



CHEETAH

Acinonyx jubatus



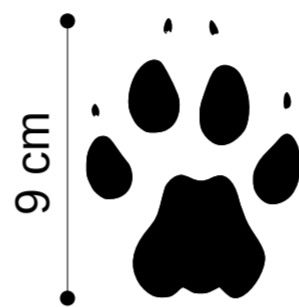
TAXONOMY
Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora
Family: Felidae
Genus: Acinonyx
Species: jubatus



AT A GLANCE	
Total Length:	1.8-2.2 m
Height:	80 cm
Weight:	40-60 kg
Lifespan:	8-12 years
Gestation:	90 days
Litter-size:	1-6 cubs



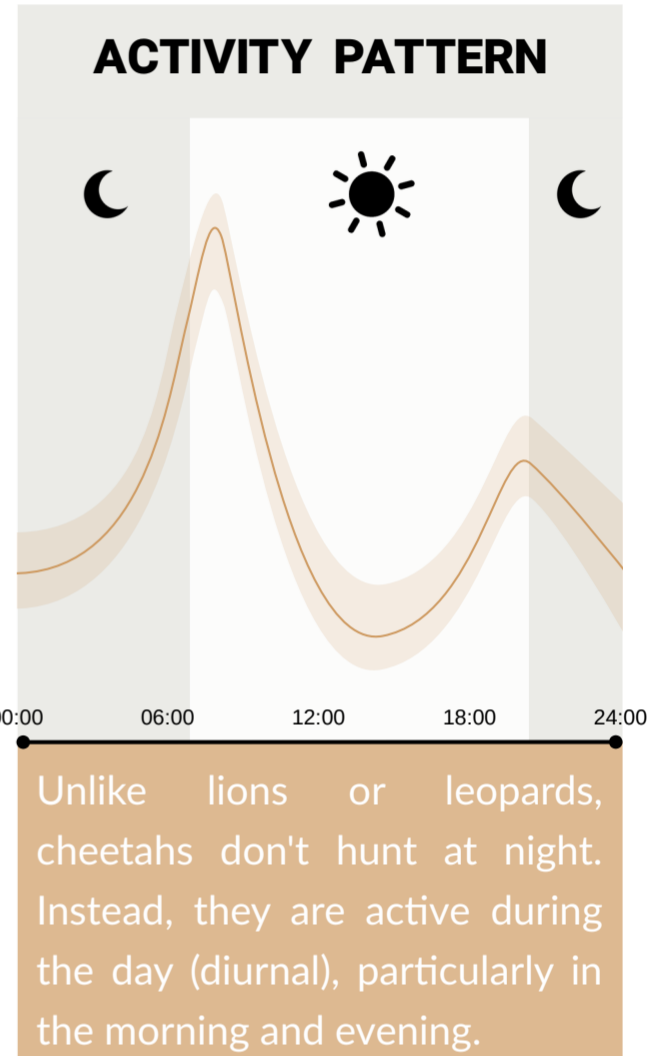
LETOTSE



With its slender and lean body the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) is built for speed. In fact, it is considered the world's fastest terrestrial mammal, reaching velocities of up to 110 km/h, even though it can only maintain such a pace for a few seconds. Besides its long, white-tipped tail, which serves as a counterbalancing rudder during hunts, and solid black dots on a golden coat, this species can easily be recognized by its black facial tearmarks. These are believed to absorb sunrays and thereby prevent distracting glares during hunts.

Cheetahs primarily predate on small to medium-sized antelopes, but may also opportunistically take birds and hares. Because they exhaust entirely during the hunt, they cannot feed immediately after a kill and need to recover for a few minutes, leaving them vulnerable to kleptoparasitism by other large carnivores. Unlike leopards, they cannot hoist their kills up a tree to secure it and often lose it to hyenas or lions.

Cheetahs prefer open savannah habitat and often linger on elevated vantage points, such as termite mounds. They have excellent eyesight, enabling them to spot other animals from 5 km away. When patrolling their home-range, they will climb and mark trees.



