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Abstract: Lions and hyenas force cheetahs off protected land on African wildlife reserves and steal their fresh kills for an easy meal. Cheetahs are often killed by farmers who are trying to defend their livestock. Laurie Marker began in 1994 to give guard dogs (Anatolian shepherds) to Namibian farmers to defend the livestock. With their flocks safe, farmers are killing far fewer cheetahs

# The Race for

## Can cheetahs beat



**HOME BASE:** Namibia, Africa, has the world's largest population of wild cheetahs—roughly 3,000.

A cheetah digs its spikelike claws into a grassy plain in Africa. Then, the spotted cat kicks off and darts into the distance. This sleek feline can accelerate from 0 to 113 kilometers (70 miles) per hour in mere seconds, making it the world's fastest land mammal. That's a vital skill for nabbing a tasty antelope or rabbit for dinner. But this swift *carnivore* isn't just stalking its next meaty meal: It and other cheetahs are running for their lives.

According to scientists, cheetahs, or *Acinonyx jubatus* (ak-sin-ON-iks

joo-BAH-tus), are on the fast track to *extinction*. The species is in danger of dying out as tougher animals, such as lions and hyenas, force cheetahs off protected land on African wildlife reserves. These animals steal the spotted cats' fresh kills for an easy meal, says Laurie Marker, a zoologist and the founder and executive director of the Cheetah Conservation Fund. Forced to leave the reserves and pad onto unprotected lands, cheetahs are often killed by farmers who are trying to defend their livestock.

In the early 1900s, roughly 100,000 cheetahs roamed expanses of Asia

and Africa. Now, only 12,000 of the cats remain. About a quarter of these endangered cats live in Namibia, a country in southwest Africa that Marker also calls home. "When I first got here [in 1977], farmers were killing cheetahs like flies," she says. "We had to do something."

### SCAREDY CATS

Marker and others devised a plan to keep the cats from livestock, and angry farmers. Since most cats turn tail if confronted with a dog, Marker wondered if cheetahs would avoid farms that were guarded by barking pooches.

**WEB EXTRA**

To learn more about cheetahs, see: [www.cheetah.org](http://www.cheetah.org)

# SURVIVAL

## extinction with the help of guard dogs?



**PAST CAT:** A cheetah can go from 0 to 64 kilometers (40 miles) per hour in just three strides.

BY CHRISTY BROWNLEE

In 1994, Marker began testing the idea by giving Namibian farmers Anatolian shepherds. This breed of guard dog has a long history in Europe of protecting flocks of sheep and herds of goats from predators, such as bears and wolves.

Marker soon found that these shepherds have a knack for keeping cheetahs at bay too. Once placed on farms for guard duty, the dogs began doing what their ancestors have done naturally for 6,000 years, she says.

The dogs patrol the farms at night, keeping a lookout for danger. If they spot an intruder, the Anatolian shep-

herds sound menacing barks and growls. Usually, that frightens away wary cheetahs. But if a bold cat decides to stick around, the dogs fight ferociously to defend the livestock.

"Cheetahs want an easy kill because if they get hurt, they might never hunt again," says Marker. So most cheetahs avoid the dogfight.

