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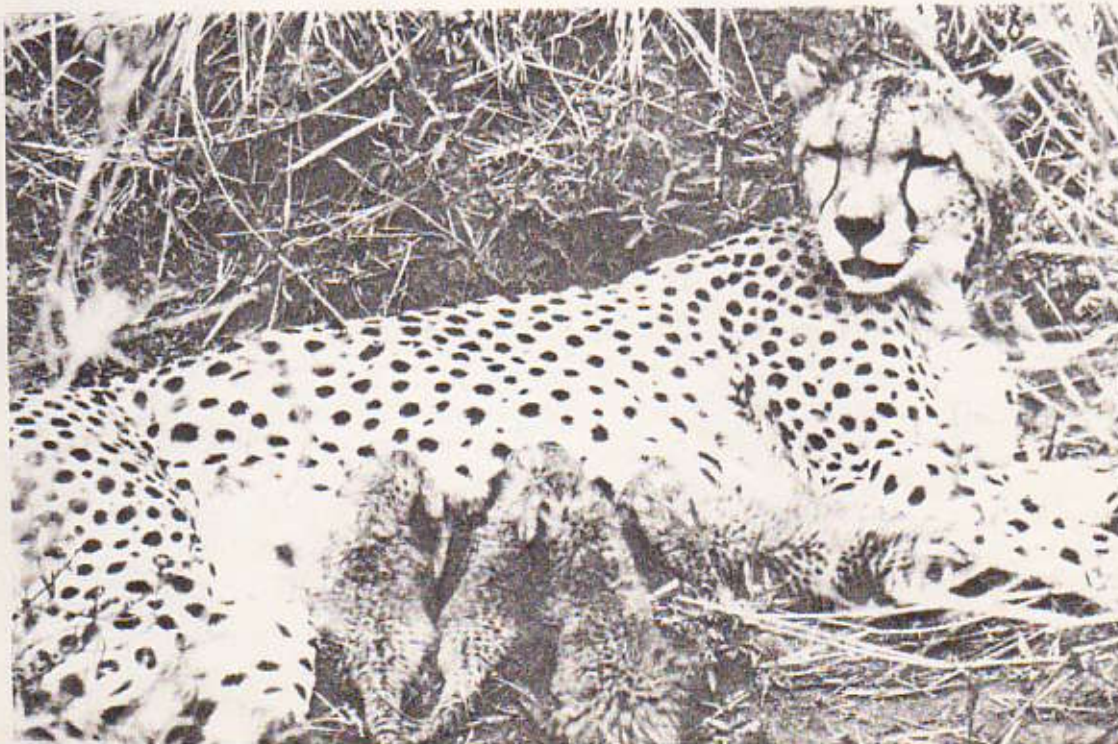
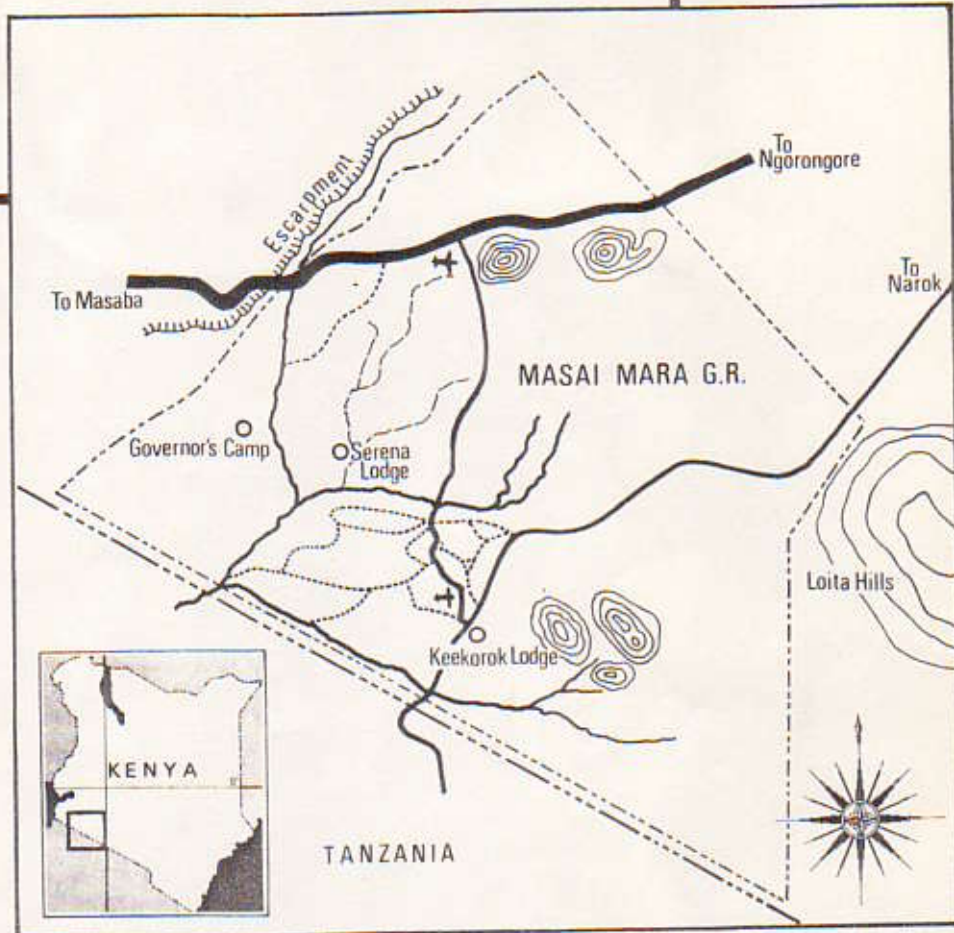
Cheetah and Man

