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Abstract: Details of cheetahs born in captivity up to May 1971. It is possible to suggest factors which are common to most or all of the births of cheetahs in captivity, and thus to indicate ways in which zoo management should proceed in order to achieve cheetah breeding.

# Cheetahs

*Acinonyx jubatus*

## in captivity

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Although cheetahs *Acinonyx jubatus* have been kept as pets or captive animals for as long as any other wild species, their ability to breed under these conditions appears to have been singularly poor. Modern records indicate reproduction in captivity only within the last few years: it is possible that there have been births to pairs or groups of cheetahs kept as private pets but, in established zoological collections, whether public or private, the breeding of cheetahs is a modern development.

From the information at my disposal, details of cheetahs born in captivity up to 31 May 1971 have been set out in Table 1.

From this and other information available, it is possible to suggest factors which are common to most or all of the births of cheetahs in captivity, and thus to indicate ways in which zoo managements should proceed in order to achieve cheetah breeding.

Common factors are:

- Except for the Spinelli case, where two males were put with the female, and the Montpellier case, where two females were put with the male, the breeding pair was quite separate from other cheetahs;
- The age of the female was not more than five and probably under four years at the time of birth of the first litter;
- One parent was relatively aggressive - for

example, the female of the Whipsnade pair and the breeding female at Montpellier - and in no case were both parents completely tame;

- The matings and births took place in quite small runs and enclosures, with one exception, Montpellier, where the run was relatively large.

There are other factors which may be important in the breeding of cheetahs in captivity and which were present in some of the recorded cases. These include:

- Introductions of male or males to the female only when it is expected that the female may be ready for mating as, for example, at Whipsnade where the introduction of the male to the female (after long periods of separation) has been followed within two weeks by oestrus and mating;
- Room in the enclosure for play and chasing activity, as for instance in the three cases (Spinelli, Whipsnade and Montpellier) where cheetahs have been born *and* reared;
- Absence of other big cat species in the vicinity of the cheetah enclosure.

There are also conditions which some observers of cheetahs in the wild believe are essential for successful breeding including:

- A preponderance of males. It has often been suggested that the presence of several males together is a necessary prelude to mating, and

wild-caught litters seem usually to have consisted of more males than females. The captive births recorded below show this preponderance, 19♂ to 13♀ for the litters where sexes are definitely known although, except in the Spinelli case, mating took place without any other males being present;

b) Exercise. It is said that cheetahs take a lot of exercise in play and other physical activity, and that much space is needed for full expression of their normal behaviour, including mating;

c) Secretiveness. Cheetahs are secretive animals in respect of mating and breeding and lack of privacy might inhibit mating;

d) Long view. Cheetahs are animals of open plains country and have the ability to see far into the distance, looking for prey. In the Spinelli, Whipsnade and Montpellier cases the runs are sited in such a way that a reasonably long view is possible. The satisfaction of this need can be aided by the provision of elevated resting places (simulating trees and anthills in the wild) in runs and enclosures.

ZOO OR OWNER	DATE	NO. BORN	SURVIVAL	REMARKS
Philadelphia, USA	24 March 1956	2♂ 1♀	1 killed by parents 2 hand reared: - died 3 days of age	Small run
Philadelphia, USA	25 April 1957	1♂ 1♀	Hand-reared: died 3 months of age	Same parents and same place
Krefeld, Germany	24 April 1960	4	1 eaten by parents 1 killed by mother - 2 days of age 2 hand-reared: 1 died 6 weeks of age 1 died 18 weeks of age	15 m × 6 m run
Oklahoma City, USA	7 April 1962	2♂ 1♀	1 born dead 2 taken to incubator: 1 died 24 hours of age 1 died 10 days of age	All premature Very small run
Oklahoma City, USA	14 November 1962	2♂	1 eaten by father 1 taken to incubator - died 49 hours of age	Same parents Very small run
Arnhem	?	2	Eaten by parents after few days	No other information
Signor P. Spinelli, Rome, owner of mother (pet);	13 January 1966	1♂	Died	Reared by mother (pet). 2 males put with female for mating.
Rome Zoo, owner of father	14 December 1966	3♂	Still alive?	50 m × 3 m run
Whipsnade	15 September 1967	1♂ 2♀	Male still alive 1♀ died 4 months of age 1♀ destroyed 18 months of age	40m × 20 m run
Whipsnade	22 July 1968	1♂ 2♀	Still alive	Same parents
Whipsnade	6 February 1970	1♂ 1♀	Still alive	Same parents
Whipsnade	7 March 1971	3♀	Still alive	Same parents
Montpellier	December 1968	2♂ 1♀	♀ died 9 months of age; males still alive	Large run. 1 other female in group at mating
Montpellier	May 1970	3♂ 1♀	Still alive	1 other female in group at mating
San Diego	October 1970	3♂	2 died immediately - eaten by parents 1 still alive	Same parents 2 males with 1 female in very large enclosure

Table 1. Details of cheetahs *Acinonyx jubatus* born in captivity up to 31 May 1971.

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