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Abstract: Observation of a mother cheetah with five approximately one month old cubs. After one month the mother started teaching the cubs to hunt. The cheetah faces many problems. Losses its kill to lions and hyenas, part of its range is drying out and other parts are becoming heavily brushed. Nearly 95% of its former habitat is no longer available. In spite of some of the steps that have been taken in regards to nature preservation, the outlook for the cheetah remains bleak. Trade and conflict with human are other problems for the cheetah. The spotted Sphinx, the beautiful cheetah has almost no future.

TRANSLATION OF AN ARTICLE BY DR. NORMAN MYERS THAT APPEARED IN THE GERMAN MAGAZINE "DAS TIER"

On the first morning of my stay in the Serengeti I experienced one of the highlights of my trip: a cheetah mother with five approximately one month old cubs. They were very small and kept falling over clumps of grass. I knew that for several more weeks they would not be able to stray to far from this area. The ideal situation for me, since it gave me ample time to observe them and photograph them. Nevertheless, I almost missed the entire family. The cubs were hidden in a thicket that I passed in my vehicle. With their longish, smokegray coats they blended perfectly into the shadowy brush. After several months of age, when they start wandering around in the more open areas, their coat will start changing to the spots like the mother. On the fourth day, I saw the cubs playing and tumbling around. After two weeks they could climb over treestumps laying on the ground and started to chase each others tails. And, much like young lions, they would lay up in a hiding place only to pounce on each other, something they probably will not be doing when they are older. An instinctive cat behavior? I noticed that the claws of the youngsters were sharp enough to allow them to climb trees. With adult animals and their stationary claws, this becomes almost impossible. Overall, cheetas remind one a little of dogs. As an example, they are not as wild as lions or leopards. Therefore it is not surprising that they have been easily tamed and, much like falcons, have been of help in hunting for 3500 years in old Egypt.

In the first few days the cubs were rather weak and helpless. One in particular seemed to have problems with all joints. After a week the animal disappeared. An average litter often is six, but eight have also been known, and on the average only two survive. With lions and leopards, the litter is usually smaller but as a rule more cubs survive.

After one month, the mother started teaching the cubs to hunt. She caught a gazelle young and brought it still alive to the cubs. Every time the cubs let go of it, it would run away, but the mother would bring it back to them for another try. Finally, one of the youngsters did the right thing and grabbed it by the throat. In order to feed her family, the female had to go on hunts every day. For me, that was a perfect opportunity to watch her. I knew, of course, that the animal can reach speeds of over 60 miles an hour. One has to see this several times over before one can appreciate this in all its elegance. Lions and leopards can neither run as fast or as far. They prefer to attack from a hiding place. A cheetah does not hold much with stalking and surprise. Nevertheless, it is a true cat, with the short skull and the dentition of a cat, the teeth being more for killing than for chewing. The eyes, not the nose, are the most essential sense organ in the cheetah.

The cheetah does not need the cover of night to hunt. It almost exclusively hunts by day. Since it does not stash its kill, it must hunt more often than the lion and leopard. And, since it hunts the open savannah, it cannot afford to miss often. Often

enough it loses its kill to lions and hyenas. Any attempts to protect its kill could be fatal or at least cause injuries. And that a cheetah can ill afford. A lion could possibly survive with a broken leg since the pride would probably feed it. But these are not the only problems the beautiful, spotted sphinx faces. Part of its range is drying out and other parts of it are becoming heavily brushed, which makes it difficult for an animal that is adapted to open grassland type hunting. This same increase of brush has helped the leopard, since it is gaining more hiding places. The ever increasing population of leopards not only make hunting more difficult for the cheetah but also are dangerous for the survival of the young. Never have cheetahs been able to match the numbers of their larger relatives. In the last 100 years, the cheetah has utilized only about one fourth of the African continent, while lions have had almost double that area and leopards are virtually worldwide. Today, all have had to give up a substantial piece of their habitat, but the cheetah has suffered the worst. Nearly 95% of its former habitat is no longer available to it. A fence, that can either keep it from its prey or domestic animals can be as fatal as a noose, a poison arrow or the gun of a hunter.

Even nature preserves have not been helpful in increasing the number of cheetahs. Seldom is there more than one animal per 60 square kilometers, and in some areas it has gone down to 1 animal per 250. Even the Serengeti, an area of 25000 square kilometers, approximately 1.5 million gazelles and rolling grasslands for ideal hunting only has about 250 cheetahs. This in comparison to 2000 leopards and about 3000 lions. The South African Krueger National Park, about 19000 square kilometers, has around 300 cheetahs but twice that number in leopards and four to five times that number of lions. How can the cheetah in the face of all these odds survive? Badly. Fourteen years ago, by request of the WWF and the IUCN, I studied the cheetah situation in all of Africa. Later, I added to this my observations from Kenya. The results are not very promising. Fifteen years ago it was thought that on the continent of Africa, which is three times the size of western Europe, 15000 cheetahs could be expected. That is only about half the number we had in 1960. Today, this number is half again that small, in spite of the fact that south of the Sahara Africa has nature preserves that total 375000 square kilometers, twice the size of West Germany. Even if all preserves could survive the onslaught of human population (which is doubtful), only about 3000 cheetahs could be handled in them. But now, there is a few hundred here, a few dozen in another area and so on. And so the cheetah, much more than its larger cousins, is at least in some parts of Africa doomed to extinction.

In spite of some of the steps that have been taken in regards to nature preservation, the outlook for the cheetah remains bleak. As recent as 10 years ago, large numbers of cheetah skins were exported to Italy, other european countries and Japan. Today, this number has dwindled, thanks to pressures of conservationists and better protective laws. But the trade still exists. Hopefully, this can be totally stopped in the near future. In the not too distant future, the cheetah could be facing the same

problem that the Bengal tiger faced in the early seventies when only about 2000 animals could be counted in the wild. Thanks to the massive help of the Indian government and the WWF, this number has since then doubled. Who cares that the cost for this was so much greater than if we had thought about this earlier and provided protection early on. In spite of all of this, similar ideas have yet to be looked at by any of the African nations or even realized.

The fastest mammalian animal in the world has been up to this point speedy enough to avoid nature's dangers but in the face of all the changes in Africa it may not be able to stay ahead. The spotted Sphinx, the beautiful cheetah has almost no future.