

CATS

OF AFRICA

behaviour, ecology and conservation

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Gerald Hinde

TEXT BY
Luke Hunter

For my lovely wife Pam and our children, Wayne, Kevin, Sharon, Gavin and Ricky, with love.
In memory of a wonderful father, Pat, and with love to my mother May and brother Ron.

*'The world and all that is in it belongs to the Lord;
The earth and all who live on it are His.'* Psalm 24:1

GERALD HINDE

For my parents, Lois and Tim.

LUKE HUNTER



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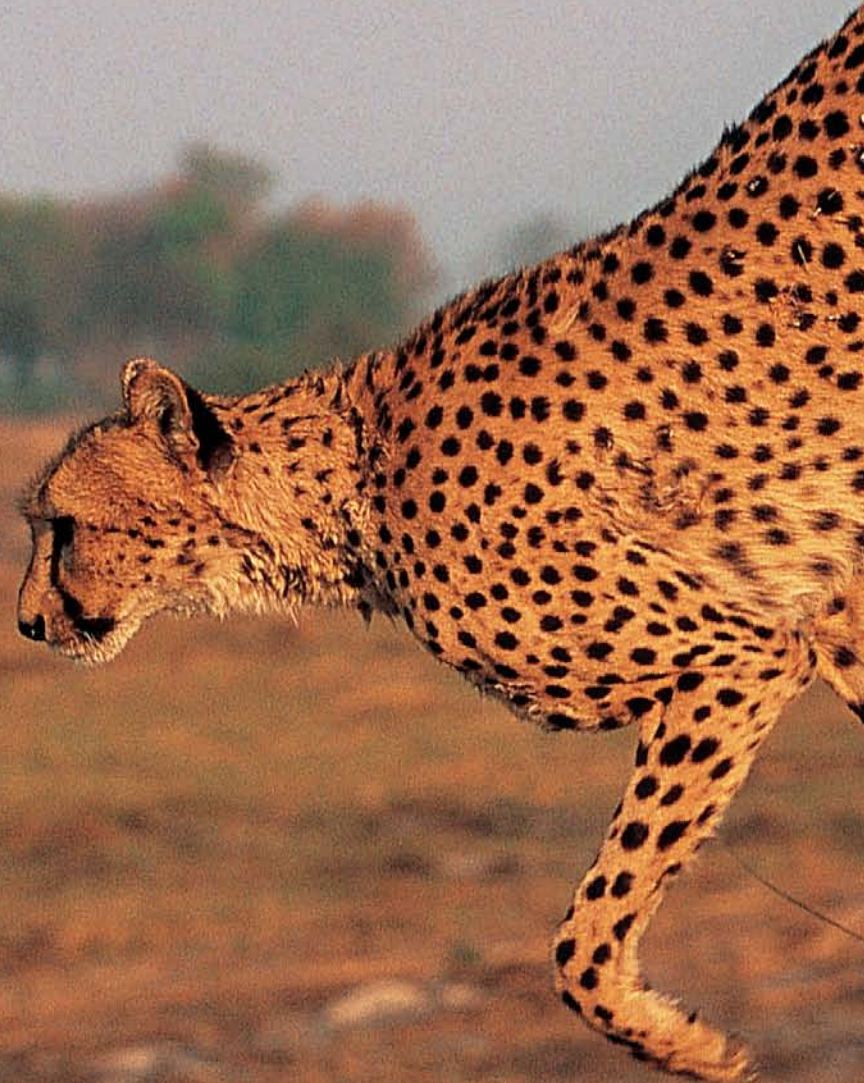
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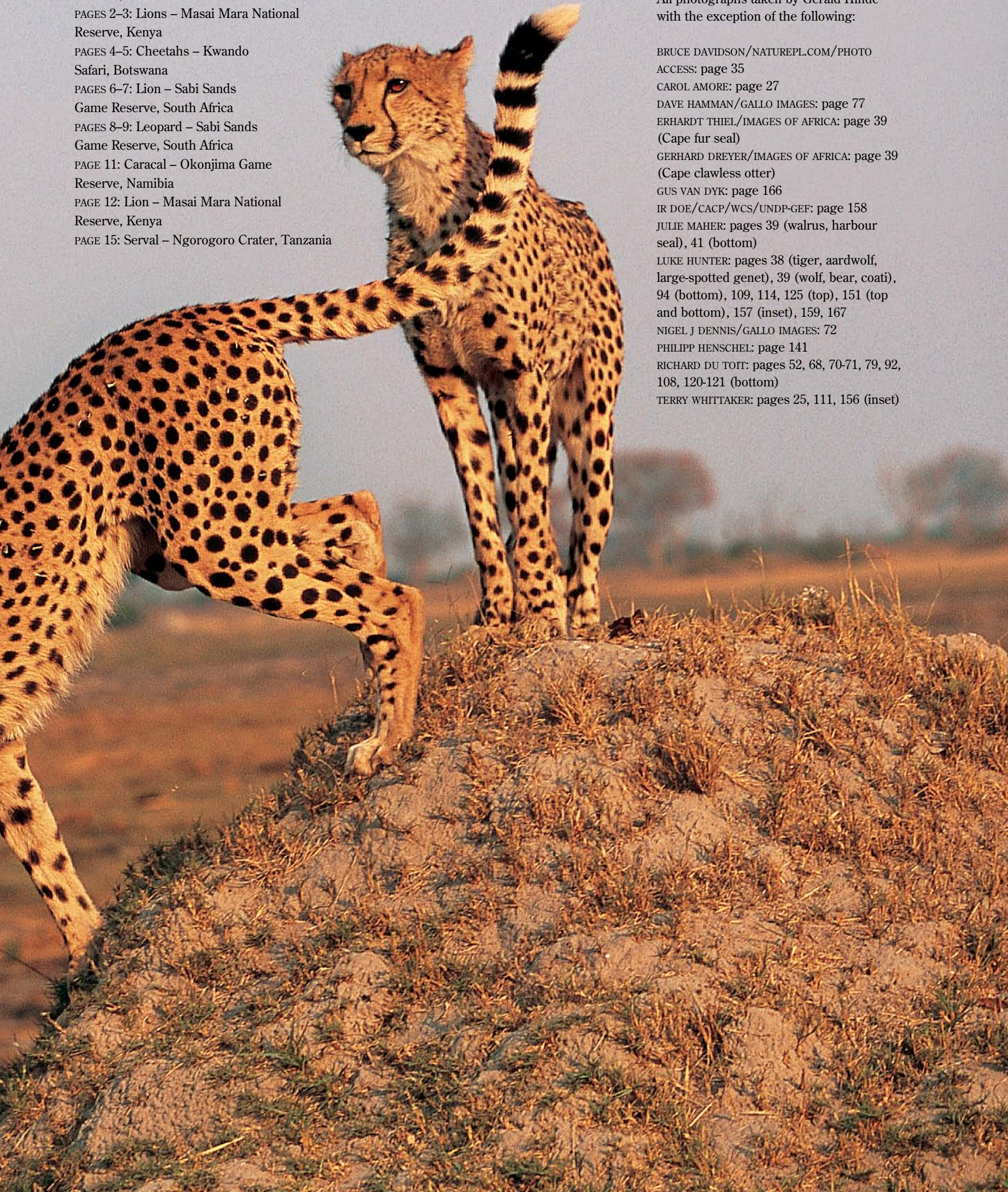


