

Dr. Laurie Marker
Founder and Executive Director

Dr. Laurie Marker is a research scientist and conservation biologist recognized as one of the world's leading experts on the cheetah. As Founder and Executive Director of Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), Dr. Marker has pioneered research, established conservation models and created cooperative alliances on behalf of the cheetah that had never before existed. Under her leadership, CCF has grown into a world-class cheetah research, education and conservation institution near Otjiwarongo, Namibia, situated on a 100,000 acre integrated wildlife and livestock private reserve. In July of 2015, Dr. Marker will celebrate her 25th anniversary with CCF, the longest-running cheetah conservation program in the world.

Dr. Marker began working with cheetahs at Oregon's Wildlife Safari (1974-1988), where she developed the most successful captive cheetah-breeding program in North America and initiated a first-of-its-kind research project in cheetah re-wilding in Namibia in 1977. She hypothesized that a captive-born cub could be taught to hunt, and tested this theory with Khayam, a young cheetah she had raised from birth. Dr. Marker did teach Khayam to hunt, but more importantly found that livestock farmers in Namibia were killing hundreds of cheetahs per year as a perceived threat to their livestock. This set the stage for her career-long research into cheetah ecology, biology and conservation strategies to mitigate this conflict.

Dr. Marker traveled back and forth from the U.S. for the next 13 years, gathering data from cheetah range countries and forming a network to begin cheetah conservation strategies. Already a species in peril because of shrinking habitat and lack of genetic diversity, as discovered during Marker's early genetic research, livestock farmers' actions were driving the cheetah even closer toward extinction and at an accelerated pace. In 1990, determined to end the conflict, Dr. Marker moved to Namibia and drove door-to-door in her rusted-out Range Rover to meet with farmers. These interactions inspired Dr. Marker to develop highly effective, non-lethal predator control methods that not only benefitted the cheetah in Namibia, but also helped mitigate human-wildlife conflict involving large carnivore species in other countries around the globe. In mitigating this conflict, Dr. Marker also stabilized the wild cheetah population in Namibia and helped develop cheetah conservation programs in several other African countries and in Iran, where the last Asiatic cheetahs are found.

After more than a decade of transnational commuting, Dr. Marker made the decision to leave her post as Executive Director of the Center for New Opportunities in Animal Health Sciences at the Smithsonian Institution (NOAHS, 1988-1991), relocate to Namibia, and dedicate her life to the long-term sustainability of the species. Initially rebuffed by Namibians fearing change, her rigorous scientific research, creative conservation programs, and unique holistic philosophy that considers the livelihoods of people sharing the cheetah's habitat have gained her the respect and trust of an entire nation. The vital information she has assembled on cheetah health, reproduction, ecology, and genetics – taken along with the more than 900 cheetahs she has worked on and the 2,500-plus blood and tissue samples she has collected in the field over the past 25 years – has proven invaluable in the management of both wild and captive cheetah populations everywhere.

Dr. Marker earned her DPhil in Zoology from the University of Oxford in the UK. She has published more than 65 scientific papers in peer-reviewed journals and is a regular contributor to *The Huffington Post*. In 2014, she was named an A.D. White Professor-at-Large with Cornell University. Dr. Marker has been awarded the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement (2010), The Tech Museum of Innovation's Intel Environmental Prize (2008), and is a two-time finalist for the prestigious Indianapolis Prize. She was named a Hero for the Planet by *TIME Magazine* and has been featured in *Smithsonian*, *National Geographic*, *Discover* and *The New York Times*, as well as on numerous television shows, including "The Tonight Show," "Good Morning America" and "Today."