David & Lida Burney



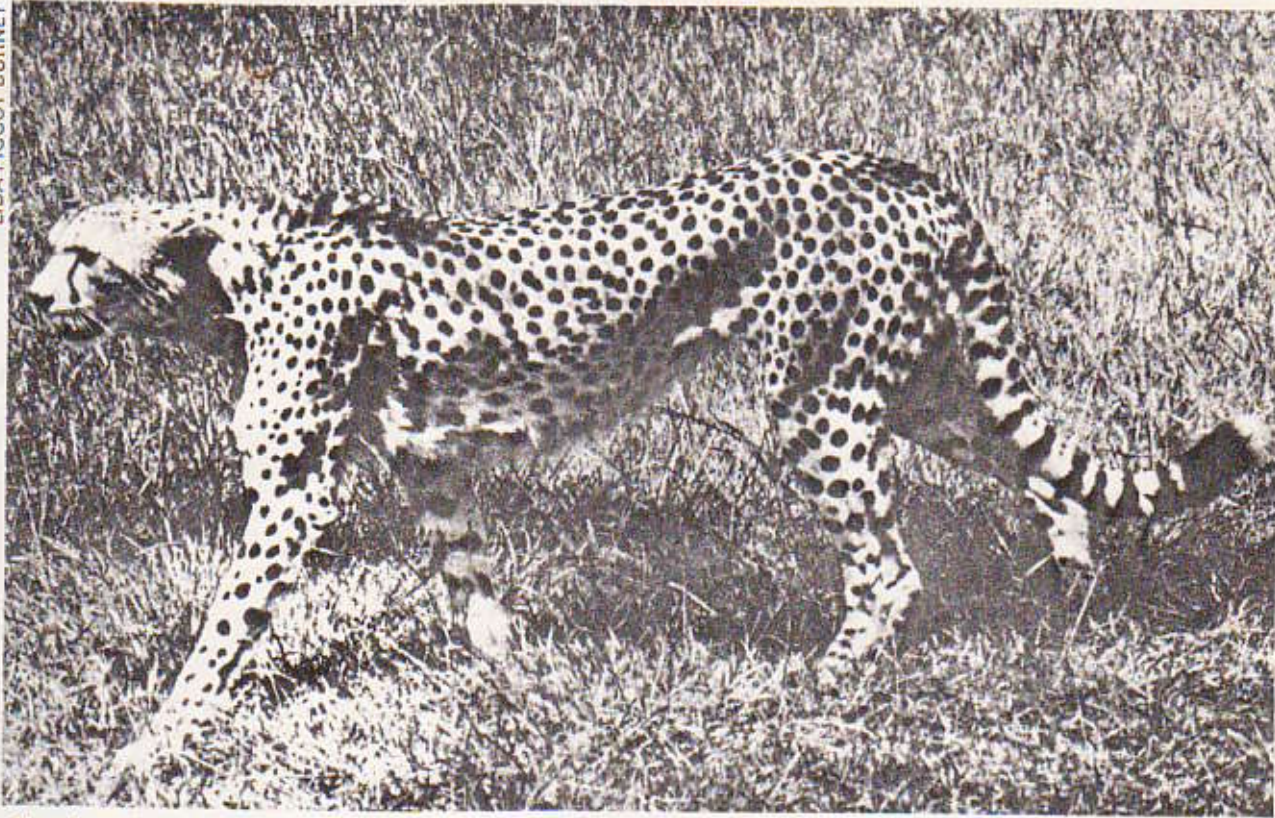
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Cheetah with cubs.

