

**EDGE
BOOKS**

CHEETAHS



BIG CATS

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SEEING SPOTS

From the top of a termite mound, the cheetah spots an impala. Before the impala even realizes it is being chased, the cheetah is right behind it. The African grasslands are a blur as the **prey** tries to outrun its hunter. Running at her top speed, the cheetah is almost out of energy. But she has cubs to feed, and the impala is tiring too. The cheetah holds on and wins the race.



Cheetah Timeline



Big Cat Fact

No two cheetahs have the same spot design.

At first glance, cheetahs look a lot like leopards. Both of these big cats have yellowish tan bodies and black spots. But cheetahs are much slimmer than leopards. Cheetahs also have black stripes that look like tear marks running from the corners of their eyes. These marks help reduce some of the glare from the sun.

Another way to identify a cheetah is by looking at its tail. All cheetahs have several black rings near the ends of their tails. The very end of the tail has a white tuft of fur.

- **4 million years ago** – The earliest known cheetahs lived.
- **About 10,000 years ago** – Cheetahs disappeared from North America.
- **About 3000 BC** – The ancient Sumerians became the first people to tame cheetahs.
- **About 1322 BC** – Artifacts with cheetah designs were buried in King Tutankhamen's tomb in Egypt.
- **AD 1300s to 1500s** – European princes and other nobles hunted with trained cheetahs.
- **AD 1556 to 1605** – Akbar the Great of India owned more than 9,000 cheetahs during his reign.



BUILT FOR SPEED

Perhaps the only thing more amazing than the cheetah's beauty is its speed. The cheetah is the fastest **mammal** in the world. It can reach speeds of 60 miles (96 kilometers) an hour in just three seconds. But it can't keep up this extreme pace for long. It usually runs at top speed for about 300 yards (274 meters). Running this fast uses a lot of energy, and the cheetah tires quickly.

The cheetah was built for speed. Its body is long and narrow. A cheetah stands about 36 inches (91 centimeters) tall at the shoulder. It weighs about 75 pounds (34 kilograms). It has a small head for an animal of its size. These **traits** create less wind resistance when the cheetah runs.

mammal—a warm-blooded animal that breathes air and has hair or fur; female mammals feed milk to their young

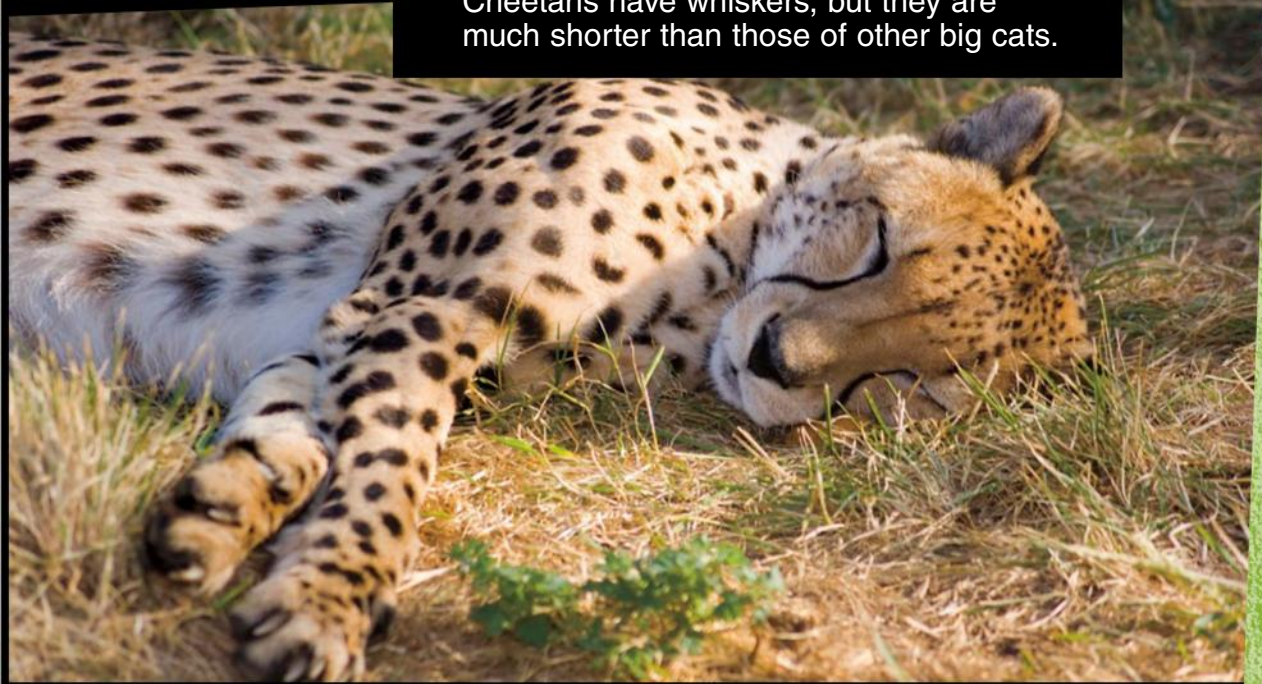
trait—a quality or characteristic that makes one person or animal different from another

