

Cheetah Scavenging and Hunting by Night

Cheetah have been observed scavenging and hunting by night in Namibia's Etosha National Park. Philip Stander, of the Etosha Ecological Institute, saw a male and two large cubs, a male and a female, feeding together on a day-old carcass of giraffe *Giraffa camelopardus*. Such scavenging behaviour is unusual for cheetah.

Standar also observed another group, consisting of an adult male and a large male and large female cubs successfully hunting springbok *Antidorcus marsupialis* on moonless nights. In each case, they lost their prey, one to a hyaena *Crocuta crocuta*, and one to a lion.

In a paper in the South African Journal of Wildlife Research, Stander said that the cheetahs did not stalk, but approached prey downwind in 10 of 12 hunts, walking or trotting with heads held low, or sprinting into the herd. They used vegetation or ground cover. The cheetahs appeared to coor-

dinate their movements towards the springbok from different directions, possible to intercept prey fleeing from one of the other cheetahs. In one case the female cub intercepted a springbok that had been flushed by the male cub. In all observed hunts the cheetahs watched both prey and each other, which may have served to coordinate their movements relative to the prey, Stander said.

He remarks that the group composition of the cheetah groups was atypical as adult males are usually either solitary or occur in adult male groups. He also says that, while it has been suggested that cheetah hunt by day to have good visibility and freedom from obstruction in high-speed chases, the observed cases implied that they were proficient in total darkness and vegetated terrain.

The night observations were made with the aid of a soft red-filtered spotlight and an infra-red sensitive video camera.