A PIGGOT-BURNEY



Cheetah on the move.

A small group of Thomson's gazelle munched the tender grass at the edge of the brand-new airstrip near Governor's Camp. They glanced up frequently but didn't seem to see the cheetah that eased forward slowly in the freshly-cut drainage ditch. Patiently moving a few inches at a time, at infrequent intervals, the hungry cat was still a bit too far for his species' classic rush to be a sure bet on such uneven terrain.

It seemed that his third serious stalk in an hour was his third flop in that hour when all but one of the Tommies, with tails wagging furiously and necks craning with concern, noticed the cheetah ears poking up through the grass and decided quickly to add another 50 meters to the 100 already separating them from the possible danger. A few minutes later, the one that remained jerked his head up suddenly and looked all around.

"Oh well," I sighed, "here comes an airplane to mess up everything." As the plane's wheels scuffed the runway, the lone gazelle turned and faced the strange apparition. Decelerating past the cheetah's hiding place, the plane's passengers witnessed an incredible sight. The cheetah bounded forward and caught the distracted Tommy with ease.

I wondered, as the plane taxied toward the cheetah—who was holding the kicking victim by the throat—if the newly-arrived tourists realized what a unique occurrence they were witnessing. Perhaps they simply assumed that everyone sees such things on safari in Kenya.

For my wife Lida and I this event was "good data." Though we have seen many dozens of spectacular kills in our hundreds of hours watching cheetahs this was the first, and possibly the only time, we would see a kill made under these circumstances. It was also the first time we'd seen tourists "game-driving" in an airplane! Recently a pilot reported seeing a cheetah with a kill near this air-strip, and we've seen this particular individual and also another lone female with kills within 200 metres of the strip whilst it was being constructed.

While the visitors fumbled for packed-away cameras, the life ebbed from the gazelle, and the cheetah scanned the horizon and panted.

"He will never manage to eat this one," Lida lamented. "Every vehicle in camp will be here shortly, not to mention several more planes."

Visitation was fairly light at first, since it was lunch-time for human beings as well. But later in the afternoon it was apparent that word had got around. Also, five more planes landed and three took off. Some pilots apparently

didn't spot the cheetah upon landing, as the vehicles that picked them up didn't even come over, and the plane behaved "naturally." At one point the cheetah dragged the carcass closer to the airstrip, in order to ease the searing mid-day heat by utilizing the meager shade of a strip-marker about 25 metres from the edge of the tarmac. Six hours after the kill, nothing remained but the large bones—and one presumably contented cheetah with a very distended belly.

Since we are trying to evaluate the effects of human activities on the cheetahs in Masai Mara Game Reserve, an incident that turned out so well for both cheetah and man is of course heartening. Often cheetahs in the reserve are chased almost relentlessly throughout the day by tourist vehicles. Outside the reserve there is man afoot to watch out for as well. Often



Cheetah carrying her cub.

Cheetah and Man

continued



Wanted!

David and Lida Burney are seeking old photographs of cheetahs in or near Masai Mara Game Reserve, in order to investigate the age and kinship of individuals they are studying.

