



# CHEETAH FACTS

Founded in 1990, CCF is a Namibian non-profit incorporated association dedicated to the long-term survival of the cheetah and its ecosystems.

## CCF VISION

To see a world in which cheetah live and flourish in co-existence with people and the environment.

## CCF MISSION

To be an international centre of excellence concerning cheetah conservation, and multi-disciplinary research and education programmes; working with all stakeholders to achieve best practice in conservation and management.

CCF's activities include conducting international research, conservation and education programmes to ensure the survival of the cheetah for future generations.

## CHEETAH (*ACINONYX JUBATUS*)

### RANGE & POPULATION

Once found throughout Asia and Africa, the species is now only scattered in Iran and various countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Home ranges in Namibia for males can be up to 1500 square km and for females, 1200-1500 square km. Only 12,500 cheetahs remain in 25 African countries and 200 cats survive in Iran. Namibia has the world's largest number of cheetahs, yet over  $\pm$  3,000 remain in the wild.

### STATUS

Protected species in Namibia. Endangered under the United States Endangered Species Act. Listed on CITES Appendix I. (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species.)

### HABITAT & DIET

Cheetahs thrive in areas with vast expanses of land where prey is abundant. Cheetahs have been found in a variety of habitats, including grasslands, savannahs, dense vegetation, and mountainous terrain. In Namibia 95 percent of cheetahs live on commercial farms. A cheetah's diet consists of small antelope, young of large antelope, warthog, hare and game birds.

### DESCRIPTION

The cheetah has a slender, long-legged body with blunt semi-retractable claws. Its coat is tan with small, round, black spots, and the fur is coarse and short. The cheetah has a small head with high-set eyes. Black "tear marks," which run from the corner of its eyes down the sides of the nose to its mouth, keep the sun out of its eyes and aid in hunting. Adult body length 112-135 cm; tail length 66-84 cm; shoulder height 73+ cm; weight 34-54 kg. The male is slightly larger than the female.

### SPECIALISATIONS

The cheetah's flexible spine, oversized liver, enlarged heart, wide nostrils, increased lung capacity and thin muscular body make this cat the swiftest hunter in Africa. Covering 7-8 meters in a stride, with only one foot touching the ground at a time, the cheetah can reach a speed of 110 km/h in seconds. At two points in the stride, no feet touch the ground.

### BEHAVIOUR

Cheetahs have a unique, well-structured social order. Females live alone except when they are raising cubs. The females raise the cubs on their own. The first 18 months of a cub's life cubs learn survival lessons on knowing how to hunt wild prey species and avoid other predators such as the leopards, lions, hyenas, and baboons. At 18 months, the mother leaves the cubs, which then form a sibling group, staying together for another 6 months. At about 2 years, the female siblings leave the group, and the young males remain together for life. Males live alone or in coalitions made up of brothers from the same litter. Some coalitions maintain territories in order to find females with which they will mate. Fierce fights between male coalitions, resulting in serious injury or death, can occur when defending territories. Cheetahs hunt in the late morning and early evening. They capture their prey by stalking - until the prey is within 10-30 meters - before chasing. The prey is suffocated when a cheetah bites the underside of the throat. Chases last about 20 seconds, and rarely longer than 1 minute. About half of the chases are successful. In Namibia, cheetahs use play-trees (trees with sloping trunks and large horizontal limbs, usually camelthorns) to observe their surroundings and mark the area. Cheetahs make chirping sounds, and hiss or spit when angered or threatened. They purr very loudly when content. Cheetahs do not pose a threat to humans.



" This species deserves to be on the earth. We must join hands and work together for the cheetah's survival. "

-DR. LAURIE MARKER,  
CCF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





## REPRODUCTION

Sexual maturity occurs at 20-23 months. The gestation period is about 95 days, and the average litter size is 4-5 cubs. Cubs are smoky-grey in colour with long hair, called a mantle, running along their backs; they are up to 30 cm long and weigh 250-300 grams at birth. The mantle has several purposes: it is thought to camouflage the cub in dead grass, hiding it from predators, and to work as a mimicry defence, causing the cub to resemble a honey badger.

## LIFE EXPECTANCY

Studies have not been conducted in the wild on longevity; 8-12 years is average in captivity. Cub mortality is high for the species in both the wild and captivity. On average 30 percent of all cubs born in captivity die within one month of birth, and in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park, about 90 percent die before reaching 3 months of age.



## NATURAL HISTORY

Cheetah relatives had worldwide distribution until about 20,000 years ago, but the world's environment underwent drastic changes in the Great Ice Age. Throughout North America, Europe and Asia, about 75 percent of the mammal species vanished. Only a handful of the modern cheetah remained, having gone through a "bottleneck," and inbreeding occurred for the species' survival. In c1700 BC the Egyptians were the first to tame the cheetahs and cheetahs have been kept in captivity for some 5,000 years. However, they breed poorly in captivity. The many parks and reserves of Africa offer protection for only a small amount of cheetahs. In these parks, lion and hyena numbers increase, and the cheetahs cannot compete with these large predators which kill cheetah cubs and steal their prey. Evolution has favoured speed and not strength for this species. Therefore, most of the cheetah population is found outside of protected reserves.



## SURVIVAL THREATS

Decline in prey, loss of habitat, poaching, and indiscriminate trapping and shooting threaten the survival of the cheetah throughout its range.



## LEGAL PROTECTION

As a protected species in Namibia, people are allowed to remove cheetahs only if cheetahs pose a threat to livestock or human life. Unfortunately, some farmers will capture cheetahs indiscriminately (the "problem" animals may not be singled out), often removing or killing those that have not taken any livestock. Limited international trade in live animals and skins is permitted from Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. Illegal trade in other parts of Africa and indiscriminate capture and removal in southern Africa continue to threaten the survival of this species.



## CONSERVATION

To help this sleek hunter of the African wild win its race against extinction, we must (1) help protect its habitat and insure a place for it on Namibian farmlands, (2) aid in the conservation of the wild prey base, (3) halt the indiscriminate capture and removal of the cheetah, (4) improve livestock and game management, and (5) educate everyone about the need to conserve biological diversity and the predators' unique role in a healthy ecosystem.

## CAPTIVITY

Cheetahs are wild animals. Capture of wild cheetahs threaten the survival of the species in two ways. First, the removal of individuals reduces the species' genetic diversity in the wild. And secondly, cheetahs do not breed well in captivity. The Asian cheetah is nearly extinct because of its capture for private use. Special dietary requirements, special needs and unpredictable behaviour make this a poor pet. Wild instincts remain intact even with tamed and captive raised animals.



## CHEETAH CONSERVATION FUND

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