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PHOTOGRAPHER'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

'There is something about safari life that makes you forget all your sorrows ... One feels really free when one can go in whatever direction one pleases over the plains, to get to the rivers and pitch one's camp.'

KAREN BLIXEN FROM *OUT OF AFRICA*

Were it not for the assistance of numerous people and organisations, this rather daunting project would not have been possible. Cats have always been my favourites and I enjoyed being constantly in their presence in some of the best viewing venues in Africa. I cannot offer enough praise about the quality of the places and the expertise and friendliness of the people wherever I went. I extend my thanks to them all, and my admiration for their contribution to conservation in Africa.

I am asked on a regular basis for recommendations as to the best places for game viewing. They are too numerous for me to mention them all, but below is a selection. Details of the destinations are brief and I recommend that readers check the web sites for more information.

I hesitate to mention names of people for fear of leaving anyone out. This book is not just the product of the immediate team, but the result of input and assistance from a wide range of people. A special thank you to all the staff at the places that I have been privileged enough to visit. Africa truly offers the best when it comes to destinations and friendly, efficient people in the tourism industry.

The staff at Johannesburg head office and at all the lodges of Conservation Corporation have always been friendly and professional and have contributed greatly towards this book. From my first contact with Yvonne and Peter Short, my subsequent meeting with Shayne Richardson and my numerous dealings with Suzanne Henderson, everyone was really wonderful. Along the way, Gavin Lautenbach (a senior ranger) helped initially at Phinda and then at Londolozi and whenever he could at other destinations. I owe him a special thank you for all his help and friendship. Conservation Corporation has numerous captivating destinations throughout Southern Africa and Zanzibar.

In Kenya and Tanzania the management and staff at the lodges were great, and the area and game viewing was astounding. This is a photographer's paradise and the annual migration adds another dimension to the drama on show. I especially enjoyed the cheetah viewing, with lions coming a close second. The open plains make photography a pleasure, and the colours and landscapes are captivating.

The Ngorongoro Crater Lodge offers views that are immensely wide and panoramic; the experience was quite surreal. The lion viewing on the crater floor was exceptional with good cheetah viewing, too. The crater floor met all my expectations, particularly with regard to game viewing. 'I stood on the edge of the world and saw my heart soar into its ancient sky.'

Cat viewing and photography is excellent at Londolozi Game Reserve in South Africa. In the early 1980s this was my first experience of a private game reserve. It remains one of the best places to see leopards and the other big cats.

Phinda Game Reserve is situated in lush northern KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The area comprises seven distinct habitats and an abundance of wildlife, including the big five. Cheetah viewing here is exceptional.

Ngala Game Reserve in South Africa hosts exclusive game lodges and walking safaris, and during my stays I had very good lion and leopard viewing, which offered excellent photographic opportunities.

Desert and Delta offered good photographic opportunities and friendly, efficient staff. A special thank you to Helga Hagner and Jonathan Gibson.

Overlooking the Chobe River in Northern Botswana, the Chobe Game Lodge is the only lodge situated within the Chobe Game Reserve in the Kasane area. The 48-room lodge offers luxury and comfort and great game viewing. Lions are well represented and very visible and the elephant viewing is excellent in the dry winter months. Game viewing is conducted on both land and water.

Camp Moremi is situated on the beautiful Xakanaxa Lagoon in the eastern Okavango Delta within the Moremi Game Reserve. The area supports abundant cats, including leopards, which are very visible and relaxed, and which make for good photography.

The Kwando Safari experience in Botswana is truly unforgettable and offers very good predator viewing – lion, leopard and wild dogs are well represented. The camps are intimate, private and exclusive. My times there were filled with a spirit of adventure and it was a uniquely African experience.





Hoedspruit Cheetah Project in South Africa made my job much easier with regard to the smaller cats such as caracal, serval, black-footed cat and African wildcat. The centre has established itself as one of the leading research and breeding facilities for endangered species in South Africa. A visit to this centre is highly recommended.

The Kruger National Park is probably one of the best known wildlife locations in the world today, where a great diversity of wildlife can be experienced. It was here that my interest in wildlife started when I was a small child, and I still rate it as a good wildlife destination and value for money. Malalane Lodge is situated on the southern border of the Park and this superb resort offers the thrill of exploring the African bushveld, combined with first-class luxury.

The luxurious Mala Mala Game Reserve in South Africa supports a great diversity of mammal species and is situated adjacent to the Kruger National Park. The reserve straddles the perennial Sand River and includes a variety of habitats that are home to a corresponding range of predators and prey. I owe much of my success in the wildlife photographic field to the opportunities offered to me by Mike and Norma Rattray, for which I am truly grateful.