While researching *The Effects of Human Activities on Cheetahs in the Mara*, they have distinguished many cheetahs by the unique arrangement of the rings and spots on their tails. Only photographs that show the end of the tail clearly are useful, but they may be on any type of film and from any period from the early Colonial days to the present.

Persons wishing to assist are requested to send or take their pictures to the East African Wild Life Society, Box 20110 Nairobi. They will be copied and returned promptly. Please include the year and approximate location of the photographic encounter with the cheetah, if known.



car appears on the scene, he will flee for cover at high speed.

At dawn one morning I scanned the area around camp with binoculars, as I often do, and saw no cheetahs but only herds of antelope, buffaloes, giraffes, ostriches and the other usual sightings. I then set up the telescope, feeling unusually persistent, and scanned some more at 20X. Although it is time-consuming to do so, this method can sometimes reveal cheetahs if the view is from a fairly elevated spot and the grass is short.

There he was, under a bush at about 290 metres! We had tea and breakfast on top of the Land-Cruiser

for a better vantage point. Still parked by the tents, we observed him—and he observed us. From the time I luckily spotted him until the first car arrived at the gate, he spent most of that peaceful quarter hour looking toward the camp and the nearby ranger post.

While the driver of this first vehicle took care of the business of paying entrance fees to the park ranger, the large, exceedingly pale-coloured cheetah, stood up and revealed that he was a male with the *Phantom's* distinct pattern of black, white, and tan on the tail.

Before the vehicle could get through the gate, still over 250 metres from the well-concealed cheetah, he bounded the 50 metres or so to the road, crossed and disappeared on the other side into some high grass and scattered bushes. The vehicle went on up the road, oblivious to the prime viewing opportunity so barely missed. The driver stopped just beyond, though, when she saw "the cheetah people" driving up the road behind.

"Do you see something?" called our friend as we pulled up alongside. We explained, and everyone scanned hard for the now invisible mystery cat. A few minutes later they gave up and continued on towards Serena Lodge. Several minutes afterwards I realized why we couldn't find him—he had moved to a point halfway up the Oloo-lolo Escarpment, and was resting (a bit smugly it seemed) in the shade of a tree among boulders. Even though we stayed put, he watched us most of the time. Then, as another car chugged up the road, he did a very un-cheetah-like thing. With all the confidence of a leopard and considerably more speed, he bounded farther up the precipitous hillside, stopped for a short breather in the shade of another tree, scent-marked the trunk, then climbed on. The people in the car climbed out and switched drivers, but failed to notice the cheetah.

Near the summit he paused somewhat longer, looked back at three minibuses passing on the road, scent-marked two more trees, then disappeared over the top, leaving the reserve and entering an area of patchy forest and bush where Masai only infrequently graze their sheep and goats.

The closest we've ever seen a tourist vehicle get to him was a time many months ago that a group of minibus-drivers chased and outflanked him on very open ground, getting within 50 metres of the fleeing cheetah for a few seconds before he darted into some very thick bush and once again became invisible.

The *Phantom* and the airport male always show the sort of contrasting reaction to tourists illustrated by these two examples. Three females with cubs we have studied in detail are very tolerant of approach by tourist vehicles.

