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Abstract: The cheetah, fastest of the world's land animals, is racing toward extinction. One or another of man's desires have harassed many species into oblivion, but the cheetah is getting what seems to be special extermination treatment. It is being trapped for its value alive, shot for the value of its fur, poisoned because it supposedly kills livestock, occasionally hunted for "sport", made homeless through the loss of its habitat, and starved through the loss of its prey's habitat.

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COVER *Cheetah by Fleming B. Fuller*

National Parks & Conservation Association, established in 1919 by Stephen Mather, the first Director of the National Park Service, is an independent, private, nonprofit, public-service organization, educational and scientific in character. Its responsibilities relate primarily to protecting the national parks and monuments of America, in which it endeavors to cooperate with the National Park Service while functioning as a constructive critic, and to protecting and restoring the whole environment. Life memberships are \$500. Annual membership dues, including subscription to National Parks & Conservation Magazine, are: \$100 sustaining, \$50 supporting, \$15 contributing, and \$10 associate. Student memberships are \$5. Single copies are \$1. Contributions and bequests are needed to carry on our work. Dues in excess of \$10 and contributions are deductible from federal taxable income, and gifts and bequests are deductible for federal gift and estate tax purposes. Mail membership dues, correspondence concerning subscriptions or changes of address, and postmaster notices or undeliverable copies to Association headquarters in Washington. When changing address, please allow six weeks' advance notice and include old address (send address label from latest issue) along with new address. Advertising rates and circulation data are available on request from the Advertising Manager in Washington.

THE CHEETAH, FASTEST OF THE WORLD'S land animals, is racing toward extinction. One or another of man's desires have harassed many species into oblivion, but the cheetah is getting what seems to be special extermination treatment. It is being trapped for its value alive, shot for the value of its fur, poisoned because it supposedly kills livestock, occasionally hunted for "sport," made homeless through the loss of its habitat, and starved through the loss of its prey's habitat. It would be difficult to think of another reason for persecuting these lithesome spotted cats. Certainly they do not threaten man's safety; they have never been known to attack man unless cornered, a situation in which *any* animal fights back.

Among the African big cats the cheetah is approaching extinction the fastest. In 1965 the East Africa Wild Life Society conducted a cheetah survey. The report estimated that only about 2,000 cheetahs still remained in all of East Africa, one of the animal's strongholds, and their numbers seemed to be declining. Despite their long association with man, relatively little is known of the ecology and behavior of this elegant feline. I felt it important to acquire knowledge that could prove helpful in preserving the species, so I went to East Africa to study the cheetah in the wild. I wanted to determine the reasons for the cheetah's decline and the steps that should be taken to ensure its survival.

The cheetah once was widely distributed throughout most of Africa except in the arid desert and heavy rain forests. It was also common in the Middle East and southern Asia. It is now nearly extinct in Asia and the Middle East, and it is rare in much of south and north Africa. There may still be remnant populations in West Africa in the area around Kano, Nigeria; in north-central Africa in the vicinity of Fort Lami; and around the southern borders of Lake Chad. The Sudan probably has a respectable number in Bahr El Ghazel Province. Farther east, cheetahs have disappeared from areas of former abundance in Ethiopia and are believed greatly reduced in Somalia. Tom Foose of the University of Chicago recently returned from a general reconnaissance of Angola. He spent nearly three months in the wildlife preserves of Angola and other countries in southern Africa without seeing a single cheetah! He told me that one warden in Angola remembered seeing only two cheetahs in a decade whereas at one time they were much more common. The only remaining cheetah stronghold outside East Africa is South West Africa, but this is also the major recent source of live cheetah exportation, and population trends are not being monitored.

