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Abstract: Conditions are described that led to a birth of three cheetahs in 1968. In spite of temperatures often below freezing and including several days of snow, the three developed perfectly, not using the heated shelters which had been provided.

# Birth of three cheetahs

*Acinonyx jubatus*

## at Montpellier Zoo

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The Montpellier Zoo was created in 1965, under the auspices of the Municipality of Montpellier, and of its mayor, and with the direction and inspiration of Professor Doumenge, member of the City Council. It is situated in the north-eastern part of the city in a wood 80 ha (198 acres) in extent, formerly frequented only by a group of local hunters who practised their favourite sport, thrush-shooting, there. A dense, Mediterranean-type vegetation, with many pines and different varieties of oak, covers the limestone soil, between the frequent outcroppings of rock.

In this setting, in the company of the various animals which are maintained here in semi-liberty – the three cheetah enclosures, for example, are of about 1,200 m<sup>2</sup> (12,900 ft<sup>2</sup>) each – live a group of cheetahs which in 1968 was composed of two males and four females. These originally came from Ethiopia and French Somaliland and are in perfect condition. They enjoy the sunny location (2,800 hours of sunshine per year) and the addition, in each enclosure, of an artificial sand beach.

Their food consists of 1.5 kg (3 lb) of meat each day, sprinkled periodically with powdered milk, brewers' yeast, or vitamin-mineral salts, and a once-weekly ration of unplucked chicken.

Males and females were distributed in two parks – one male and two females in each. However, as a result of some rather violent battles, certain animals were temporarily isolated.

It was under these conditions that on 1 December 1968, three youngsters were born to a four-year-old Ethiopian mother and a five-year-old male from Somalia.

In spite of temperatures often below freezing and including several days of snow, the three developed perfectly, not using the heated shelters which had been provided. However, we took pains to see that their mother received abundant food.

At the age of one month, the youngsters

already ate solid food, though still being suckled. (It was not possible to determine the exact date of weaning.) They also received bones of veal or fowl to facilitate the development of their skeletal systems.

At three months of age, the cheetahs were vaccinated against Carré's disease, infectious hepatitis, leptospirosis and typhus. The vaccinations apparently all took, and the three developed normally to the age of six months.

It was at this time that, without apparent cause, a paresis of the posterior limbs appeared in all three, causing, in two of them, a serious impediment in walking; the third being less gravely afflicted. None of them presented any symptoms of fever, or of localisations in the joints. A diagnosis of dietary deficiency was made, and treatment by daily injections of, alternately, calcium and Tridocelan (Vitamins B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>6</sub> and B<sub>12</sub>) was carried on for twelve days. A rapid improvement was observed, but nevertheless a certain difficulty in walking persisted for two of the animals. A rich diet, supplemented by many vitamins, eventually brought about the all but complete disappearance of these symptoms during the month following the treatment. The improvement is well illustrated by the fact that their 220 cm (7 ft) high fence with a valence of 35 cm (13½ in) had to be reinforced and the valence brought to a height of 80 cm (31 in) to keep the young cheetahs from choosing between their gilded cage and the liberty of the park, to the shock of a few visitors who encountered them face-to-face at the turning of a path.

By now, our three cheetahs, in spite of rather bad tempers – caused perhaps by the memory of so many injections – are in perfect health, and, having attained an already respectable growth, are almost as big as their parents.

In conclusion, I might mention that the father and mother, put together again after a certain lapse of time, appear to want to repeat

their exploits of last year. For them, and for the zoo, we are hopeful of seeing a new generation of cheetahs added to the collection.

It may be of interest that the same deficiencies appeared, together with marked paresis of the

hind limbs, in two 5-month-old pumas, also born at the zoo. The same treatment (Tridocelean with calcium) had spectacular results, and gave a complete cure in ten days.