Geo Pollution Technologies
   Mr Pierre Botha;
   wscc@namibnet.com

2) **Mining Licence No 57 & Mining Claims No’s 66129 to 66132, Otjo & Karibib areas**
   SLR Environmental Consulting
   Mr Werner Petrick;
   wpetrick@slrconsulting.com

3) **EPL’s 4323, 4324 (Maltahöhe), 4742 (Brakwater), 4688 (Witvlei), 5057 (Windhoek) & 5058 (Omaruru) areas**
   Risk Based Solutions
   Ms Charlotte Visser,
   cvisser@rbs.com.na

4) **Elisenheim No. 680 Urban Developments, Windhoek**
   LM Environmental Consulting
   Dr Lima Maartens, lima@iway.na

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**Roll of Honour**

We gratefully acknowledge the support of our corporate members, which allows us to pursue our mission to conserve the natural environment of Namibia and to promote appropriate protection, wise and sustainable use of natural resources and sustainable development.

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* Ongava Tented Camp
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