

Cheetahs

Cheetahs are considered the fastest cats on Earth. They are actually sprinters and can only run for short distances, but they reach speeds of up to 70 miles per hour and can cover more than 20 feet in one stride.

Cheetahs are long and lean animals. They sprint for about 20 seconds at a time. While they are running, cheetahs are in the air more than half the time. Their sharp claws function almost like sports cleats, giving them a lot of traction so they can pick up speed quickly and make long strides. Their amazing speed over short distances allows cheetahs to catch prey that larger cats like tigers and lions, are not fast enough to get. Cheetahs feed on gazelles, impalas and antelopes as well as some smaller mammals and birds. Once they catch their prey, cheetahs eat it quickly before any other animal can come and take it from them.

The word cheetah means “spotted one” and it describes the pattern of this wild cat’s coat. Cheetahs live in the open grasslands of Africa. The spots on their golden coats help them blend in to the tall, dry grass. Cheetahs usually hunt during the day unlike larger cats such as tigers and leopards that do most of their hunting at dawn, at dusk or at night. By hunting during the day, cheetahs avoid competing with other cats for prey.

Cheetahs usually live by themselves. Cubs stay with their mothers for about 18 months. Then the females go off alone and the males stay in small groups until they are full grown adults. Even though cheetahs keep to themselves for the most part, they usually get along without fighting – except during mating season, when males often fight with each other over females! Cheetahs communicate by making different sounds. They cannot roar like the bigger cats, but they do purr, growl and hiss. Cheetahs also make a chirping sound called a “chirrup” when they are excited. During mating season, they make a sound called a “stutter bark.”

Unfortunately, cheetahs are an endangered species. There are only about 12,000 of them left in the wild. Part of the reason for this is that humans have been moving into their territory to set up ranches. Aside from taking over their land, ranchers often shoot cheetahs because they are afraid that the cats will prey on their livestock. Also, tourists who go on safaris in Africa usually travel by day, the time when cheetahs hunt. But cheetahs do not like to be seen by humans, so they sometimes go without food.

Cheetahs Questions

1. Cheetahs are
 - a. sprinters.
 - b. able to run up to 20 miles at a time.
 - c. the largest cats in Africa.
 - d. nocturnal.

2. Cheetahs have
 - a. stripes.
 - b. spots.
 - c. manes
 - d. solid colored coats.

3. Cheetahs can reach speeds up to _____ miles per hour.

4. A cheetah's sharp claws help it to run fast and take long strides by creating
 - a. friction.
 - b. distraction.
 - c. traction.
 - d. None of the above

5. Because cheetahs are so quick, they
 - a. hunt during the day.
 - b. fight with each other often.
 - c. can catch prey that larger cats cannot get.
 - d. can roar loudly.

6. Cheetahs hunt
 - a. whenever they are hungry.
 - b. mostly at dawn or at dusk.
 - c. at night.
 - d. during the day.

7. What does the word cheetah mean?

Cheetahs Questions (Cont'd)

8. Cheetahs
 - a. live alone for the most part.
 - b. live in family groups called prides.
 - c. rarely get along with each other.
 - d. hibernate in winter.

9. Which of these is not a sound that cheetahs make?
 - a. chirp
 - b. bark
 - c. purr
 - d. roar

10. Cheetahs are an endangered species because
 - a. ranchers shoot them.
 - b. ranchers take their land.
 - c. they hunt less because they hide from tourists.
 - d. All of the above

Name _____



Date _____

Cheetahs Answers

1. a
2. b
3. 70
4. c
5. c
6. d
7. spotted one
8. a
9. d
10. d