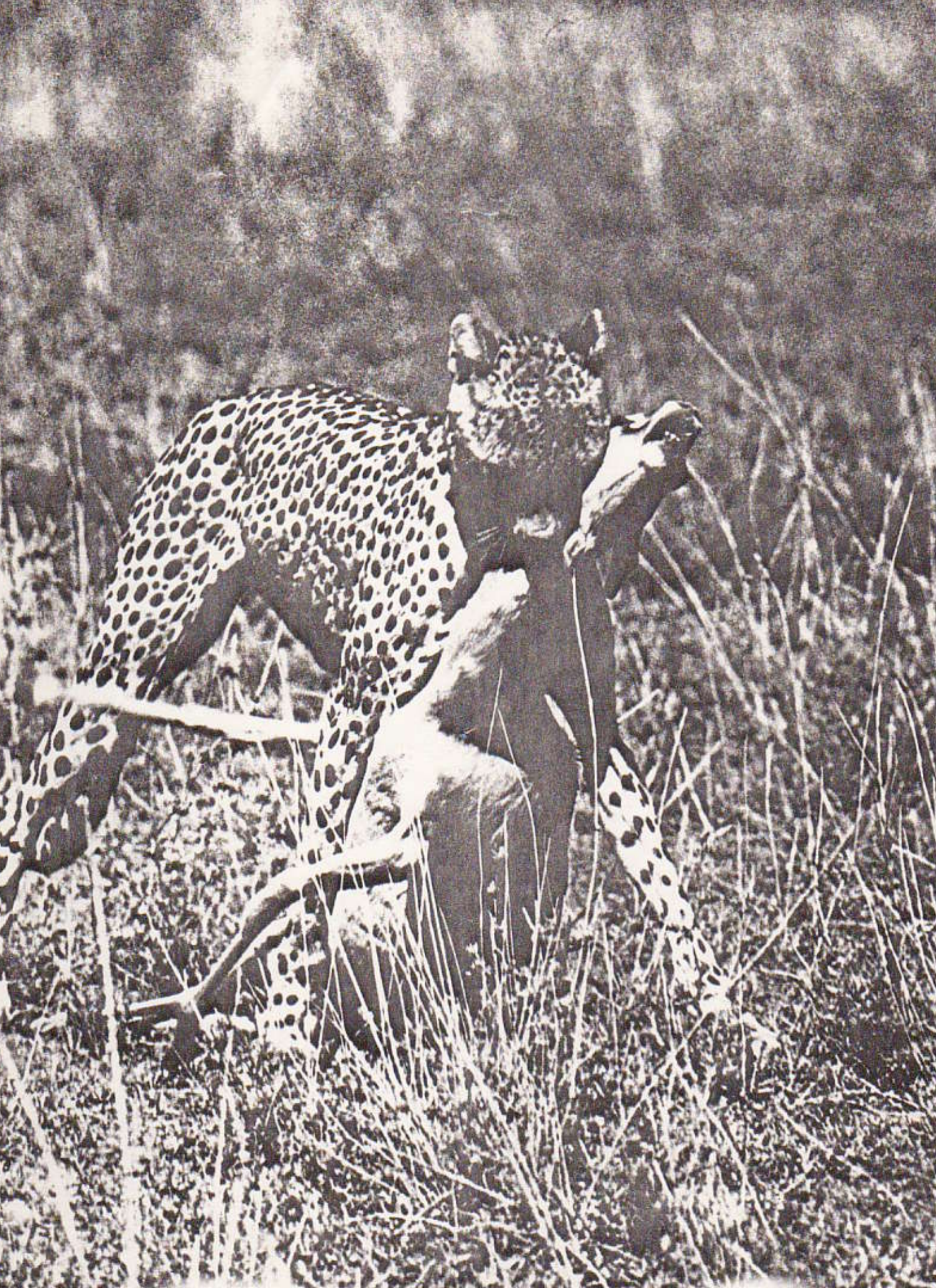
other animals such as lions, hyenas, leopards, and even baboons may complicate their lives. Sometimes we cannot help worrying about the rare and vulnerable cheetahs whose lives we have observed hour after hour, day after day for almost a year now since the beginning of my postgraduate research at the University of Nairobi.

