

Carly Chadwick

2<sup>nd</sup> International Symposium on Zoo Animal Welfare (Brookfield Zoo, Chicago, USA)



*A coalition of male cheetahs at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo*

I'm currently in the final year of my PhD at the University of Salford, researching social group behaviour and personality in captive cheetahs. The wild cheetah population is rapidly declining, but the captive population is not self-sustaining. This is a potential problem for cheetah conservation and might indicate underlying welfare concerns. Previous research has shown that there are no differences in the reproductive physiology of wild and captive cheetahs, or in the physiology of breeders and non-breeders within the captive population. So it's likely that the problems encountered by zoos in breeding these species are related to the behaviour and

management of cheetahs in captivity. Housing animals in appropriate social groups is an effective way of improving animal welfare by providing them the context in which to express behaviours that have been observed in their wild counterparts. Knowledge of captive cheetah social interaction is therefore crucial if zoos are to provide optimal conditions for welfare and breeding.

My research uses behavioural observations and zoo keeper questionnaires to investigate the social behaviour and personality of captive cheetahs. The success of captive breeding programmes depends not only on the management of the captive population as a whole, but also on the management and husbandry of individual animals. The captive environment itself has a profound effect on the behaviour of wild animals and individuals vary in their responses to the environment. Understanding this variation among individuals is the goal of animal personality research. The quantitative assessment of zoo animal personality can be used to investigate social group cohesion, individual reproductive success and pair compatibility, and information from personality assessments can be used to inform important management decisions, particularly those relevant to welfare and breeding.



*Presenting at the symposium*

Hosted by the Chicago Zoological Society at Brookfield Zoo, the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Symposium on Zoo Animal Welfare brought together zoo animal welfare scientists, as well as laboratory, farm and companion animal welfare researchers, to discuss innovations and future directions for zoo animal welfare science. Topics of discussion included the behavioural assessment of animal welfare, human-animal relationships, zoo exhibit design and animal personality. At the symposium, I presented the preliminary findings of my cheetah personality survey, investigating links between individual personality profiles

and breeding success, whether there is evidence for pair compatibility in cheetahs, and the effects of cheetah personality on social group cohesion. This was the first time I had given a presentation at an international conference and was a major milestone in my PhD progression. Presenting here gave me



valuable experience in communicating my research to an international audience and helped me to expand my network at this early stage in my research career. I enjoyed showcasing my research to my peers and I had the opportunity to meet prominent researchers in the field of zoo animal behaviour and welfare, many of whom I have cited in my thesis and publications. After my talk, I met the collections development manager from Wellington Zoo, New Zealand, who was interested in taking part in the personality survey. So not only did attending the conference enhance my presenting skills, it also provided me with more subjects for my study!

Without the Society of Biology Travel Grant, I would have been unable to attend the symposium. I am sincerely grateful to the Society for their support, which provided me with an excellent opportunity to present my research, expand my network and develop international collaborations.