

CHEETAH STERILITY BLAMED ON ZOO DIET

Commercial cat food fed to captive cheetah in North America has caused sterility and early deaths, according to Kenneth Setchell, Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Cincinnati.

New Scientist said that Setchell, collaborating with researchers at Cincinnati Zoo, found that liver degeneration was the primary cause of death in cheetah in North American zoos. But no liver damage was found in cheetah at a South African breeding centre. The major difference between the two groups of cheetah was diet. The South African cheetah fed on whole carcasses, while the North American cheetah got a commercial cat food, which is largely horsemeat, but with soyabean products for added protein.

It was found that the soyabean products in the commercial cat food were a source of daidzein and genistein, which act as weak oestrogens. Oestrogens are known to affect the liver, and the cheetah's liver functions improved when they were fed chicken with vitamins and minerals instead of the commercial food. One four-year-old, which had never been pregnant, came into oestrus three months after the zoo changed her diet.

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