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STATEMENT ON SYLVESTER, CHEETAH AMBASSADOR

STATEMENT: Attributed to: VICTORIA FALLS WILDLIFE TRUST

Jessica Dawson, Executive Director

January 31, 2019

VICTORIA FALLS WILDLIFE TRUST ANNOUNCES PASSING OF CHEETAH AMBASSADOR SYLVESTER

I am deeply saddened to announce that Sylvester, our adored cheetah ambassador, passed away last night from injuries sustained during a confrontation with a small female leopard. Our entire Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust family, including visitors and supporters worldwide, will sorely miss our charismatic friend and companion. He touched thousands of hearts, transformed negative opinions about predators, like cheetahs, into positive ones and inspired us all to embrace and learn more about his amazing species. The outpouring of concern and support we have received from around the world is lifting us through this extremely difficult time.

The altercation between Sylvester and the leopard occurred on the evening of January 26th. Veterinarian Dr. Chris Foggin began treatment immediately, while Sylvester's team of animal care specialists also worked around the clock to provide care and monitor his condition. Unfortunately, during the following days, his status deteriorated as his kidneys began to shut down, likely a result of the stress. With his team of devoted animal keepers by his side, he was euthanized last night at 8:15pm Zimbabwe time, 1:15 Eastern time in the U.S.

Sylvester is close to nine years old and came to the Trust as an orphan when a lion killed his mother and four siblings. Alone, hungry and dehydrated, Sylvester was discovered by a game scout who brought him to the English family at Buby Valley Conservancy where he spent the next 6-months of his life. Norman English was ex-National Parks and Wildlife Management and Penny English was a registered nurse. Sylvester's survival was a direct result of their skills, wildlife knowledge and care. Eventually, National Park authorities who then asked Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust for help. Given that a cheetah's physiology and diet are very complex, our veterinary capacity and resources would ensure that Sylvester would thrive.

Unfortunately, by the time Sylvester came to the Trust, he was imprinted on people, thus making the chances for his successful release to the wild questionable at best. Most likely, he would have found comfort being around people, thereby causing problems in rural communal areas that surround our national parks in the Victoria Falls area. It is highly probable wildlife managers would have had to put him down. Because he was a specially protected animal on the endangered species list, National Parks and Wildlife Management and the Trust decided to give Sylvester a career as an ambassador animal to champion a message of coexistence with our rural and urban neighbors.

Research supports the fact that ambassador animals can provide compelling experiences needed for people to gain and maintain personal connections with their own relationships with nature. Such was the case with Sylvester: he was an impactful catalyst in the delivery of our conservation messages, which profoundly affect learning and promote attitudinal changes in the region.

Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust will continue Sylvester's noble work of helping to steward a culture of coexistence with carnivores and fostering a conservation ethos among rural communities through education and outreach.

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Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust is advancing and promoting environmental conservation and sustainable use of indigenous resources throughout Southern Africa. Our main areas of focus include wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, wildlife disease prevention, using forensics to combat wildlife crimes, mitigating wildlife-human conflict, and community outreach and education.

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