The cheetah is the only cat that has its claws exposed at all times. The claws give the animal better grip when running. The cat's long legs also take huge strides. These traits add to a cheetah's speed.

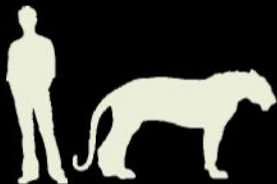
A cheetah's powerful tail can measure 30 inches (76 cm) long. The tail helps the big cat keep its balance. This is important when a cheetah must change direction while running.

Big Cat Fact

Cheetahs have whiskers, but they are much shorter than those of other big cats.



Size Comparison Chart

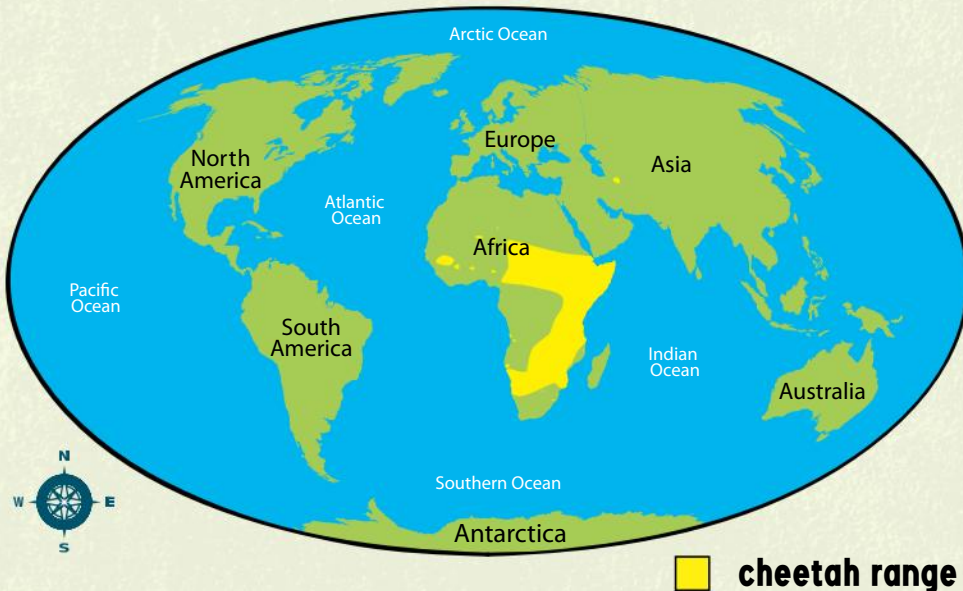


The average height of an American male is 5 feet, 10 inches (178 cm).

AT HOME

Cheetahs live in the African grasslands, dense and open woodlands, and semi-desert areas. They can be found east to west from Somalia to Senegal and as far south as northern South Africa. A small number of cheetahs live in southern Algeria and northern Niger. They also live in Iran, which is in Asia.

Cheetahs are not as strong as other animals living in these areas. Lions, leopards, hyenas, and wild dogs can defeat a cheetah in a fight. Most cheetahs use their speed to avoid these animals.





More than 90 percent of wild cheetah cubs die before they reach adulthood. Other wild animals often snatch cubs when their mothers are away hunting. A cheetah that makes it to adulthood may live up to 12 years. Cheetahs in **captivity** may live as long as 17 years.