

Cheetah

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Acinonyx jubatus

Cheetah

The cheetah is the world's fastest land animal whose speeds can reach up to 70 miles per hour. Known for its spotted coat, the cheetah is smaller than most other wildcats; adults usually weigh anywhere from 110 to 140 pounds. Cheetahs live about 12 years in the wild and about 20 in captivity.

Cheetahs prefer to hunt in late mornings and early evenings. Although the chase for their prey lasts anywhere from 20 to 60 seconds, only half of their pursuits are successful. When cheetahs do catch their meal, they must eat quickly so as not to be captured by their predators, such as lions.

Cub cheetahs have downy fur called a mantle, which they shed as they mature, to make them look larger and more intimidating to predators. A mother cheetah's call to her young can sound like birds chirping, so it is sometimes said that cheetahs chirp instead of purr, although like domestic cats, cheetahs also purr. A mother typically stays with her cubs for about a year, as females prefer to be alone. Males, however, are usually social with each other and may even defend one another.

The IUCN currently lists the cheetah as vulnerable.

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