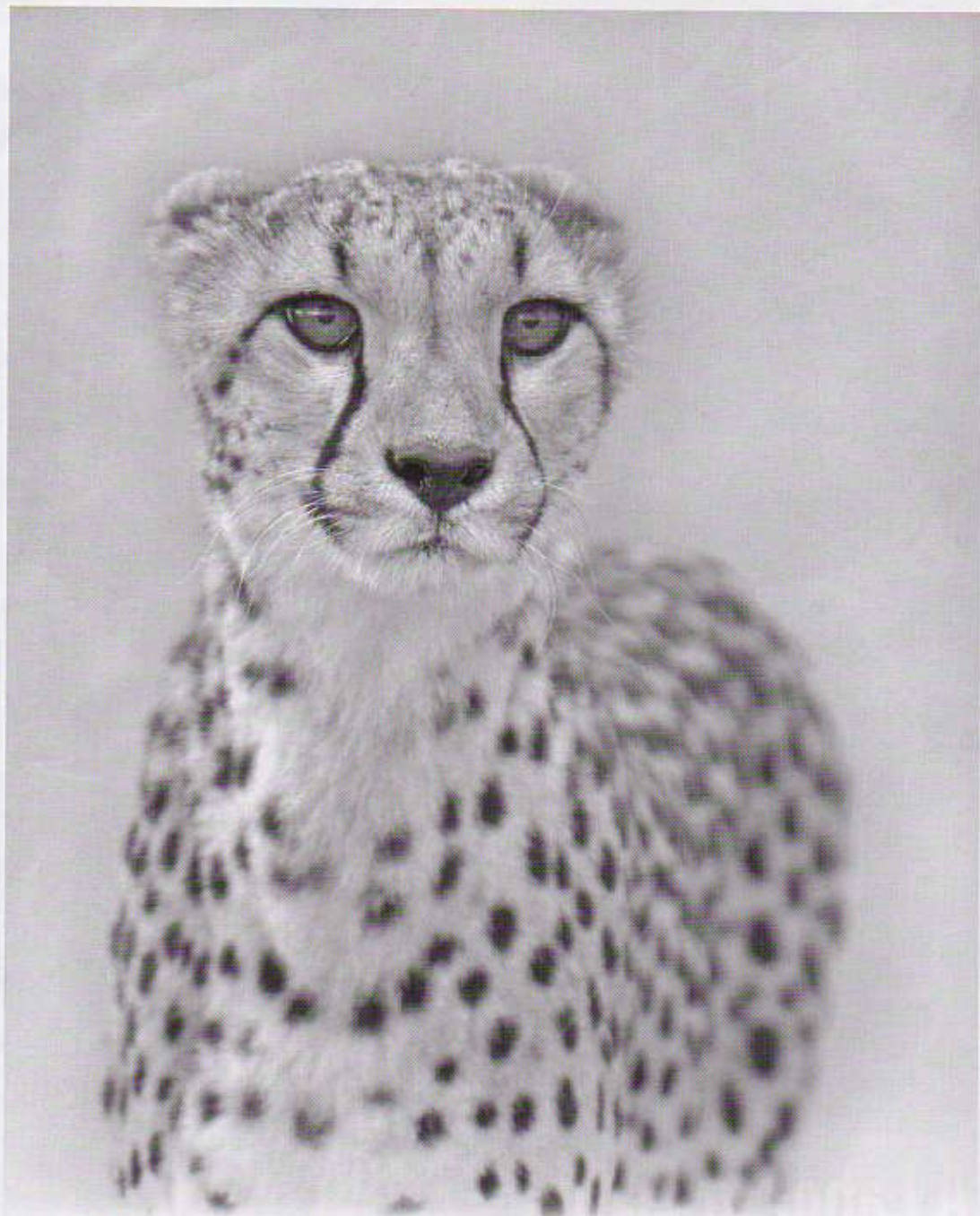
### **RUNNING ON EMPTY**

Over the last 10 years, Marker and her co-workers have checked to see how well the guard dogs are doing. They've found that livestock defended by Anatolian shepherds rarely get

attacked. With their flocks safe, farmers are killing far fewer cheetahs.

Even so, Marker says that cheetahs may still become extinct. Poverty forces some people in African countries to *poach*, or illegally hunt, the same wildlife that cheetahs prey on to feed themselves. This leaves little food for cheetahs that have been chased from livestock. Plus, cheetahs need a lot of land. So people must better protect suitable habitat.

Only by tackling poverty will poaching be reduced, says Marker. Then, if land is protected, cheetahs will be able to hunt freely for wildlife. ✨



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[www.cheetah.org](http://www.cheetah.org)



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