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Australia Zoo
Home of The Crocodile Hunter

Amazing Animals
Fact sheets

Cheetahs

Cheetah are not classed as 'big cats'. Big cats have the ability to roar - cheetahs have instead retained the ability to purr, just like your domestic cat at home.

Cheetah

The cheetah has a slender, elongated body supported on tall, thin legs with blunt semi-retractable claws and a flattened rudder-like tail that measures half of the cheetah's head and body length. Black "tear marks" run down the face from the corner of the eyes down to the mouth. It is believed that the "tear marks" aid in hunting by helping to keep the sun out of the eyes. The coat colour is tan with evenly spaced black spots. The coat is coarse and short. Adult body length 112-135cm; tail length 66-84cm; shoulder height 73-90cm; weight 34-65kg.

Habitat

Cheetahs prefer vast areas of open country, such as grassy plains or savannahs, although they can survive in a variety of different habitats including open woodlands, semi-desert, sandy plains, dense vegetation, and mountainous terrain.

Diet

Cheetahs are diurnal meaning they are active during the day. Cheetahs usually hunt in the late morning and early evening. They capture their prey by stalking until the prey is within 10-30 metres before initiating the chase. Because cheetahs store heat internally they will only chase over very short distances before they must stop and cool down. Chases usually last around 20 seconds and no longer than 1 minute. About half of all chases are successful. Cheetahs use a bite to the throat in order to suffocate their prey. Their diet consists of Thomson's and Grant's gazelles, springbok, reedbuck, waterbuck, kudu, steenbok, duiker, warthog, hare, game birds, and wildebeest. Because of their relatively small size in comparison to other large predators in Africa, cheetahs commonly lose 10-50% of their kills to lions, hyaenas and leopards. Cheetahs are well adapted to living in arid environments and are not obligate drinkers. They appear to be able to satisfy their moisture requirements from their prey's blood and urine or by eating tsama melons.

Breeding

Cheetah breed once a year. The female raises the cubs ranging from 2-8 (but usually 3 or 4) herself. They will stay with her for up to two years.

Australia Zoo Cheetah profiles

Echo

Echo is the big man on campus. Born at the Ann Van Dyk Cheetah Centre in South Africa, Echo is the biggest of our five cheetahs. He has a serious demeanour but also has a soft and playful side. He likes to use his strength and large body to wrestle with his brother Fox Trot. Echo loves long naps in the shade under a tree with his handlers.
Echo has a very large personal space and can be quite secretive, often choosing to walk away from large groups of people or looking away from you as you try to get a photograph of him when you pass by on the shuttle. He prefers to keep an eye on things from afar. Although he is a very gentle cat he can become a bit grumpy, so his keepers must know how to read his moods very well. Beneath Echo's tough exterior, he has a beautiful nature. He loves getting scratched behind the ears, which often relaxes him so much he starts to fall asleep in his handlers arms. He loves going for walks around the Zoo and his favourite spot is in the bush and around the lake at the back of the Zoo. The easiest way to identify Echo is his large build. He has a stocky build compared to his lanky brother Foxy. He carries more weight around his head and shoulders than the other cats. He is definitely a handsome man. Be sure to keep an eye out for Echo next time you visit Australia Zoo.

Endangered Species!

Very low numbers are left in the wild. Cheetahs are at risk of extinction within the next ten years.

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