Mokuti Lodge in Namibia, on the eastern border of Etosha National Park, offers superb accommodation. The eastern section of Etosha is my preferred location and offers exceptional game viewing in the dry months. In the mornings I drive from waterhole to waterhole to find lions either hunting or at play. The afternoons offer good elephant viewing.

I particularly want to thank Nick Seewer for allowing me the privilege of staying at the delightful Orient-Express destinations in Botswana. Also Karl Parkinson and Sandy Fowler for friendly and efficient service.

Step out of your luxury tent at the Khwai River Lodge in Botswana and gaze onto hippo, elephant and abundant wildlife. Bordering the Moremi Game Reserve, this area became the focus of my life for a full year when I produced a book called *Timeless Wilderness*, and developed a special affection for the area and its cat populations.

In a river channel parched by two decades of drought lies the Savute Elephant Camp. The area has one of the largest concentrations of resident elephant and offers good lion viewing. Twice a year (usually May and November) the zebra migration passes through Savute and it's a time of plenty for the predators. During the late 1980s and early 1990s I studied a pride of lions here, and made a documentary about them.

Okanjima Game Reserve lies nestled in the unspoilt beauty of the Omboroko Mountains in Namibia. Not only a luxury lodge, it is also home to the AfriCat Foundation, a non-profit

organisation committed to long-term conservation of Namibia's large carnivores – especially cheetah and leopard. These cats are almost always seen and are relaxed, offering excellent photographic opportunities.

The Pilanesberg Game Reserve in South Africa is two and a half hours from Johannesburg by road, with the added attraction of Sun City nearby. Lions, cheetahs and rhinos (black and white) can be seen.

Wilderness Safaris offer a wide range of lodges in South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Seychelles. They provide wonderful African safaris with great game viewing in unspoiled, natural habitats. I especially want to thank Colin Bell and Mike Myers for their personal help and friendliness during this project.

Hidden from the world and situated on Chief's Island within the Moremi Game Reserve is the secret paradise of Mombo Camp. Large concentrations of wildlife occur in the area and all the big cats are common. Each luxury tented room is raised off the ground, with breathtaking views over the plains.

Duba Plains is one of Okavango Delta's remote camps and is located in a private reserve famous for high concentrations of lions and huge herds of buffalo. A truly beautiful area with exceptionally good accommodation and game viewing.

The Waterberg, situated in the far north of South Africa, is really magnificent and one of the younger developing 'big five' areas. During my travels here, I photographed cats at Welgevonden, Entabeni and Shambala game reserves, all wonderful locations.

Quinton and Nicole Martins of the Cape Leopard Trust are doing a sterling job with the research and conservation of leopards in the Cape. I admire them for their tireless contribution to conservation.

Linda Tucker and Jason Turner are dedicated to the reintroduction of white lions to free-roaming conditions; it certainly is a landmark in conservation history. We will be watching anxiously for the day that Marah and her cubs are free and wild.

Thank you to Mike Bester at Bester's Zoo in Pretoria, South Africa for allowing me to photograph the sand cats.

Throughout my years of dealing with Struik Publishers I have met some wonderfully talented people, and I wish to thank Steve Connolly, Pippa Parker, Janice Evans and Helen de Villiers in Cape Town, and Deone Marsh and Janet Larsen in Johannesburg, for all their time, effort and friendship.

A special thanks to Richard du Toit, William Taylor, Royston Knowles, Brian Richards and Henk Maree for friendship and help along the way.

GERALD HINDE
Johannesburg, 2005

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I am very grateful to the colleagues and friends who donated the use of their photographs to fill some critical gaps, in particular, thanks to Carol Amore, Christian Sperka and Gus van Dyk. I am very grateful to Philipp Henschel (WCS) for the use of his unique golden cat photograph, and to Eve Gracie of Black Eagle Publications for ensuring it reached Cape Town. I am indebted to the Islamic Republic of Iran's Department of Environment and the CACP secretariat, particularly Dr Hadi Soleimanpour and Hooshang Ziaie, for permission to use the camera-trap image of the Asiatic cheetah in Iran.

