



A cheetah's slender body is built for speed, Accelerating from zero to 45 in just 2.5 seconds. It is the fastest land mammal and can reach top speeds of 60 to 70 mph. Cheetahs inhabit the African savanna but are vulnerable to extinction due to loss of habitat and limited genetic diversity.

Physical Description

- Cheetahs have slender, long-legged bodies with blunt, semi-retractable claws.
- Their heads are small with high-set eyes.
- A black tear mark runs from the inner corner of each eye down to the mouth.
- Spots serve as camouflage for both hunting and hiding.
- Spots and the ring pattern of its tail are unique, enabling researchers in the field to identify individuals
- Cheetahs' eyes have elongated retinal **foveas** (the small, rodless areas of the retina), giving them a sharp, wide-angle view of their surroundings.
- The dark tear marks beneath each eye may aid in hunting by minimizing the sun's glare. They may also provide an enhanced ability to intimidate.
- A cheetah's spine works as a spring for its powerful back legs, extending the cheetah's reach with each step, but the movement is physiologically taxing.
- Cheetahs are sometimes confused with leopards—a much heavier animal with rosette-shaped spots and no tear marks.
- Cheetahs do not roar, but they make sounds including purrs, barks, growls, hisses and chirps that are unlike those of any other cat.

Fun Fact

A cheetah's footprints have claw tips visible, more like a dog's than like a typical cat's print.

Size

- An adult cheetah weighs 75 to 140 pounds, is about 30 inches tall at the shoulder and 44 to 56 inches long with another 26 to 33 inches in tail length.
- Males are slightly larger than females.

Native Habitat

- Cheetahs inhabit a broad section of Africa including areas of North Africa, the Sahel, eastern and southern Africa.
- They are most prevalent in Kenya and Tanzania in east Africa, and Namibia and Botswana in southern Africa.
- In Namibia, cheetahs live in a variety of habitats, including grasslands, savannas, dense vegetation and mountainous terrain.

Food/Eating Habits

- Cheetahs are carnivorous and eat a variety of small animals such as game birds and rabbits, antelope, springbok, steenbok, duikers, impala and gazelles, and the young of larger animals like warthog, kudu, hartebeest, oryx, roan and sable. .
- cheetahs are primarily diurnal, hunting in the early morning and late afternoon.
- Since they depend on sight more heavily than smell, they like to scan the countryside from a **kopje**, or the top of a termite mound.
- Cheetahs usually creep within 100 yards of an intended victim before the final acceleration. Full sprints last about 20 seconds.

Sleep Habits

Primarily diurnal, unlike many other species of cats.

Lifespan

The average lifespan of wild cheetahs is 8 to 10 years. In human care, the average lifespan is 12 to 15 years.

Threat to Species

- Cheetahs have become extinct in at least 13 countries over the past 50 years.
- The Asiatic cheetah survives in Iran, but is critically endangered.
- An estimated 7,500 to 10,000 cheetahs remain in the wild.

