

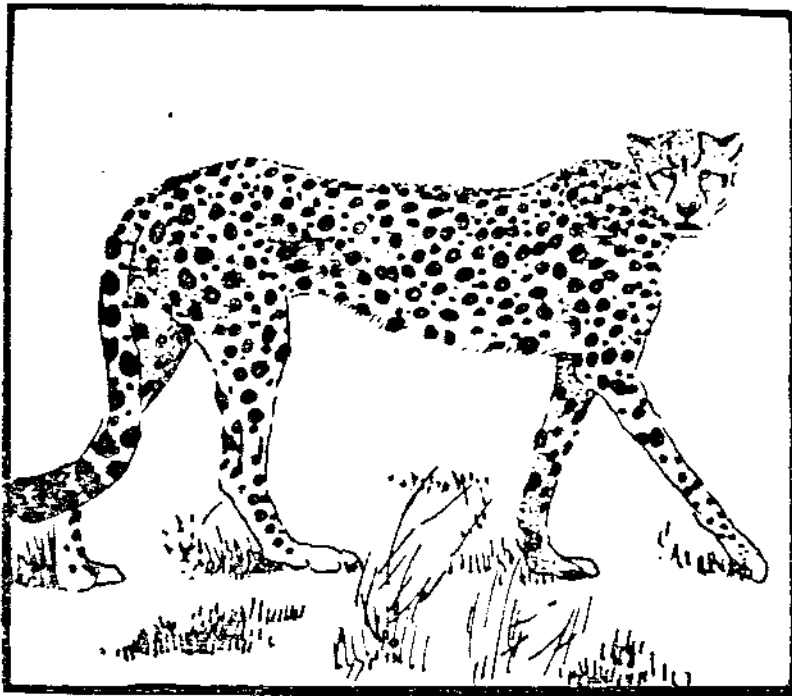
Rawal R. 1986. Agile Sprinter. Zoo's Print 1(4):14-5.

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Abstract: Some notes about the occurrence of the cheetah, historical dispersal, reasons why it became extinct in Asia and reasons for its decline. Short description about the exceptional speed and appropriate the very adapted body features.

# C H E E T A

E is for Extinct...F is for Forever, Extinction is Forever



Zoo Outreach Organization chose the Cheeta as our symbol because this beautiful animal become totally extinct in India relatively recently during the 1950s

It is a sensitive animal, difficult to keep and breed in captivity, but with care and patience it can be done.

If our zoos had been keeping them and perfecting the husbandry, it may not have been necessary to lose the Ind Asian subspecies entirely.

This issue of Zoo's Print is devoted to the "fastest thing on four legs" and a selection of articles follow on various aspects-now and then.

## AGILE SPRINTER

by Roopal Rawal, a CEE-NFS article

The Cheetah is more often if not always, mistaken for a panther or Leopard. But the distinct profile of the Cheetah with a steep outline of its forehead and the face marked by 'tear stripes' running from the corner of the eyes down the sides of the nose, differentiates it from a panther. While the coat of the Cheetah is heavily patterned with solid black spots, that of the panther is marked with small close-set black rosettes.

At one time Cheetah was widely dispersed from India across to the North of Africa, down that continent into South Africa, Today it is restricted to Africa. One of the reasons for its decline in Asia is that it preferred to live in open country. As agriculture spread, the Cheetah's natural habitat was threatened as also its main diet-blackbucks and chitais. Of course the trade in

coats, rugs, etc and lust for trophies did account for a sudden fall in its number.

Some say that Cheetah became extinct in Asia due to evolutionary factors. Some others blame human intervention, while a few consider biological factors responsible. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that like many other fauna and flora species the Cheetah has become a creature of the past. Environmentalists are trying to re-introduce Cheetahs in India before it is too late. So there is still a ray of hope. But whether they will survive and if they do, will they multiply or breed successfully, remains an enigma.

With lithe physique, sleek posture and legendary speed, the Cheetah claims the title of the world's fastest land animal. The Cheetah shares the characteristic of being a sprinter, with other

cats. But it is quite difficult to say accurately how fast it can run. It is very fast over short distances. So the initial burst of speed is no doubt amazing. But after some time it gives up the chase. The widely accepted speed after various trials is 80 km an hour. But it can attain a speed of 110 km an hour and keep it up for about 360 m.

The exceptional speed makes the Cheetah an adept hunter. The grace and elegance with which it moves in the wild to capture a fleet-footed prey shows its prowess as a hunter. Most of the big cats lie in wait and set ambushes for their prey. But that's not true of a Cheetah. To capture a prey, it relies on its speed. The Cheetah usually stalks the prey and chooses the animal that has separated from the group. The stalk is followed by a sprint.

The prey is not taken with an unexpected leap but is pursued in an open chase. It can easily seize its prey after a short sprint but if the prey has a good start then the Cheetah might give up. Once the prey is killed the Cheetah likes to drink the blood and eat the heart and kidneys first. Thereafter the head is taken and only then is the muscle meat preferred. A Cheetah is not likely to return to a kill after the first feed.

## The Odd Cat out

The small head, the narrow deep chest and body, the long, sinewy limbs are the distinctive characteristics, that distinguishes the Cheetah from other cats. Its claws are blunt and not as retractile as some of the big cats. These claws serve a specific purpose of giving this speedy animal an additional grip essential for sudden stops and turns. Its teeth are not as sharp as that of a panther and a Tiger. It has many dog-like characteristics, too. For instance the feet are very much like that of a dog. It is only when it stalks does it remind one of a cat. Cheetahs are solitary but occasionally hunt in pairs. Groups of up to twelve members may be seen.

