

Teaching Material on Biodiversity Conservation (TMBC)

Title: A Trip to Africa – The Cheetah on the brink of extinction?

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Quality Assessment: Prof. Carsten Hobohm (UF)

Level: Secondary school

Type of material: Puzzle with factual information for children; followed by group-puzzle and questions to children; additional information for the teacher

Aim: Gaining knowledge and creating an emotional relationship (with an animal), understanding the way of life and threats (the idea of extinction) as well as protective measures

Material: See annexe

Approach: The children are divided into 4 expert-groups. Each group receives a puzzle with factual information. Important aspects need to be documented by the children in their workbooks. The groups are then re-formed so that each new group contains an expert from each original expert group. Each expert tells the other group members in the new group what he or she now knows about the leopard. After this, the experts go back to their original groups and answer the worksheet questions as listed below.

Questions to be asked to the children:

Which family does the cheetah belong to?
How does it manage to hunt its prey?
Name three typical features of the cheetah.
What constitutes a threat to the cheetah?
Where does the cheetah live today?
How is the cheetah protected?
How can you help to protect cheetahs?

Information for the teacher (references):

GARDNER, S. (2013): Cheetah- In: WIKIMEDIA Foundation Inc. (Hrsg.): Cheetah, San Francisco (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheetah>), received 20.11.13

Lehmann, S. (2012): Cheetah in Namibia. - (photographs)

REINSBERG, Dr. D.: Gepard – In: WWF Deutschland (Hrsg.): Artenlexikon, Berlin (<http://www.wwf.de/themen-projekte/artenlexikon/gepard/>), received 08.11.13

RUPPERT, W.; SPÖRHASE-EICHMANN, U. (2012): Biologie-Methodik, Handbuch für die Sekundarstufe I und II, Berlin

Information on the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*):

Cheetah – Today & Threats

Cheetahs are threatened by the scarcity of their food supply as well as by fragmentation and loss of their biotopes. By moving to other biotopes, such as farms, they often get killed because they hunt the farmers' cattle. A further threat is poaching. This means hunting and selling their coats as well as processing their coats into clothes. Cheetahs, like other wildcats, are listed in the Washington Protection of Species Convention. This means that trade in cheetahs is forbidden worldwide and the poaching is illegal.

Today, there are only 100 Asian cheetahs left. This stock is stable, however, it can be wiped out rapidly by natural disasters like forest fires, storms or intense flooding. Diseases can also quickly become a danger because they spread fast and can end fatally. In the northwest of the African continent the picture is similar. Here, there are only 2500 cheetahs left. Every year the world conservation union prepares a red list of threatened species of animals. According to this list the northwest African and the Asian cheetah are declared as „threatened with extinction“.



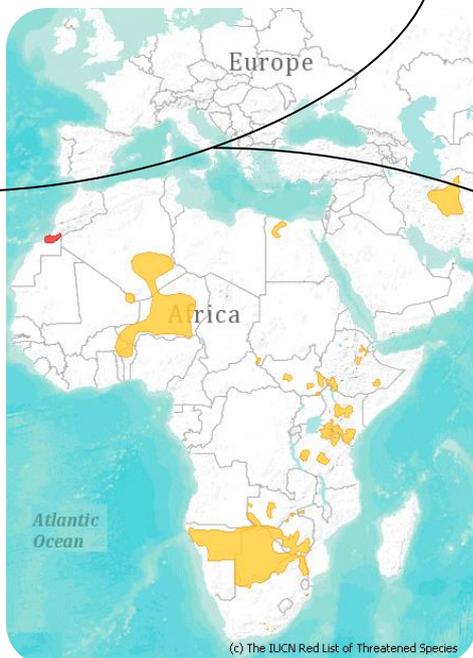
In the southern part of Africa you can find the most cheetahs today. The number is estimated at 4500. Although this seems a large number, it is not nearly enough, and the world conservation union classified the south African cheetah as an “endangered species”.

Altogether, there are still 7.000 - 10.000 Iranian, northwest African and south African cheetah left.



Cheetah – Biotope & Nutrition

A century ago cheetahs were found all over Asia and Africa, so one can distinguish between the Asian and the African cheetah. Today, the cheetah only lives in the north of Iran, in the southern parts of Africa and the Sahara. The yellow areas on the map below indicate where the cheetah occurs.

