

# KRUGER 2 CANYON NEWS



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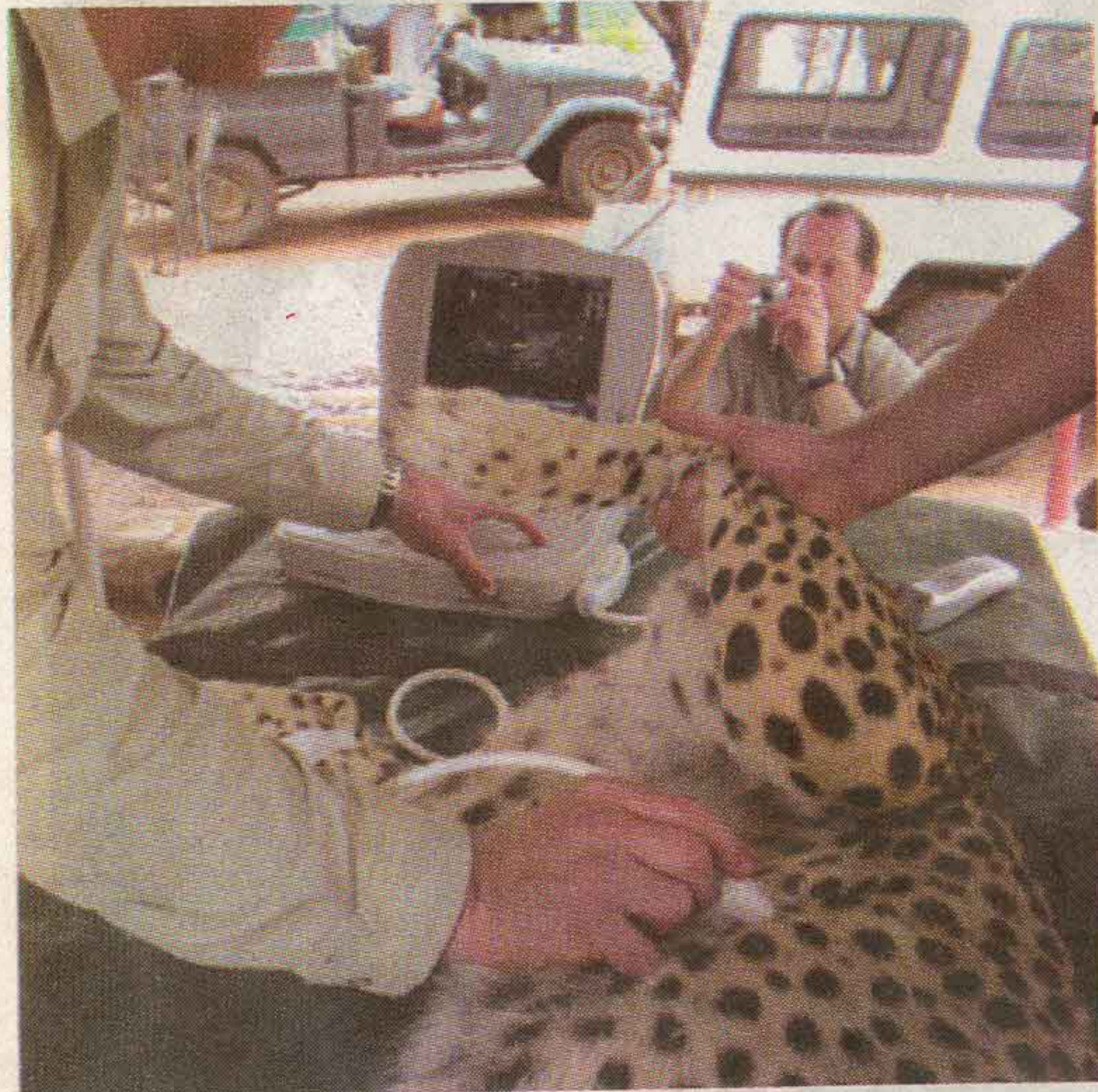
## Break-through that may help improve genetic viability



ARTICLES

# A game breeding breakthrough that may help improve genetic viability

*Continued from page 1.....*



**Dr Jean-Yves Routier scanning a female cheetah.**

**HOEDSPRUIT** - "Now I am in South Africa and I try to bring what we do not have here, to help wildlife. Technology has killed wildlife, now technology can help wildlife," says Michel. "The cheetah are a problem, last year the official number culled or hunted in South Africa was 150, where there are only 170 existing in the Kruger Park. This is ridiculous! Cubs often do not survive longer than 18 months, and the breeding habits and requirements of the female cheetah make breeding very difficult. To add to this, the cheetah gene pool is very poor and 40 to 60 percent of males are sterile." explains Michel. "I believe that unless something is done, cheetah will disappear in the next 10 years."

Michel began by registering a non-profit company and started a search for the right people to assist him. "I found a vet from Paris, Dr Routier - he is an extraordinary surgeon, Professor Fontbonne - a specialist in breeding carnivores, Dr Quesney - for DNA, the best on genetics in Europe. The project has been going for 1 year. In March four vets came and

we did practical research at Tshukudu, Moholoholo, the Air Force Base Hoedspruit and Thornybush. Dr Peter Rogers has also



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with equipment, but also with his wealth of knowledge in the field of working with wildlife, and especially the cheetahs."

The process involves a small implant, two millimetres in size that is inserted under the cheetah's skin. This stimulates pre-ovulation. After two days the animal is scanned on site with a portable Echo graph that is brand new on the market, to check if the ovary is ready and that the follicle has divided. The cheetah is then injected with a hormone that causes ovulation within 24-hours. Suitable male cheetah sperm will then be surgically inserted into the female for fertilisation to take place. An S-bend in the uterus of a cheetah makes it anatomically impossible to artificially inseminate a cheetah other than surgically. It is imperative that male sperm with the right DNA and fertility is found and used to improve the gene pools of the cheetah, in order to strengthen the species as a whole.

"We would like to have more animals involved to make it a better research project," says Michel. Landowners and who have cheetah, wishing to join the research program are welcome to contact Michel. "If we succeed to breed cheetah, we will put up strict contracts with those involved. The cheetahs may not be hunted or sold for money. We only want to strengthen the chances of survival of the species, and we will only breed cheetah if we have suitable place for them to go."

Kruger2Canyon quizzed Dr Rogers on his views regarding this project:

"It's a fantastic idea and if it works it can do a lot of good, but it's still very much in the embryonic stage," said Dr Rogers. "The Americans are very advanced in this field, and have been trying for a while now to surgically inseminate cheetah and so far they have only had one success and managed to produce a single cub."

According to Dr Rogers, cheetahs do not have a very diverse gene pool, and they suffer from in-breeding traits due to a genetic bottleneck that happened to the species thousands of years ago. All cheetahs are descendant from a small nuclear gene pool resulting in cheetah



**Above: Dr Routier and Dr Peter Rogers working together on a cheetah at Moholoholo.**

**Below: Dr Routier and Michel Laforet with a cheetah - still under sedation - at Tshukudu.**



today being relatively inbred. This results in lower fertility, lower fecundity (fewer babies born) and also a poor mothering ability.

Michele Laforet - CESRAM - P.O. Box 111 - Hoedspruit - 1380.



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SA1227 10H45  
SA1221 11H35

**Hoedspruit - Johannesburg**

SA1228 12H25  
SA1222 13H15

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**Monday - Friday**

11H35  
12H45

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13H20  
14H30

**Tue, Thur, Sat**

13H05

**Tue, Thur, Sat**

16H20

**Saturday**

11H35  
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**Saturday**

13H20  
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**Sunday**

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