

Amputation of the front leg of a caracal (*Caracal caracal schmitzi*) following trauma caused by a gin-trap



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Introduction

The caracal *Caracal caracal* (Fig. 1) is widespread throughout Africa, the Middle East, and Asia (Fig. 2). While abundant in sub-Saharan Africa, populations in Asian range states are listed under CITES Appendix I and the Arabian population (*Caracal caracal schmitzi*) is Vulnerable in Oman and the United Arab Emirates. The caracal is a protected species in much of the Middle East and North Africa. Habitat degradation and hunting are the main threats to these populations. We describe the case of a wild caracal caught and injured in a gin-trap hunting device in the UAE.



Figure 1. Arabian caracal (*Caracal caracal schmitzi*) at the BCEAW.

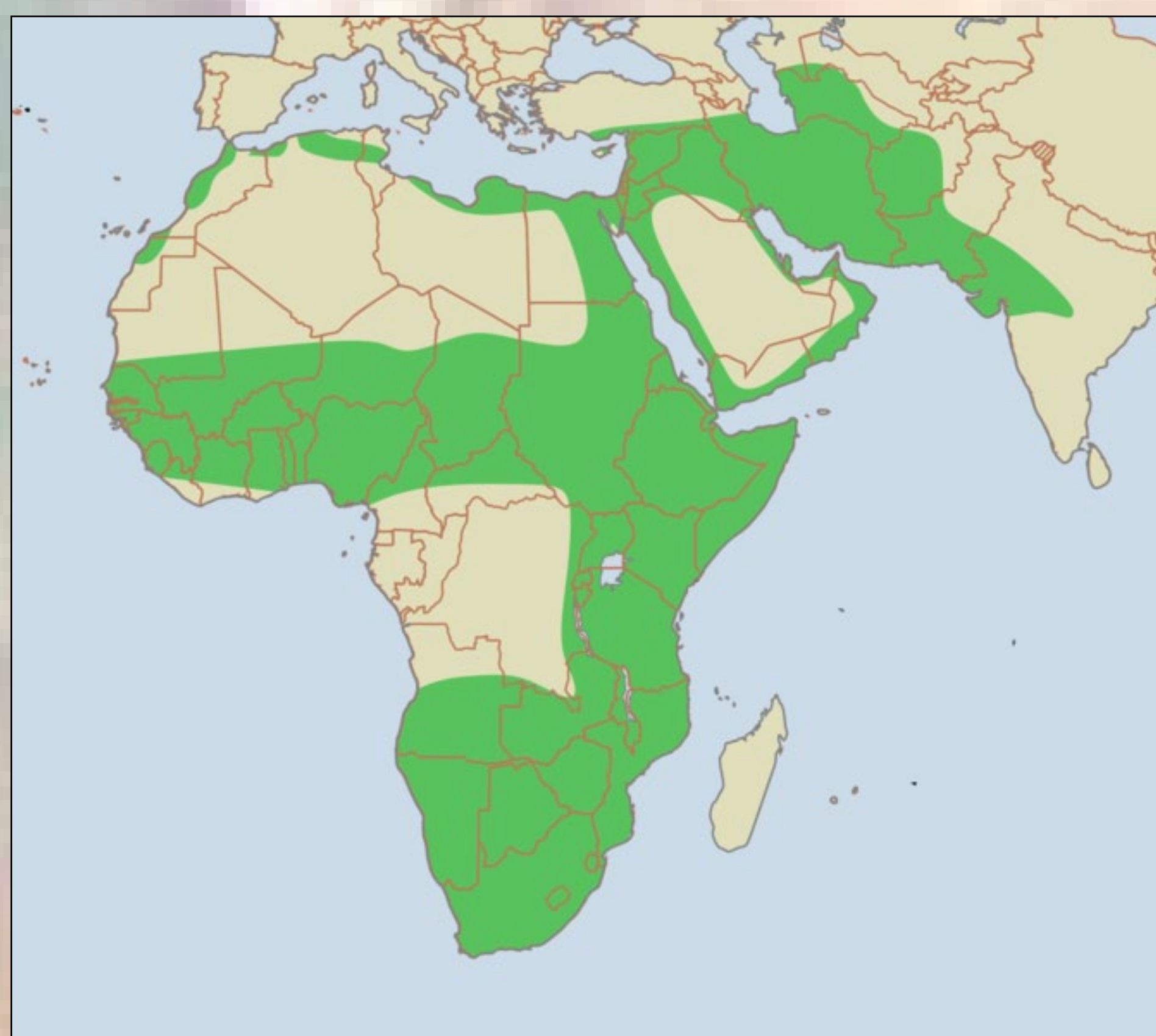


Figure 2. Geographic distribution of the caracal (*Caracal caracal*) (Hurley, G. www.wotcat.com. Downloaded 16 December 2009).

Case

A wild-caught 8.5-kg adult male Arabian caracal was delivered to the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife (BCEAW). On presentation, the caracal was alert and in fair body condition. He was sedated with injectable drugs administered by blowpipe and maintained with gas anaesthesia. The tendons of the paw were exposed and necrotised, and there was a heavy maggot infestation (Fig. 3). The trauma was consistent with injuries inflicted by a gin-trap or leg-holding trap (Fig. 4). The necrosis suggested the wound was sustained several days prior. Following thorough cleaning and removal of maggots, the leg was bandaged. One toe was missing from the right foot, possibly the result of a previous trapping injury.



Figure 3. Trauma and extensive necrosis of the left forepaw.



Figure 4. Gin-trap or leg-holding trap.

Laboratory tests indicated dehydration, stress, acute inflammation, and tissue necrosis. Viral testing was negative for FeLV, FIV, and FIP.

The caracal was sedated by blowpipe every other day for cleaning of the wound and bandage change. He was given anti-inflammatory drugs, painkillers, and antibiotics.

Attempts were made to save as much of the leg as possible, but severe necrosis of the wound and stress made amputation necessary. Because caracal males use their forelimbs to grasp the female during copulation, it was thought best to preserve as much of the limb as possible in order to keep this caracal as a potential breeding animal. Two weeks after arrival, the lower third of the forearm was amputated, instead of at the elbow or shoulder as is usually done in domestic animals (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Partial amputation of the left forelimb.

The caracal recovered well from anaesthesia and was moved to an outdoor enclosure one day post-operation. The non-stick dressing came off the surgical site two days post-operation and the caracal seemed well-adapted to walking. There was no discharge or swelling and the incision remained closed (Fig. 6). There was evidence of minor bleeding on two occasions post-operation.

Sharp and rough logs were subsequently removed from his enclosure. To date, this caracal has adapted well to amputation although it will preclude his return to the wild. He is kept as a breeding male at the BCEAW.



Figure 6. The caracal one month post-surgery.

Discussion

This animal suffered significant trauma inflicted by a trap, and lack of treatment led to serious infection. Without veterinary care, it is unlikely this animal would have survived. Despite the sad fact that this animal is lost to the wild population, it is valuable for the further study of the Arabian caracal and for the captive management of the species.

Unfortunately, its capture is representative of the current threats to Arabian wildlife. Human interference and killing, followed by overgrazing and a decrease in prey are cited as the primary threats to the caracal in Arabia. A significant portion of animals seen by the BCEAW veterinary department are victims of poaching. This jeopardizes the native ecosystem and the future of species in this region and is of highest priority for the conservation of indigenous Arabian wildlife.

Acknowledgement

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Works Cited

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