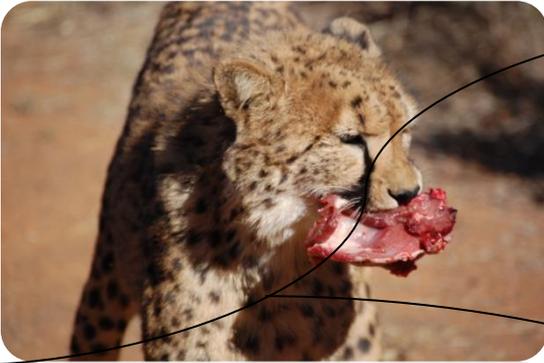


In Iran, the cheetah lives in the lowland plains of the desert. A desert is an expanse of land with only few plants and where water can be very scarce. On the African continent the cheetahs live in mountainous regions of the Sahara desert. They also live in grassy steppes (wide dry areas without trees), dry woods and savannahs (wide area with a herbaceous layer and a few trees). Because of a decline in the number of prey animals, the cheetahs in Africa have been driven out of 75% of their habitat.

Besides young antelopes, calves and rabbits gazelles are the main prey for the cheetahs. Usually, they consume two kilograms of meat per day. However, sometimes the male cheetahs only go hunting once or twice per week. The females, however, go hunting every day, since they have to feed their children. The young cheetahs learn hunting from their mother. She brings them live prey to practise. A cheetah creeps close up to 30 meters to the prey animal, this is followed by a short sprint. The whole hunt is usually over within a minute.

Cheetah – General

Cheetahs belong to the family of the real cats and are beasts of prey. They are described as the fastest land mammals in the world.



Cheetahs have very long legs and a deep-seated chest. Its head seems quite small in proportion to its body. Their fur is short, yellowish and spotted. Cheetah and leopard are frequently mistaken for each other, but there are several differences. The cheetah has completely closed spots. Also, the cheetah, both smaller, at about 2,20 m long, and lighter, at 50-64 kilograms than the leopard. On the face of the cheetah you can see black lines from the eyes to the muzzle; these lines are called “tears”.

Cheetahs hunt by day and can reach a speed of 110 km/h within only three seconds, albeit only for short distances. In contrast to our domestic cats they cannot retract their claws.

In the wilderness cheetahs live up to 12 years. In captivity, where the natural enemies are absent and the cheetahs don't have to hunt prey, they can reach an age of 17 years.

Cheetah females are solitary, the males form groups. Cheetahs become sexually mature at the age of three years. Females give birth to 1-6 young in a cave or in high grass. At first, the cubs are suckled, at the age of 8 weeks they learn hunting by means of live prey, which is brought by the mother. They leave their mother at about 18 months. However, many cheetah cubs (almost 95%) don't survive this long, because they are killed by lions.



Cheetah – Protective Measures



A conservation organization has just built a 287,000 square kilometers national park for cheetahs. This is as big as Italy. It is particularly important that these parks have a lot of space for cheetahs so that they don't confined. Cheetahs are also held in zoos, in attempts to breed them and increase their population. Unfortunately, this hasn't been very successful so far because cheetahs reproduce very badly in captivity. Zoos in particular are not big enough to offer cheetahs the large space they need.

For years, the number of cheetahs has been going down steeply. Therefore, there are many conservation organizations which try to protect these animals. The cheetahs need protection from poachers, who hunt them, because they want to sell their coat for a lot of money. Farmers don't like cheetahs either and kill them, because they attack and injure the cattle.

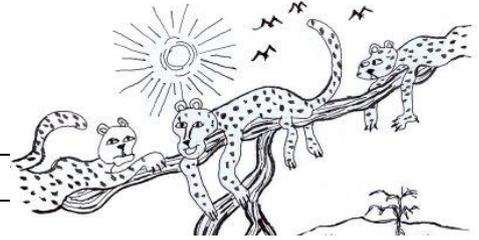
At the same time, many organizations try to study the cheetahs. They use radio collars with which they can track their current position. If cheetahs approach a farm they will be captured and released somewhere else or returned to a national park again.

That's why conservation organizations try to create wildlife refuges, in which cheetahs can find enough food and protection from poachers. These landscapes are called national parks; you can find these places where most cheetahs still live today – in Africa.



A Trip to Africa – Cheetah Quiz

What family does the cheetah belong to?



Authorized by Pascal Kirchmaier

How does it manage to hunt its prey?

Name three typical features of the cheetah!

What constitutes a threat to the cheetah?

Where does the cheetah live today?

How is the cheetah protected? How can you help to protect cheetahs?
