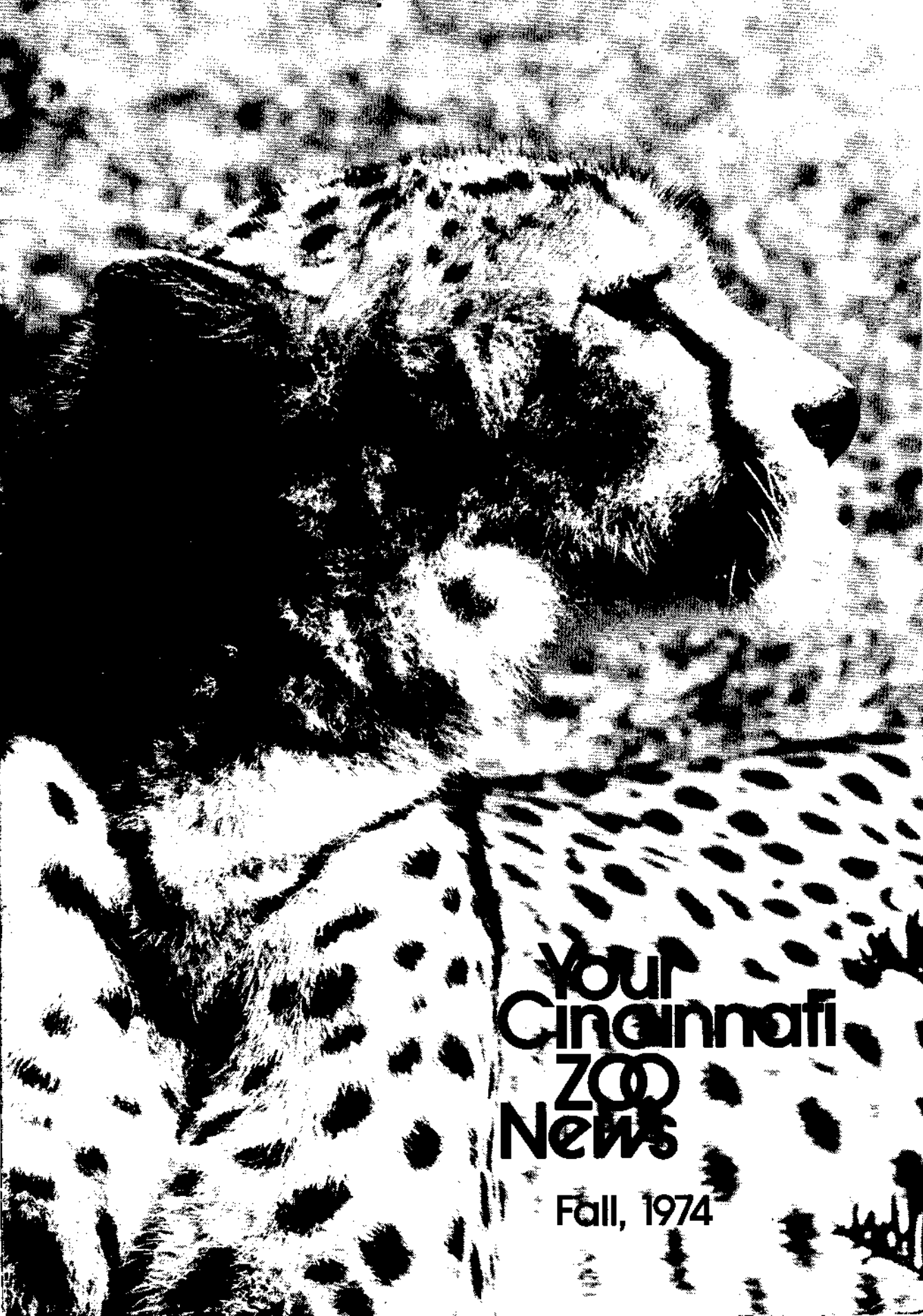


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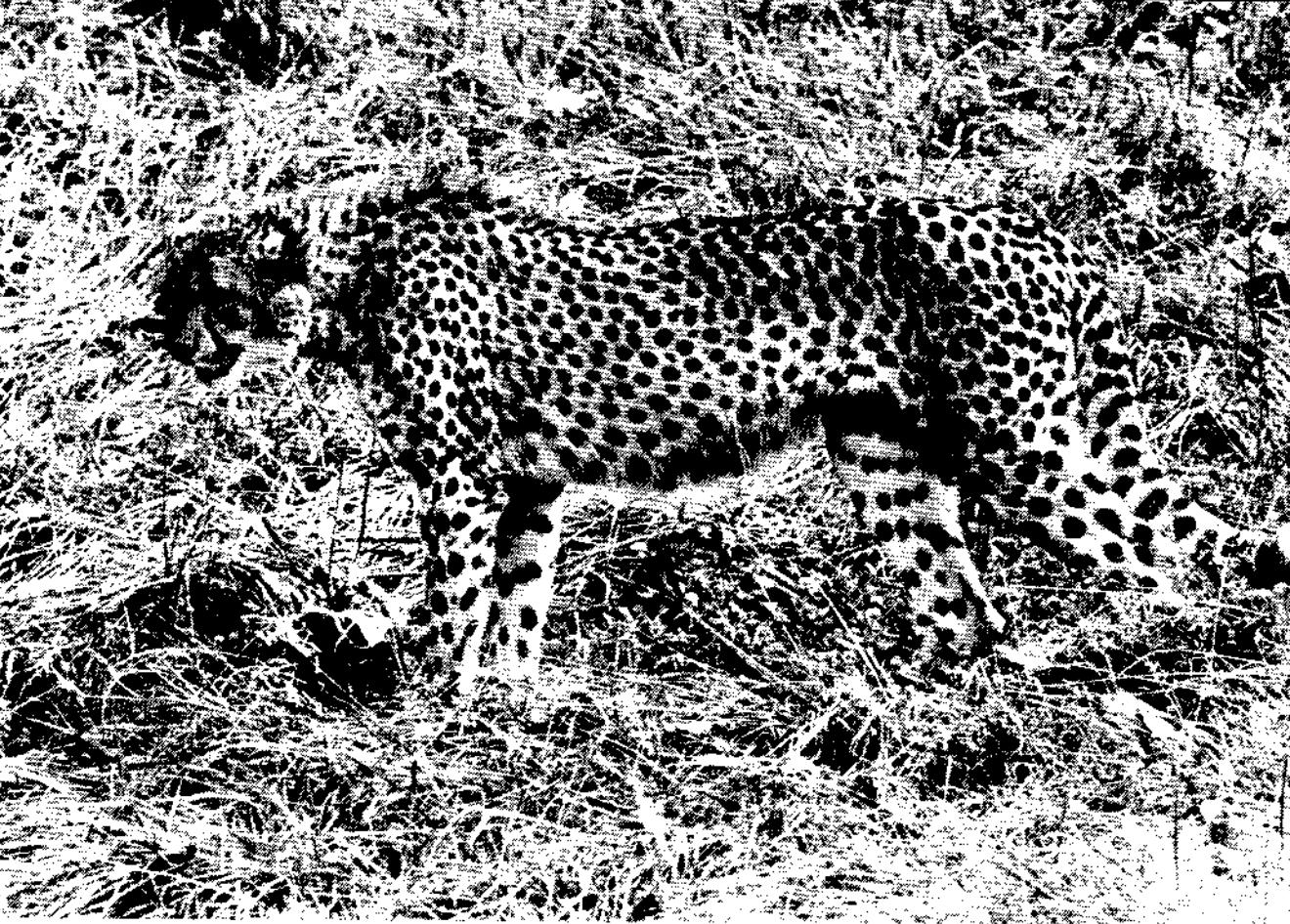
Keywords: 1Afr/45Asia/Acinonyx jubatus/cheetah/conservation/extinction/protection

Abstract: Indian potentates keeping cheetahs as pets, so did Mongol and European emperors as far back as the 5th Century. Today it is extinct throughout Asia. Human population growth will continue to deplete the already restrictive habitat requirements of the cheetah. Zoos must continue contributing to the saving to this species by deeds. More supervision and conservation measures are needed to protect the cheetah.



**Your
Cincinnati
ZOO
News**

Fall, 1974



In Africa or the Cincinnati Zoo? This photograph by John Moreau was taken in the Zoo's new ecologically designed cheetah cage.

"The Hunting Leopard"

By: Robert Lotshaw, Curator

In 1893 Richard Lydekker, in his 6 volume Royal Natural History series, wrote that from time immemorial tame hunting leopards have been kept by the native potentates of India as part of the royal state for the purpose of hunting the Indian black-buck (antelope) or other game. In this sport, writes Sir Samuel Baker, all persons excepting the keepers of the animals are simply spectators, and no interference is permitted. Each hunting leopard or *chita* occupies a peculiar cage which forms the body of a cart, drawn by two bullocks. When game is expected, the *chita* is taken from the cage, and occupies the outside seat upon the top, together with the keeper. The animal is blinded by a hood similar to that worn by a falcon, and it sits upright like a dog, with the master's arm around it, waiting to be released from the hood, which it fully understands is the signal that game is sighted.