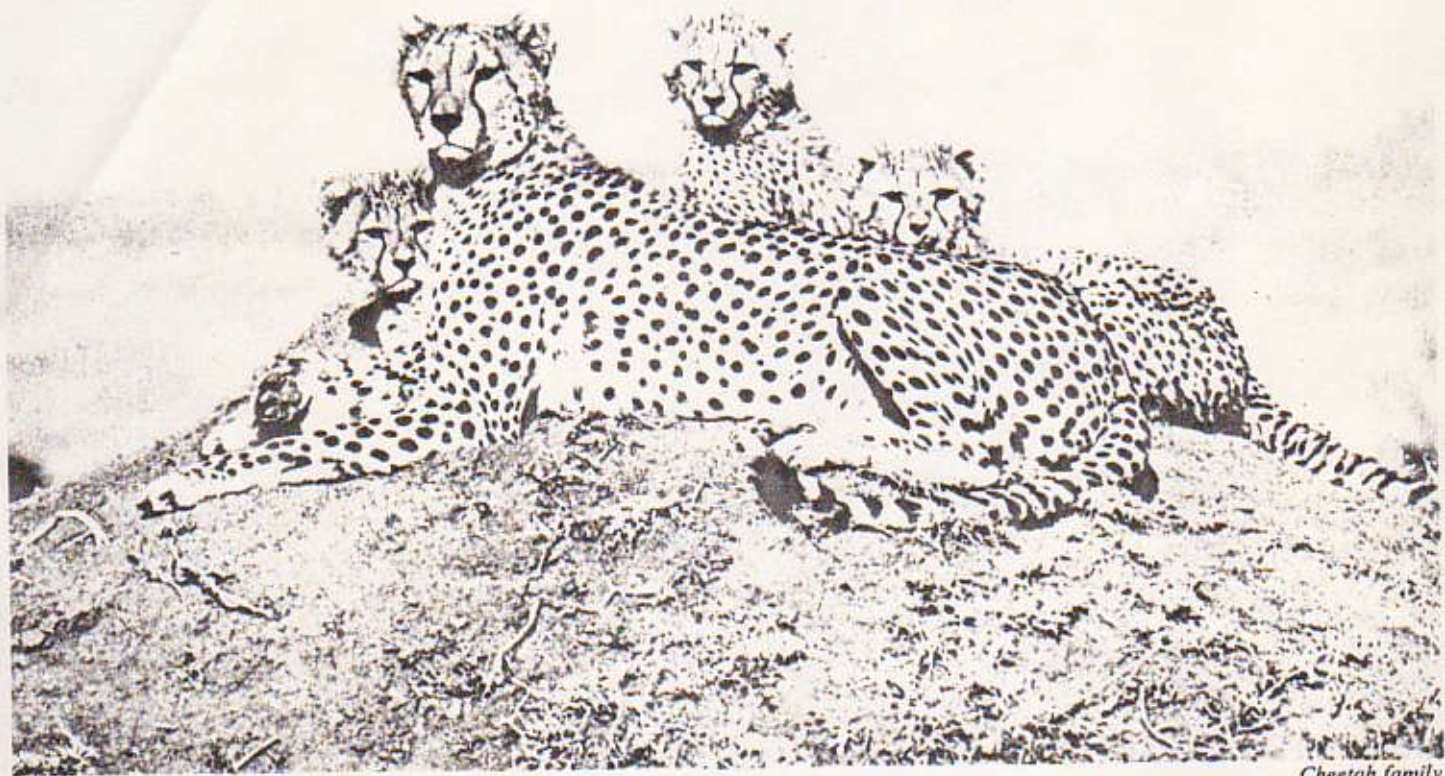
But is the cheetah vulnerable? Is it rare, for that matter, given the habitat limitations? These and more questions have followed us daily, as we follow the cheetahs and record in detail the behaviour and movements of the many individuals we have come to know not only by physical markings, but in some cases by behavioural characteristics as well.

One of the most striking generalizations to come from our observations of the 30 cheetahs we know best (we can account for about 60 in the reserve and the surrounding Narok District) is that different cheetahs vary remarkably in their typical response to tourist vehicles.

To get some notion of the extent and import of this difference, consider the case of another adult male, who frequents the Oloo-lolo area in the north-western corner of the reserve and adjacent Masailand. Regarding his attitude about vehicles, he is at the other end of the behavioural spectrum from the male by the airstrip. We jokingly refer to him as the *Phantom*. Ever since first encountering this shy individual in August, 1978, we have periodically seen him in the 20 square miles that includes our camp and its vast 'front garden'—the northern tip of the Mara Triangle.

We watch him, and other cheetahs as well, from the greatest distance that topography and vegetation allow, often with a telescope at 300 metres in short-grass situations. Unlike most of our study regulars, he will frequently look at us even at such distances. If another





Cheetah family

LIDA PIGOTT BURNEY



In these two photographs we see one of the natural hazards of the cheetah's life style. Only a few minutes after making a kill the cheetah are driven off by a hyena; now they will have to hunt again.