In many languages the cheetah goes under names that translate as "the hunting leopard." With the exception of the dog, the cheetah shares the longest association of hunting with man; and, like dogs, cheetahs are easily tamed and handled. The early Egyptians used cheetahs for coursing game. They took each new generation from the wild, as cheetahs did not breed in captivity. The constant removal of potentially reproductive animals from populations, along with natural mortality, probably contributed to an early decline of the cheetah in northern Africa. Thousands of cheetahs in Asia were captured and used by the Mongol rulers on their deer-hunting expeditions, according to Marco Polo. The use of hunting cheetahs became a pastime that proved tasteful to European rulers and those of Asia Minor as well. From the courts of the Turkish

CHEE

Randal



CHEETAH

L. Eaton



PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR EXCEPT AS NOTED

sultan to the hunting lodges of the German emperor at Vienna, cheetahs were tamed for hunting everywhere after the sixteenth century. The sport of hunting with cheetahs in India reached such proportions that when cheetahs were near extinction early in this century, the supply was maintained with African-caught cheetahs. A demand in Asia for hunting cheetahs still exists.

In modern times, man's inroads on cheetahs have taken several forms:

- There is a continuing demand for live cheetahs to be trained for hunting or to be displayed in zoos. More recently, cheetahs have become status pets in the United States and other affluent countries. These cheetahs still come from the wild, as captive cheetah breeding has hardly begun.

- Agricultural development has conflicted with cheetahs wherever they still survive. Their own habitat has been altered, and their prey species have been displaced, undercutting their food supply. In addition, proximity to livestock has led to charges, most of them exaggerated, that cheetahs have been raiding the herds, and cheetahs have therefore been trapped and killed.

- Cheetah fur, like that of most other spotted cats, commands good prices. Though it is against the law in East Africa to kill cheetahs for fur, it is done.

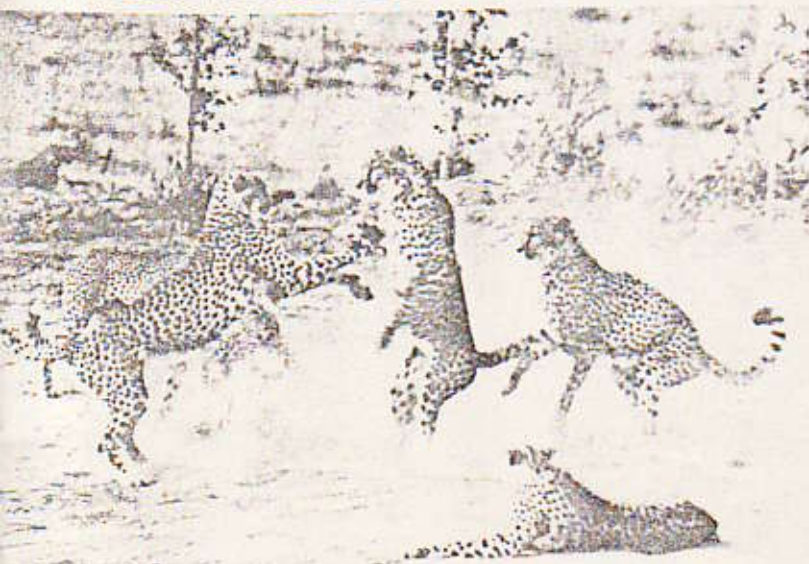
The demand for wild-caught adult cheetahs is damaging to populations in several ways. For every cheetah trapped, tamed, and trained successfully, several die in the process. If cheetahs were good breeders in captivity, as are lions, for example, then they would be much more abundant today. But cheetahs are *not* good breeders in captivity; men have been taking them out of the wild for thousands of years and consequently have maintained a continuing drain on wild numbers. Even in the wild, breeding can be difficult. Cheetahs, unlike lions and wolves, lack "baby-sitters." The cheetah female raises her young by herself, not in a group of adults that help care for the cubs. If a female lion is killed or removed, her cubs may still survive in the care of the pride. A cheetah's cubs will die. In one case that I observed, a female cheetah in Nairobi National Park suddenly disappeared. Her cubs, half-grown and not yet able to kill on their own, waited several hours for their mother to return. When she did not, the cubs panicked, running this way and that. They were not yet skilled in capturing prey and so could not survive.

All young cheetahs exported abroad come from the wild. South West Africa and East Africa are the only remaining parts of the cheetah's once great range in which a supply is available to animal dealers. Poachers in Kenya told me that live cheetahs are worth great sums of money in Ethiopia, which, according to them, is the center for exporting black-market cheetahs to other countries. Somalia is equally if not more important in the illegal spotted cat trade.

