



## Makulu-Makete Captive Release Project

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Since 2007 De Wildt has undertaken a project to release captive bred cheetah into the wild. Though this project has been a vision for several years it was in 2008 that it has become a reality. There were three candidate cheetahs for the captive release project; one female and two males. Each cheetah was born and raised in captivity at De Wildt Wildlife Breeding Centre but presently reside on Makulu Makete Wildlife Reserve in Limpopo, their new home. The female was placed alone in a boma adjacent to the males who shared a boma. Training the cheetahs in the boma was the most fundamental aspect of the project. The cheetahs were fed in a way that allowed them to become accustomed to life in the wild. This meant becoming accustomed to venison as they were fed either horse meat or IAMS® cat pellets. This required them to eat venison; eat the skin, around the bones and have several days without food to mimic days in the veld when they do not catch food. The primary researchers spent time with the cheetahs so that all could be accustomed and comfortable with each others presence. The desire to chase fast moving objects such as motor bikes and quad bikes is innate in captive cheetah. This behaviour has been eliminated as a result of extensive boma training. All cheetahs were released in 2008. The ability to hunt was not doubted. All cheetahs hunted a variety of game successfully including impala, warthog, bushbuck and gemsbok. However when working with wildlife there are complications. Several hunting accidents occurred, one cheetah contracted Cryptococcus and two died (Plausible snake bite and a ruptured stomach ulcer). There are currently three cheetahs in this project, female Phoenix and two males May-Day and Bones.

