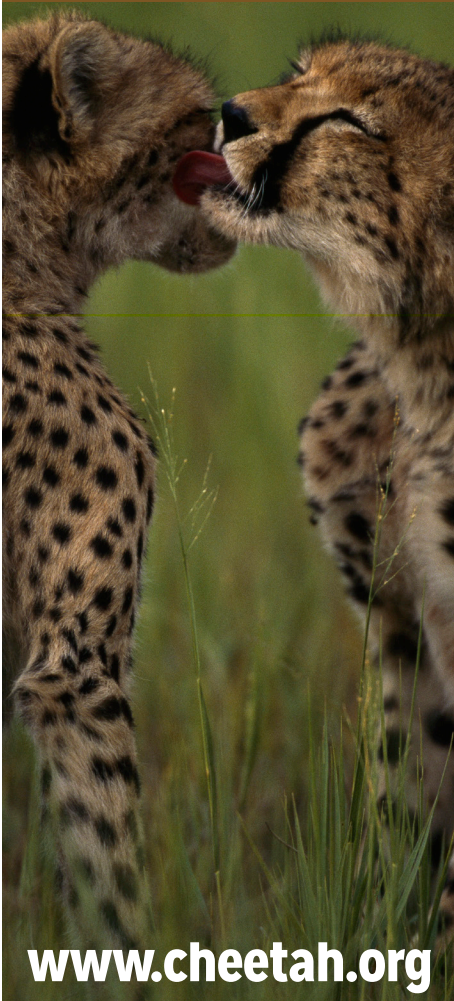


Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) works to save the cheetah in the wild. CCF's Research and Education Centre is located in Namibia, Africa. CCF's programs are based on...

RESEARCH

CONSERVATION

EDUCATION



CHEETAH Facts For Kids

How Big are Cheetahs?

Cheetahs are the smallest of the "big cats". A classification that includes: lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars and cougars). Adult cheetahs weigh up to 125 pounds and can measure up to 60 inches, their tails add up to 32 inches more. That's a total of up to 7.5 feet.

Built for Speed

Cheetahs have long legs and very slender bodies. Just like race cars they have light body frames and a streamlined shape that makes them highly aerodynamic (air passes around them efficiently reducing drag). Cheetahs have large nostrils that allow them to take in lots of oxygen per breath. They have a large and powerful heart and lungs that work together to circulate oxygen through their body very efficiently. Because of their unique anatomy they can attain speeds of up to 70 mph.

"Cleat" feet and "Rudder" tails

Cheetah's foot pads are hard and textured like tire treads providing cheetahs with increased traction in fast, sharp turns. Cheetahs have short blunt claws, which are considered semi-retractable (they don't pull in fully like other cats' claws). The claws are closer to that of a dog than of other cats. Cheetah claws work like the cleats of a track shoe to grip the ground for traction when running to help increase speed.

The extreme flexibility of the cheetah's spine is unique. The cheetah's long muscular tail works like a rudder on a boat. This allows sudden sharp turns during high speed chases as the cheetah swings its tail back and forth as its prey weaves to escape.

Spots, stripes and grey fluff

The cheetah's undercoat ranges in color from light tan to a deep gold and is marked by solid black spots. The spots on a leopard's or jaguar's coats are open in the center like a ring donut. Comparing spots is one way to quickly identify the cheetah from other spotted cats. Not only does the cheetah's fur have spots, so does their skin! The black fur actually grows out of the black spots on their skin.





Distinctive black stripes run from the cheetah's eyes to their mouth. The stripes are thought to protect the eyes from the sun's glare. It is believed that they have the same function as a rifle scope, helping cheetahs focus on their prey at a long distance range by minimizing the glare of the sun.

Cheetah tails end with a bushy tuft encircled by five or six dark rings. These markings provide them with excellent camouflage while hunting and make them more difficult for other predators to detect. The tail is also thought to be a signaling device, helping young cubs follow their mothers in tall grass. The tip of the tail varies in color from white to black among individuals.

Cheetah cubs are born with fluffy grey backs. Known as a mantle, this cute mohawk-like hairstyle runs from their neck to the base of their tail. The mantle makes a cheetah cub look like a honey badger (insert side by side). A honey badger is a formidable animal that most predators will avoid so looking like one helps protect the cubs from attack. The mantle also makes them hard to see. When the mother cheetah goes out to hunt the cubs will stay hidden in tall grasses.

More about cheetah cubs

At birth, the cubs weigh 8.5 to 15 ounces and are blind and helpless. After a day or so, the mother will leave the cubs to hunt. This is the most vulnerable time for the cubs, as they are left unprotected. They will live in a secluded nest until they are about six to eight weeks old. Their mother will move the cubs from nest to nest to avoid detection by predators. The mother will care for her cubs on her own for the next year and a half.

At about six weeks of age, the cubs begin following their mother on her daily travels as she is looking for prey. This is the time when life skills are taught.

Between four to six months of age, cheetah cubs are very active and playful. The cubs' claws are sharp at this age and help them grip the tall 'playtrees' they climb with their siblings. Learning to hunt is the most critical survival skill that the cubs learn. At one year of age, cheetah cubs participate in hunts with their mother.

At about 18 months of age, the mother and cubs will finally separate but the cubs will stick together until they are about two years old.