More recently a demand has been put on younger cheetahs for pets. One has but to visit southern Florida or California to see or hear of so-and-so's cheetah. While I was in Palm Beach recently, I talked with a local veterinarian who told me of the frequent purchases of cheetahs there. He said that many of them die shortly after arriving in this country. His more wealthy clientele simply have



Young cheetahs stay with their mother until almost full-grown, above. Threat behavior, below, and fighting over females, bottom, are phenomena now rarely observable in the wild; there are too few cheetahs left for many social interactions to take place. (These are captive cheetahs.)



them replaced. Cheetahs are available in this country from animal dealers for \$1,500 to \$2,000. In southern California there are many privately owned cheetahs. They are a status symbol, much like owning a leopard or cheetah coat is.

The World Pet Society is made up of many cheetah owners. Though they profess to be striving to breed cheetahs in captivity, most of them are not willing to allow their pets to mate. The group sought my advice on how to increase breeding success, but I found that many of the members were hesitant in placing their cheetahs together in fear that they might injure each other. They seemed to be worried not so much about the health of the cheetahs as about possibly decreased attractiveness due to wounds or scars! For persons who own cheetahs to be more concerned with their individual pet's appearance than with the survival of the species is incredible.

One of the Palm Beach veterinarian's wealthier clients, who had lost two cubs, became interested in supporting research to enable the breeding of cheetahs in captivity. This would help satisfy the demand of zoos and private citizens for live cheetahs and so slow down the trapping of wild cheetahs. More recently the Donner Foundation generously contributed to the cheetah-breeding program of the San Diego Zoo.

It was not until 1967 in Rome that a cheetah gave birth to cubs in captivity that did not have to be hand raised, although cheetahs have given birth in zoos several times. In the unnatural zoo environment mothers often ignore or kill their cubs, but even when they are hand raised many die. It is desirable to have the mother raise her own cubs. The cubs acquire natural immunities to disease through the mother's milk. Furthermore, the cubs grow up socialized to cheetahs and not to men. Thus when they are sexually mature they are much more likely to mate and properly raise, rather than reject, their own cubs.

Although there is still a large demand for live cheetahs in zoos and wildlife parks, the picture looks ever brighter in this regard. Lion Country Safari, a private wildlife park with sites in California and Florida, is attempting to breed cheetahs on a large scale. The San Diego Zoo also has launched a cheetah-breeding program. Both projects are only a few months old, but already San Diego has had success with the birth of a litter, and the Lion Country cheetahs are mating frequently. In time such efforts as these should prove successful.

The advent of more intensive agriculture in East Africa not only has prevented normal animal migrations and movements, necessary for maintaining habitat conditions, but also has cost predators their prey. The cheetah in India might have survived had it not been for the loss of grazing land for the blackbuck, the cheetah's major prey.

In South Africa, the decrease of prey with the advent of European development and farming techniques probably contributed as much to the decline of predatory species as did killing the predators themselves. As cheetahs are highly specialized for certain species of prey in East Africa, a decrease in these species is leading to a decline in cheetahs. The cheetah's status is comparable to that of the wolf in North America, which not only was shot, poisoned, and trapped, but whose prey populations also were decimated.

The cheetah is considered vermin in many areas of East Africa for its supposedly great threat to sheep, goats, and small calves. However, I observed several cheetahs that regularly hunted on Somali sheep lands, and they showed not the slightest interest in the sheep. The herdsmen told me that they never had trouble with *enduma* (Swahili for cheetah) though they saw cheetahs daily on their ground. An occasional cheetah may damage livestock, as sometimes occurs with an unusual wolf or coyote; but it is certainly not a common occurrence.

Kenya's laws allow, however, that if a cheetah is killed for damaging livestock, it can be sold for its fur. A visitor to Nairobi will notice that the tourist shops are full of cheetah furs—whole, or on wristwatch bands, hatbands, handbags, and so on. These furs come from cheetahs that supposedly attacked domestic animals. No steps are taken to establish whether stock losses actually occurred, but the amount seems much exaggerated.