LIDA PIGOTT BURNEY



medium distance (50-70 metres) from minibuses driven directly toward her at high speed. The fifth seems peculiar indeed: she flees at an average distance longer than any individual except the *Phantom* himself. Her two 5-month-old cubs are almost as tame as other cubs, and are often momentarily left behind with the tourists, sometimes until mama flees to cover and calls them to her.

Many conservationists are concerned about the cheetahs' future, even inside protected areas, because of the apparent disturbing effects the tourist vehicles have on their lives. Our data indicates that heavy tourist visitation lowers their hunting success. If there are plenty of small-to-medium-sized antelope within one-half kilometre or so, however, a harassed cheetah will generally manage to kill one, often during the midday hours or another time of the day when no tourists are visiting.

Often kills are made by the tamer individuals when cars are present, especially if the cars remain stationary during the last tense moments of the hunt. We cannot help feeling frustrated for the cheetah when, after two or three days without eating (seldom more), a mother cheetah, about to sprint toward an unsuspecting easy meal, is interrupted—as a driver, probably at the insistence of his passengers, moves up quickly to five metres from the cheetah to “get a great picture.” They prey is alerted by the car and moves cautiously away as the cheetah eases back on its haunches and waits again. When we see hungry cubs mill about or just stare, we have to keep reminding each other that the tourist and the carnivore are dependent on each other, that the former finances the preservation of the latter.

We have both worked in large parks in the United States for many years, and fully realize how difficult management situations can be—especially when two species are involved, and one of them is *Homo sapiens*. There are many factors to be carefully weighed, the welfare of the natural system and its living components being the foremost consideration.

Flight distances from tourist vehicles and responses to driver behaviours are of course only two of the many things that must be looked into in this project. There are several other human activities that the cheetah must cope with. Equally important, the cheetah gives many more clues to what's going on in side its not-so-large brain than just jumping up and running away.

MAN'S MANY GUISES

Since the cheetah does not defend a fixed territory but instead wanders over a sizeable home range overlapping with those of other cheetahs, their nomadism may bring them into the vicinity of man in several guises. Inside

facilities that support them in such style. These structures are stationary, and animals soon learn to move accordingly. Such places produce garbage that attracts baboons and hyenas to some extent, perhaps making the vicinity generally unsuitable for cheetahs, although we have seen several individuals as close as 200 metres to such camps.

