Why the Cheetah is considered to be the fastest animal on Earth

by Randy Collins

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The magnificent spotted animal belonging to the Felidae or feline family is the Cheetah. It inhabits most parts of Africa and several parts of the Middle East. It belongs to the genus Acinonyx and has thankfully escaped from extinction till now. It is the only animal belonging to the cat family that has non-retractable claws and pads which is a disadvantage as it cannot climb vertically on trees as it is unable to get a firm grip to do so. It has the distinction of being able to achieve the fastest land speed among all animals and clocks at up to 120 km/h while on a short burst of 500 m . It also has the amazing ability to accelerate from 0 to 100 km/h in just 3 seconds flat

It is likely that the cheetah evolved in Africa millions of years ago before it migrated to Asia. The extinct of the species include Acinonyx pardinensis which was much larger than the modern cheetah found in Europe, India and China, and Acinonyx intermedius found in the same areas. There are a few sub-species like the Acinonyx jubatus raineyii: found in Eastern Africa comprising Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia and Uganda , and Acinonyx jubatus jubatus found in Southern Africa, Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo Mozambique and South Africa. The species Acinonyx jubatus soemmeringii used to inhabit Central Africa, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Nigeria

The Cheetah is an attractive animal with a shapely body. It has a deep chest and peters down to a narrow waist. It is covered with short coarse fur and is tan colored with distinct black spots measuring 2 to 3 cm, all over its body which serves as an effective camouflage while hunting for its prey. The underside of the cheetah is white in color with no spots, however the same spots are found on its tail which ends in a busy tuft that is white in color. The cheetah has a small head with high-set eyes. It is adapted to keep out the bright sunlight from its eyes while hunting. The black tear-like mark that runs from the corner of its eyes to the sides of its nose serves as an effective anti-glare feature. The cheetah is built for achieving short bursts of high speed that is advantageous while hunting. However, it does not have the stamina or the build to sustain long runs and gets tired easily

An adult cheetah weighs about 35 to 70 kg. The total length of the body is about 5 ft, and the tail measures from 2 to 2.5 ft. The height at the shoulder is around 3 ft. The males have slightly larger heads, however there is no great difference in size and it is not easy to distinguish between male and female. Compared to the leopard that has a somewhat similar size and build the cheetah's build appears to be more streamlined. Another mutant form of the cheetah used to be the King cheetah that is extinct in the wild and a few still exist in captivity. These are built slightly larger than the regular cheetah's with spots that are distinctly larger. The reason why the cheetah is able to achieve such remarkable speeds are that it is adapted to it by having larger nostrils that facilitate more intake of oxygen and an enlarged heart and lungs that help circulate the oxygen more efficiently to get the much needed energy while on a hunt. The respiratory rate increases rapidly from 60 breaths per minute to about 150 breaths per minute while on a chase. The cheetah never roars and actually purrs while inhaling. The cheetah is vulnerable and not able to adapt to new environments and difficult to breed in captivity. That is why it needs to be protected lest it becomes extinct. Such related programs on wild life are aired by popular service providers like Verizon FiOS TV

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Randy Collins - About Author:
Randy Collins is a freelance author and a wildlife enthusiast. He believes that animals need to be protected and their habitats need to be kept undisturbed to enable them to thrive on this planet. He keenly watches related programs that are aired on a Verizon FiOS TV.

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