PREY

COMPETITORS

STATUS & CONSERVATION

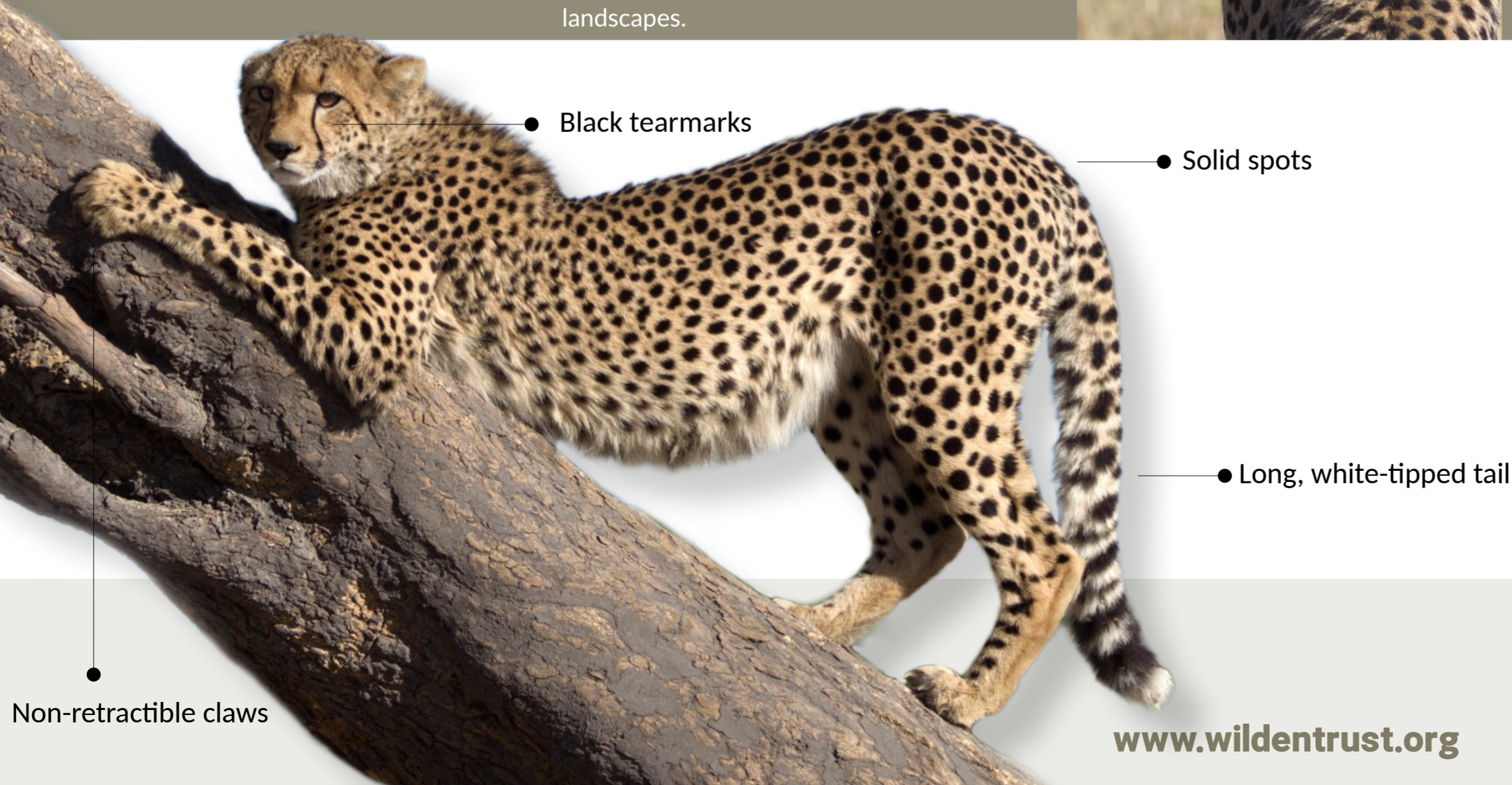
Cheetahs used to range wide across Africa and even extended into Asia. Today, the species is in **rapid decline** and only occupies a small share of its former distribution. This decline can be traced back to habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict, especially in livestock areas. As almost any other large carnivore, cheetahs also suffer from the loss of their prey base. The IUCN categorizes the species as **vulnerable** and estimates that

about 6'500 free living individuals remain. Besides Namibia and Alger, Botswana holds one of the largest remaining cheetah populations. Nevertheless, cheetahs exist at low densities everywhere they occur. This is partly due to their inferior competitive abilities among large carnivores, as they often get displaced by lions or hyenas, and need to settle in marginal lands between protected areas and human-dominated landscapes.



GENETIC BOTTLENECK

Genetic analyses suggest that cheetahs have gone through two striking genetic bottlenecks. One about 100'000 ago, and another one approximately 10'000 years ago. The lack of genetic diversity makes cheetahs incredibly difficult to breed in captivity, as captive bred individuals often exhibit genetic deficits and a high susceptibility to diseases.



SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Male cheetahs form coalitions, mostly with their brothers. This allows them to take larger prey and defend territories against conspecifics. Females remain solitary, unless they have offspring to provide for.