One animal dealer catches cheetahs in South West Africa and has supplied a great number to individuals and zoos in this country. His operation is successful because of a loophole clause in the laws protecting the cheetah. This clause states that any cheetah deprecating stock can be killed or live-trapped. The dealer in question has a broad network of connections with local farmers. When they enter a complaint, he live-traps the animal then sells it abroad. The farmer prefers having the cats taken alive because the dealer pays him more than he could get for shooting the cheetah and selling its skin. The sad thing is, of course, that most of the cheetahs are *not* damaging livestock.

A further man-cheetah "agricultural" conflict is brewing. Equatorial Africa has the richest mammalian fauna in the world. Bourlière, the French mammalogist, noted that "nowhere else in the world are there to be found so many species of wild ungulates, many of which have extremely large populations." Because of this great array of both individuals and species of wildlife, this area has great esthetic value.

In order to preserve the wildlife of Africa in the face of rapid population growth, many biologists have advocated the use of surpluses of natural animal populations for food rather than attempting to replace the wild animals with domestic livestock. It is claimed that more protein may be obtained per acre by cropping the wild fauna than by attempting to raise domesticated cattle.

How will the predators conflict with this so-called "game ranching"? This question is vital to the continued survival of the large predators. The use of wild protein sources may result in a demand for killing large predators. Man will be cropping the wild herds, thereby replacing the natural role of large predators in the community. When men take a predominantly economic concern for meat-producing wildlife, they will regard predators as vermin. Game ranching, if it becomes widespread, may do wonders for preserving the hoofed game, but may be devastating to the predators. Tourists may be the predators' saviors. Visits by tourists will provide additional income to large game ranchers. The ranchers would do a much greater business if predators were present for observation and photography.

The special fascination of the carnivores would offset loss of income from predation on hoofed game.

The cheetah survey recorded a mere eight cheetahs known to be poached in East Africa, but certainty poaching is taking a far greater toll. Though it is illegal anywhere in East Africa to kill cheetahs for fur, the demand in the United States and elsewhere for women's garments led to the illegal killing of cheetahs for the black-market fur industry. The new Endangered Species Protection Act does *not* protect the cheetah, but the recent moratorium on spotted cat furs by the International Fur Traders Federation is encouraging and long overdue. This should help considerably to ease poacher pressure on cheetahs.

Poachers told me that cheetah furs brought them 50 American dollars in Kenya and that they killed from one to six animals each time they went into northern Kenya after them. The most damaging poachers are European or Asian, as they use firearms and vehicles to run down and kill cheetahs. Because the cheetah inhabits the more open areas, poaching by natives using traps, snares, or primitive weapons is not substantial.

Cheetahs once were hunted in India as game animals. In Africa they have been shot for sport; for example, Teddy Roosevelt related that Kermit killed seven cheetahs in one day—a record. Several safari hunting firms included cheetahs in their bag, and they were taken by most game hunters in South Africa in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The cheetah survey reported only 16 cheetahs shot in East Africa. However, this figure is much too low. It does not, for instance, include those shot by farmers.

Cheetahs are outlawed as game in most African countries today. Furthermore, they are not now considered as desirable trophies by most hunters. Therefore it is doubtful

Cheetahs are born with dark coats and a mantle of long, grey fur that is lost at about three months of age.



LOUISE BUCKNELL

that sport hunting remains an important mortality factor. However, I was appalled on several occasions when speaking with big-game hunters in Africa and America to hear these sportsmen say that they had shot cheetahs illegally while on safari.

Man's only hope for holding on to an esthetically precious part of his environment is to stress the value of *all* wildlife. As in North America, South Africa's once great wildlife legacy now exists only in a few national parks and preserves. The same condition seems likely for East Africa. However, in an unstable political and economic environment, the continuation and wise management of wildlife even in national parks is tenuous. Parks such as Serengeti in Tanzania and Nairobi National Park in Kenya that require small area extensions to make them closed ecosystems—areas that can support wildlife the year round—are fighting losing battles. This is so even though tourist visitation continues to increase annually.