Another account, quoted from Lydekker, claims that "the *chitas* that bound or spring upon their prey are not much esteemed, as they are too cunning; the good ones fairly run it down."

Lydekker also wrote of the hunting leopard that "it is generally known to Europeans as the *chita* (or cheetah), but since this name is applicable to the true leopard, its use is better avoided." Some individuals believed the hunting leopard a cross between a panther and a lioness, which of course is totally unfounded.

In addition to Indian potentates keeping cheetahs as pets, so did Mongol and European emperors as far back as the 5th Century.

Recently attempts were made to race cheetah in much the same fashion that greyhounds are raced for sport. This venture became hilarious, as Armand Denis relates in his book "Cats of the World," when the cheetahs



Photo by Ed Maruska

The cheetah's eyes are deep set to protect them from bright sunlight.

caught the electric hare and dismembered it, or refused to chase it when set at a speed too fast for them. When racing against greyhounds, the cheetah easily caught them and then leaped gracefully over them.

The anatomy of the cheetah indicates a specialization for speed, not strength. A small head with large nasal passages and lungs for heavy breathing, a sleek body, a long tail that helps maintain balance at high speeds, and non-retractile claws that no other feline possesses gives the cheetah good traction and quick turns when attempting to capture elusive prey. Cheetahs have been clocked in excess of 70 miles per hour over short distances.

Impala, Grant's gazelle and Thomson's gazelle are the primary food of the cheetah but zebra, warthog, hare and birds as large as ostrich have been preyed upon when their preference is not available.

Cheetah means "spotted one" in the Hindu language of India. It is believed to be of Asiatic origin as there have been no fossil remains of this cat unearthed in Africa. Yet this handsome feline is virtually extinct throughout Asia. It was last seen in India in 1951 when three were shot in one night and is almost certainly extinct in Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. It is seldom seen in Pakistan, Afganistan, and the southern desert area of Russia. In Iran, however, the cheetah is increasing in numbers due to enforced conservation measures.

The African race of cheetah, although not nearly as few in numbers as the Asiatic race, nevertheless has been severely reduced to less than 15,000 individuals. A small population exists in Egypt, Libya and Morocco. By far the greatest numbers are to be found south of the Sahara from Nigeria, Sudan and Somalia to South Africa. Human population growth will continue to deplete the already restrictive habitat requirements of the cheetah. The future is bleak indeed.

Zoos of the world are greatly disturbed that the wild cheetah population continues to decline despite efforts that have resulted in protective federal regulations. The International Fur Trade Federation in 1971 agreed to a three year membership ban on the use of cheetah furs. In addition the United Kingdom and the United States have completely prohibited the importation of the cheetah.

Unique among cats, the cheetah's claws are only semi-retractable.

Photo by Ed Maruska





The spacious natural setting of the Zoo's new cheetah cage should encourage breeding.

Photo by Ed Maruska

Zoos, too, must continue contributing to the saving of this species not by mere words but by deeds. Exhibiting cheetahs today is not enough. We must learn more and work harder to make cheetahs more prolific in captivity. The first cheetah birth in world zoos occurred in Philadelphia in 1956 and from then until 1970 only 25 cubs were born, most of them succumbing while very young.

From 1970-72 cheetah births in captivity nearly equaled the previous 14 years and with a higher survival rate. These few accomplishments are only stepping stones to what hopefully one day will be complete perpetuation of the cheetah in zoos. We must think, eat and sleep as a cheetah would to gain further beneficial information about this complex animal.

The Cincinnati Zoo has been wanting to do its share for years, but the problem in this particular instance has been one of space and not money. Where could a spacious outdoor, fence enclosed display be built that would afford cheetah security, freedom of movement and still be aesthetically appealing from the viewer's aspect. Such an area was found on a centrally located rolling hillside.

The exhibit would overlook the African veldt and many of the animals that are the natural prey of the cheetah. An ideal location!

The old adage "absence makes the heart grow fonder" definitely applies to the cheetah because separation of sexes from time to time and then reintroduction has proven to be a stimulant for courtship. Also, it has been discovered that the presence of more than one male cheetah in the courtship of an estrus female is a contributing factor. Finally, young adult compatible cats are preferred because it is this age group that has had the most reproductive success.

More supervision and conservation measures are needed to protect the cheetah. Poaching continues to be a monumental problem and more enforcement of the protective laws for the vastness of the cheetahs' range is needed. Also the condemnation of illegal hides must be dealt with on a total international basis, not solely by the United Kingdom and the United States.

Regardless of whether you refer to *Acinonyx jubatus* as cheetah or chita or hunting leopard, the fact remains it is hanging by a thread of life in the balance of nature. We must not allow a final curtain call.