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Abstract: In 1966 the tame cheetah "Beauty", belonging to Dr. Spinelli, gave birth to her second litter: three male cheetah cubs. The birth, the state of health and the development is described in details. The female came into oestrus again four months after the birth of the cubs.

second successful breeding of cheetahs

Acinonyx jubatus

in a private zoo

PIERO L. FLORIO & LUCIANO SPINELLI

40 via San Crescenziano, Rome, Italy

On 14 December 1966 three male cheetah cubs *Acinonyx jubatus* were born to the female cheetah, 'Beauty', in the private collection of animals belonging to Dr Luciano Spinelli. This was the cheetah's second litter. The first litter, which consisted of one male cub, 'Nick', was born on 13 January 1966 and the birth and rearing have already been described

in detail (Florio and Spinelli, 1967). These two litters are the first two recorded cases of cheetahs born in captivity being successfully reared by their mother.

As on the first occasion, two male cheetahs were borrowed from the Rome Zoo, with the kind co-operation of Professor Ermanno Bronzini, the director of the zoo, and were introduced to the female when she was in oestrus on 14 September 1966. The male cheetahs were about 10 years old at the time of mating and the female 4 years 7 months old. Contrary to her behaviour when introduced to the males on the previous occasion, the female did not have any defensive reactions. She immediately seemed to recognise the males and they all began to play together very excitedly. It is Dr Spinelli's opinion that cheetahs are more likely to mate successfully if more than one male is present, since they help excite each other. Mating was not observed and probably took place at night. All three cheetahs remained very excited for three or four days. They then quietened down, though the female still appeared ready to play with them. They were left together for 20 days.

The female did not come into oestrus again following the period spent with the two male cheetahs. The first signs of pregnancy were not noticed until about 40 days after the presumed date of mating (14 to 18 September when the cheetahs were in their most excited state). The signs of pregnancy were increased appetite and swelling of the abdomen. The first signs of mammary development were noticed about 10 days before the birth. At no stage of the pregnancy was the female at all aggressive.

The birth occurred on 14 December 1966 from 0935 hours to 1020 hours, after a gestation period of 91 to 92 days (calculated from the first or second day of the female's introduction to the males). On the evening of 13 December 'Beauty' had appeared particularly friendly and kept calling to Dr Spinelli. He decided to spend the night with her in the cage. She slept quietly with her head in his lap and since by the morning there was still no sign that birth was imminent, he left the cage. At about 0900 hours he passed in front of her cage and she called to him very excitedly. He looked inside the den and noticed that labour contractions had started. The birth was much quicker and more straightforward than on the first occasion. The first cub was born at 0935 hours, the second at 1000 hours, and the third at 1020 hours. Thus the whole birth process took about 1½ hours, whereas the birth of only one cub on the first occasion lasted about two hours.

The three young were very lively and were already moving while they were still enclosed in the foetal membranes. The female broke the membranes with her teeth and they started suckling immediately. Immediately after the birth the female ate the foetal membranes and the placenta. She licked the cubs very thoroughly, but did not lick any area with special care.

The cubs weighed about 250–280 g at birth and measured about 25 cm in length from the tip of the nose to the root of the tail. (They were not weighed or measured accurately.) The first cub to be born, 'Rip', was slightly bigger than the other two, which were named 'Nembo' and 'Gero'. In appearance and colouration they resembled the cub of the first litter (see Florio and Spinelli, 1967), except that they were slightly smaller.

The female remained friendly towards Dr Spinelli after the birth and he could pick up the cubs at any time. For the first few days she was a little nervous towards other people, and so Mrs Spinelli did not go into the cage for two days and the Spinelli children for three days. She seemed slightly hostile when Dr Florio came to see the cubs on the fourth day.

The cubs vocalised soon after birth. They were able to crawl at two to three days of age, and they stood up unsteadily at 10 days. They walked at 16 days of age. Their eyes started opening after 10 days and were fully opened after 15 days. They were able to focus properly and recognise people at about 28 days. The umbilical cords, which were thinner than that of the first cub, dried and fell off after four to five days. The first teeth erupted at 20 days. On the whole the cub of the first litter seems to have been more precocious, despite the difficulties experienced after his birth (Florio and Spinelli, 1967).

The cubs started eating pieces of donkey meat left in the cage by the mother at the age of about one month. They were fully weaned at the age of five months. The ruff of hair on their backs disappeared when they were three months old.

At the age of three months the cubs were vaccinated against feline gastro-enteritis. They were given two immunisations with an interval of 10 days between each.

The female came into oestrus again four months after the birth of the cubs.

REFERENCE

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