

BACKGROUND - introduction to the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*)

History:

The cheetah is Africa's most endangered big cat and is a protected species in Southern Africa. It is considered endangered under the United States Endangered Species Act and is listed on CITES Appendix 1. (CITES Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species is an international treaty that monitors trade in wild species. Appendix 1 indicates that the species is threatened by trade and is in danger of extinction.)

Characteristics:

The oldest cat species on earth, fossil remains date back 3.5-4 million years. The cheetah is a highly specialised animal adapted for speed, at a top speed of 110-120 km/h the cheetah is the fastest land animal. In appearance, cheetahs are of light build, making them the lightest of the big cats at 35-45kg for females, and 45-60kg for males. They have long streamlined bodies and long, slim legs. Their size and build is one of the ways that they can be distinguished from Africa's other spotted big cat the leopard. The leopard in comparison is short and stocky, with a large, heavy bone structure and a lot of muscle mass. Cheetahs have on average 3000 solid black spots covering their entire body, together with their short tan fur this creates camouflage. Leopards have brown spots surrounded by incomplete black circles called rosettes on their backs and sides. One of the most prominent, distinguishing features of the cheetah are the tear marks running from their eyes to their mouths.

Behaviour:

Cheetahs kill other animals for food, we therefore refer to them as predators. They are day hunters due to their speed and are mostly found in open savannah / grassland. They are normally solitary animals sometimes forming groups amongst brothers. Mothers will spend up to two years with their young teaching them how to hunt and to avoid other predators, which is not an instinct for a cheetah. Due to their slight build for running, cheetahs do not make good fighters, preferring to run from a threat, we therefore refer to them as non-aggressive. Due to this avoidance of confrontation with other predators, the cheetah is the only predator that has not been known to attack humans in the wild.



TABLE 1: comparison of general information

	Cheetah	Leopard	Lion	Caracal	Tiger	Domestic Cat
Scientific name	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>	Panthera pardus	Panthera leo	Felis caracal	Panthera tigris	Felix domesticus
Distinguishing features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long slender body ▪ Tan coat with solid black spots ▪ Black “tear marks” on face ▪ Small head ▪ Amber eyes ▪ Semi-retractable claws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Largest spotted cat, short and stocky, muscular ▪ Coats marked with rosettes ▪ No “tear marks” ▪ Large head, powerful jaw ▪ Green eyes ▪ Retractable claws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Largest African carnivore ▪ Uniform tawny / sandy coat ▪ Males have long mane ▪ Tail sometimes black on tip ▪ Retractable claws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long, slender body ▪ Yellow-grey to reddish-brown coat ▪ Short tails, tapered ▪ Ears narrow and pointed ▪ Long black tufts on ears (4.5cm) ▪ Hind-legs longer than forelegs ▪ Retractable claws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Largest of all cats ▪ Black stripes on an orange coat ▪ Males have prominent ruff / collar ▪ Retractable claws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Belong to the small cats ▪ Variety of colours and patterns ▪ Retractable claws
Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Total length: 180 – 220 cm ▪ Adult body length: 112 – 135 cm ▪ Tail length: 60 – 80 cm ▪ Shoulder height: 73 – 80 cm ▪ Weight: 30–45 kg (F) 45–60 kg (M) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Body length: 91 – 243 cm ▪ Tail length: 68 – 110 cm ▪ Shoulder height: 70 – 80 cm ▪ Weight: 17–60 kg (F) 20–90 kg (M) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Total length: 230 – 270 cm (F), 250 – 330 cm (M) ▪ Tail length: 100 cm ▪ Shoulder height: 100 cm (F), 120 cm (M) ▪ Weight: 110-152 kg (F) 150-222kg (M) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Body length: 60 - 92 cm (F), 80 – 105 cm (M) ▪ Tail length: 20 – 35 cm ▪ Shoulder height: 40 – 50 cm ▪ Weight: 11–15 kg (F) 13–20 kg (M) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Body length: 119 – 170 cm (F), 170 – 290 cm (M) ▪ Tail length: 53 – 119 cm ▪ Shoulder height: 85 – 124 cm ▪ Weight: 75-300 kg Sumatran Siberian 	Weight: 3-5 kg
Range	Africa: 26 countries Iran: 200 individuals	Africa: Widely dispersed Also in South Asia, Far East and Arabia	Africa: Southern / East Few in Asia	Africa: Asia, Turkestan, North West India, Arabia	Not found in Africa India, China and Indonesia	Found world-wide where humans have settled
Habitat	Grasslands, savannahs, woodlands, bushlands, hill country. Majority live outside of protected areas.	Very adaptable – habitats include woodlands, lowlands, forests, mountains, savannahs, dry steppes.	Wide habitat tolerance: grassy plains, arid woodlands and semi-desert. (Not found in forests)	Wide range from open savannah and woodland to semi-arid areas. Not found in forests.	Not found in open habitats, they tend to live in a variety of forests and mangrove swamps, requiring cover and water.	Human settlements
Period of activity	Hunt early morning, late afternoon	Nocturnal and diurnal	Nocturnal and diurnal	Mostly nocturnal, will be active during the day	Nocturnal	Mostly nocturnal
Threats to humans	Not a threat to humans	Can and do attack humans	Are a threat to humans	Are not a threat to humans	Are a threat to humans	Are not a threat to humans





Cheetah



Lion



Leopard



Caracal



Tiger

**Domestic
Cat**