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LUKE HUNTER
New York, 2005



INTRODUCTION

The house cat is one of the most successful mammals on Earth. Absent only from a few offshore islands and Antarctica, its global population now numbers in the billions; in some countries, there are more cats than people. Its success embodies the adaptability, tenacity and, prior to modern human influence, the evolutionary triumph of the cat family. Excluding the domestic cat, felids are found on all continents except Antarctica and Australia. Wild cats also occur on any large island with a land bridge to the mainland in their recent geological past. The only large land masses that wild cats have never colonised have been separated from a natural source of cats for millions of years, among them Madagascar, Irian Jaya-Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Iceland. Others such as Ireland and the major islands of Japan had cats in recent prehistory but no longer have them today.

The centre of felid evolution (see Chapter 1) and still the richest place on Earth for the family is Eurasia. Twenty species* of cats occur in Asia, with two extending their distribution into Western Europe. A twenty-first species, the critically endangered Iberian lynx, now numbering fewer than 200 adults, is found only in Spain and perhaps Portugal. North America has the fewest cats with five resident species, though jaguars occurred there up until the mid-1900s, and recent photographs from the south-west United States might represent incipient recolonisation from northern Mexico. That leaves Latin America and Africa which share the same number of cats (though no species in common) at 10.

Wherever they occur, wild cats are notoriously secretive. Except for a handful of sites in Asia where tigers, leopards and Asiatic lions tolerate the presence of wildlife-watching tourists, Africa is the only place on Earth where sightings of wild cats are a reliable occurrence. In the protected areas of East and southern Africa's savanna woodlands, it is possible to see more species of felids in a week than a lifetime of searching will produce in the forests of Asia or tropical America. Millions of people are drawn to Africa every year to see the wild cats. Most are virtually guaranteed to see lions and many will enjoy exceptional views of cheetahs and leopards.

However, few travellers realise that, alongside the big three, Africa is home to a further seven species of cats. Rarely observed and little understood, most have never been the focus of dedicated scientific research. Of these seven, three are marginally better known; the caracal, widespread and resilient but exposed to intense persecution from farmers and herders; the serval, one of three cat species endemic to Africa; and the African wildcat, progenitor of the house cat and now threatened by hybridisation with its domestic descendant.

Few people have seen the remaining four. Restricted to the arid areas of southern Africa, and the smallest cat on the continent, the black-footed cat would be a complete enigma but for one excellent, intensive study in South Africa. Science is unable to make even this modest claim for the remaining three species, the African golden cat, the jungle cat and the sand cat. The little we know of them derives largely from examining dead animals and their scats. In the case of the jungle cat and the sand cat, most of the material hails from Asia where they also occur; we continue to be largely ignorant of their behaviour, ecology and status in Africa. The African golden cat occurs only in the equatorial forests of Central and West Africa where it remains one of the least investigated cats on the planet.

This book deals with all of them. Inevitably, the bias is towards the large, well-studied species where decades of research and observation have produced hundreds of scientific papers and reports. However, we have also compiled all that is known about the lesser species, including observations from their Asian range or from captivity to fill in some gaps. We hope to provide a comprehensive overview of the cat family in Africa – from the famous and popular African parks with their celebrated, safari-friendly felids, to the few remaining places on the continent uninhabited by people, where a wild cat may spend its entire life without feeling the effects of human presence.

Unfortunately, such wilderness is now exceptional. Africa has the fastest growing human population of any continent and the pressure on its wild places and natural resources is intense. The loss of habitat and prey to an ever-expanding agricultural frontier is reducing the space available to all carnivores in Africa, with the cat family the most severely affected. As occasional predators of livestock and poultry (and, in the case of lions and leopards, of people), cats suffer still more concentrated persecution that has driven calamitous range loss outside protected areas and, with escalating frequency, inside them.

None of Africa's cats is facing immediate extinction. But all of them have disappeared from large tracts they once inhabited and every species has relict populations whose loss is inevitable. The challenges facing cats in Africa are profound. Only one, the ubiquitous domestic cat, does not require dedicated conservation activity to ensure its survival for the next century. More than at any time in history, the fate of Africa's wild cats is in our hands.

* In this book, we have adopted the most widely accepted view that there are 36 species of wild cats. See Chapter 1 for details.