An encouraging contribution to the long-term survival of *all* wildlife is the increasing tourism by Europeans and Americans, for example in East Africa. The fastest growing income in Kenya is in the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, second only to agriculture. Although dollar signs cannot be placed on esthetic values, the economic importance of wildlife in East Africa, hopefully, will ensure its survival there.

Several underdeveloped African countries have failed to recognize the value of their wildlife. Though temporarily experiencing short-term success through overexploitation, they are headed for long-term failure. Somalia, Mozambique, and Angola, to mention a few, have witnessed serious declines in populations of many wildlife species that are attractive to tourists. Though a few game preserves and national parks exist on paper, they are poorly funded and inadequately managed. Walking along a road in the Angolan sanctuary for the greater sable antelope—a magnificent but endangered species—Tom Foose found eight leopard traps within a distance of only five miles! Preserves and national parks can be managed properly and more than pay their own operational expenses.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) recently has established a Cat Specialist Group in their Survival Service Commission. The group held its first meeting at the International Symposium on Ecology, Behavior, and Conservation of the World's Cats in March 1971. Lion Country Safari, National Parks and Conservation Association, and the World Wildlife Fund sponsored the Symposium. The meeting was the first worldwide step toward conserving the cheetah and other felines. The unanimous resolution of the attending scientists and 40 conservation groups was to urge the federal government to "back up the efforts of state governments in banning the importation and sale of skins and products from the wild cats of any country of the world."

The IUCN has given top priority to the cheetah and leopard in Africa, and soon questionnaires will be sent out for a broad survey of the situation. As a followup to the questionnaire survey, I will conduct field studies to determine the status and population trends of cheetahs in several areas. Eventually it is hoped that a continent-wide field survey of the cheetah can be made. The IUCN and the

World Wildlife Fund, both in Morges, Switzerland, depend on donations from private individuals and organizations to carry out these and other needed surveys of endangered wildlife species. The sooner the funds required to conduct field surveys materialize, the sooner steps can be instituted to preserve threatened cats. Oddly enough the cheetah and leopard studies are being sponsored by the International Fur Traders Federation!

Several other things need to be done immediately if we are to stop the decline of cheetahs, to ensure their continued survival, and, hopefully, to see them reintroduced in their former ranges:

- Encourage the practice of successful breeding of the many presently captive cheetahs. This would provide a source of cats for zoos and private individuals. Eventually it would permit the restocking of cheetahs where they are now extinct or may become so.

- Discourage illegal killing and sale of cheetah fur under the guise of stock damage by encouraging the African nations to employ government trappers on a complaint basis for removing and relocating any cheetahs that are really causing damage. Or an effective system of compensating farmers and graziers losing livestock might be established.

- Encourage African governments to extend national parks to make them closed ecosystems so as to prevent prey and their predators from leaving the parks and becoming susceptible to poaching.

- Encourage African governments to provide enough funds to protect all wildlife from poaching within preserves and national parks.

- Encourage women all over the world to stop buying products made from spotted cats.

- Encourage other nations to declare a moratorium on spotted cat furs.

- Encourage the U.S. Department of Interior to adopt the resolution of the first International Symposium on Ecology, Behavior, and Conservation of the World's Cats.

The largest single threat to all wildlife, not only cheetahs, is the expanding human population. As people require more land for living space and food, less land will remain to support wildlife. Even if man can survive under more densely populated conditions, the quality of his life will deteriorate as wild animals disappear. Wild places and creatures are important to man. They show us that there is more to life and the universe than our own selfish concerns. ■

Randall L. Eaton has been involved in wildlife research and conservation since high school. He has received training in biology, animal behavior, and wildlife conservation and presently is a doctoral candidate in ethology at Purdue University. For his master's degree he carried out a field study of cheetahs in East Africa. His doctoral thesis is on lion and cheetah social behavior. He organized the International Symposium on Ecology, Behavior, and Conservation of the World's Cats sponsored by NPCA and the World Wildlife Fund, and he is editing the proceedings for publication later this year.