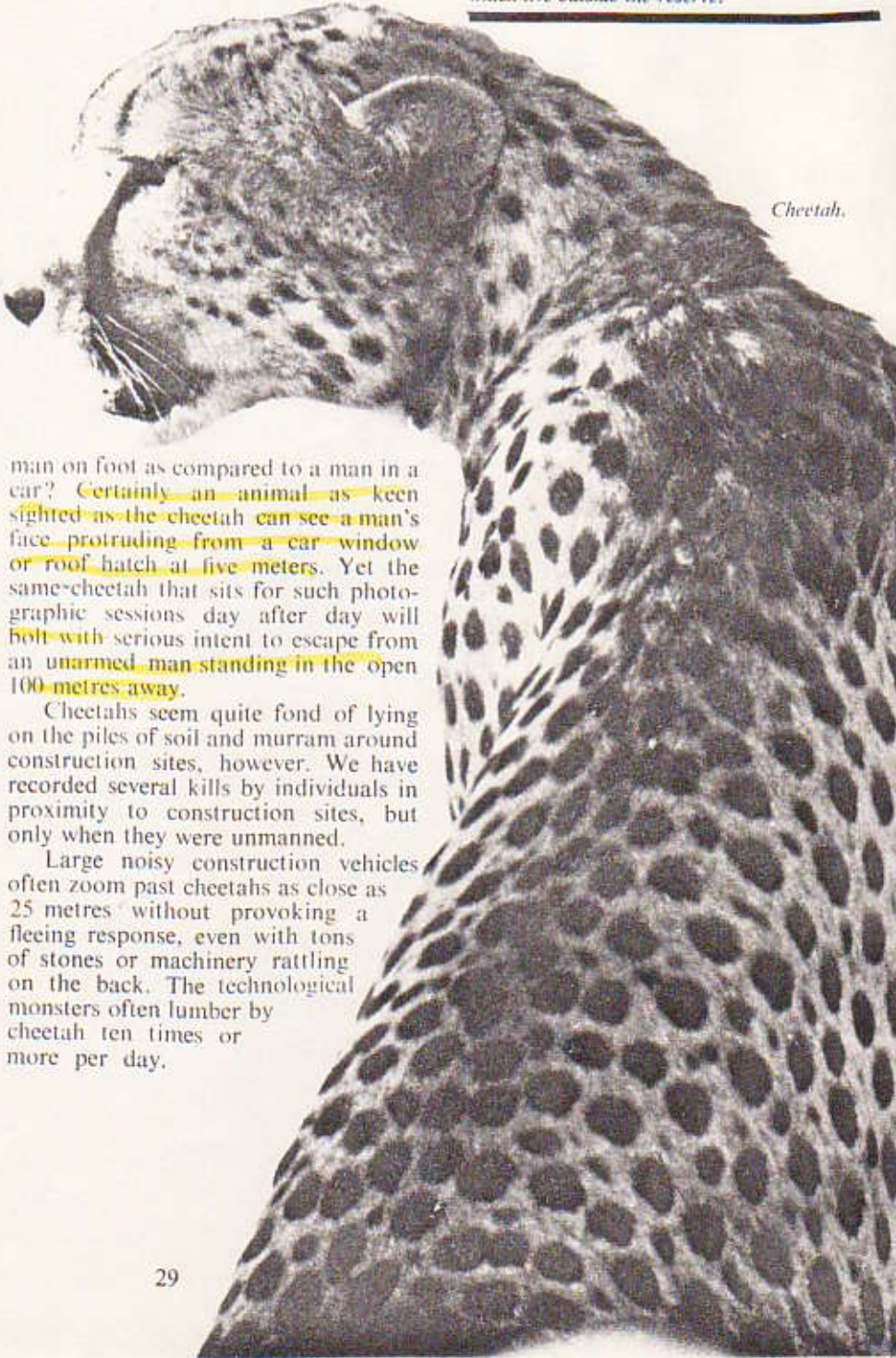
Another human activity very noticeable in the Mara in recent years is construction work such as road-building and maintenance, airstrip construction, campsite establishment and expansion, and other projects. The primary direct impact such things seem to have on cheetahs is short-lived indeed. It consists of causing them to flee, at considerably greater distances from workers on foot around the site than from tourist vehicles, usually of the order of five to ten times as far.

What is so fear-inspiring about a

Poaching incidents, another possible human interference, probably occur in the Mara far less frequently than in such parks as Tsavo and Meru. Cheetah skins bring a return far below leopard skins, rhino horn and ivory. The cheetahs' vigilance and speed, coupled with a total lack of interest in stale meat, prevent them from being likely targets for poachers, although a few cases have been recorded elsewhere in Kenya.

Even the least accessible parts of the reserve have a fair amount of tourist traffic in the dry season, but the tourists' presence is extremely limited in rainier periods. Thus the areas with the least visible human influence are possibly the areas with the greatest potential for fatal encounters with poachers.

This article will be concluded in our next issue when the Burneys will write on the cheetah which live outside the reserve.



Cheetah.

man on foot as compared to a man in a car? Certainly an animal as keen sighted as the cheetah can see a man's face protruding from a car window or roof hatch at five meters. Yet the same cheetah that sits for such photographic sessions day after day will bolt with serious intent to escape from an unarmed man standing in the open 100 metres away.

Cheetahs seem quite fond of lying on the piles of soil and murrum around construction sites, however. We have recorded several kills by individuals in proximity to construction sites, but only when they were unmanned.

Large noisy construction vehicles often zoom past cheetahs as close as 25 metres without provoking a fleeing response, even with tons of stones or machinery rattling on the back. The technological monsters often lumber by cheetah ten times or more per day.