INFORMATION BOOKLET ON CHEETAH AND WILD DOGS
Information and Conservation Booklet for Cheetah and Wild Dogs
Cheetah – General Information

Physical Characteristics

The cheetah is a large, sleek felid with a light skeletal frame and a slender, long-legged body. They have a small head with high set eyes and a black 'tear mark' running from the inner aspect of each eye down to the mouth. Their coat is tan coloured, covered with solid round black spots.

The cheetah is the world's fastest land mammal, and the most unique and specialized member of the cat family. With astonishing powers of acceleration, a cheetah can go from 0 to 60 miles (96 kilometres) an hour in only three seconds; during a chase, they can (briefly) maintain speeds of up to 100 km/hr.

Adults measure 110-150cm in length and weigh between 35 and 60kg. Unlike other cats, cheetahs have blunt, semi-retractable claws that serve as a pair of running spikes and provide traction when chasing prey.
Wild cheetahs can live to 12 years of age. Females mature at about 24 months, when they may give birth to their first litter, which they raise on their own. Mating occurs throughout the year, the gestation period is 90-95 days and average litter sizes range from 3 to 5 cubs (although up to 8 have been recorded).

Cubs are born with their black spots and a silvery mane that is shed at about 3-4 months of age. During the first two months of their life the cheetah mother leaves her cubs behind in a lair when she goes out to hunt. Cheetah cubs are often killed by larger predators such as lions, spotted hyenas and leopards, and cub mortality can be as high as 95%. The cheetah mothers are not able to defend their cubs against these larger predators.

Cheetah cubs stay with their mother for one and a half to two years, after which the cubs often stay together in sibling groups for several months before the males and females go their separate ways.
Cheetah males are often social (live in coalitions) and hold small territories while cheetah females are solitary and have large home ranges. Females can range across several male territories annually, and are highly promiscuous, which can result in females giving birth to a litter with cubs from different fathers. The cheetah’s social system with solitary females and social males is unique among cats.

**Habitat and Diet**

Cheetahs are habitat generalists and can be found in many different habitats including open plains, dry forest, woodland, savannah, semi-desert and thick bush. Habitat preference is often determined by prey availability and a lack of other large predators.

Cheetahs are diurnal, and hunt in the day time. Adult cheetahs mostly kill medium sized antelopes (15-30 kg) but small animals like birds and hares are also an important part of the diet. Cheetahs, unlike most other African predators, rarely scavenge and do not remain long with their kills, many of which are stolen by other carnivores. Cheetahs need only drink once every three to four days.
Cheetah Range and Conservation Status

Cheetahs have disappeared from huge areas of their historic range. They still occur widely, but sparsely, in Africa. Currently there are estimated to be only 7,100 individuals, confined to 9% of their global historical range (Durant et al 2015). Southern Africa is the cheetah’s stronghold, supporting about 4,300 cheetah (Durant et al 2015). The species is currently listed as ‘vulnerable’ on the IUCN red list, although there are moves to upgrade this to ‘endangered’. It is listed on Appendix I of CITES, Appendix I of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species and is protected under national legislation throughout most of its range.

*Cheetah Range, Southern Africa, 2017*
Much of Angola is designated as ‘unknown’ range for cheetah, but it is likely that significant areas of the country could, with the right protection, support cheetah.

The majority of cheetah range (78%) occurs outside of protected areas, where the species faces many threats. In addition, over half live in habitat blocks which are transboundary, requiring international cooperation for conservation of the population.

In comparison with other big cats, cheetahs occur at relatively low densities (10-30% of typical densities for lions, leopards, tigers, and jaguars in prime habitat). On the Serengeti plains, cheetah densities range from 0.8-1.0 per 100 km², but on Namibian farmlands, where lions and hyenas have been eradicated, cheetahs still occur at low densities (0.2 per 100 km²). Sizes of territories and home ranges can vary greatly (37-3000 km²).
Wild Dogs – General Information

Physical Characteristics

African wild dogs are slender, long legged canids with individually unique coat patterns of black, brown, white and tan fur. Unlike other dogs, which have five toes on their forefeet, wild dogs have only four toes per foot. They have characteristically large, rounded ears, black muzzles and tails tipped with white. Adults measure 75-110 cm in length and stand about 75cm at the shoulder. Average weight is 23-26kg.

Behaviour and Social Structure

African wild dogs are specialised social canids that live in packs of between 2 and 40 individuals. The pack is usually dominated by a monogamous breeding pair; the alpha male and female. They are obligate cooperative breeders; usually only the alpha female will produce a litter of 2 to 21 pups (average c. 7-10), which are born
in a den, and first emerge at about three weeks of age. Once they are weaned (at between 5 and 12 weeks of age), the pups are cared for by the entire pack. Any individual can regurgitate meat for the pups or remain at the den during a hunt as a ‘babysitter’.

Denning season – when the pack is confined to the den to raise the litter of pups - usually lasts about three months (usually between late April and September in southern Africa). Den sites are typically burrows excavated by aardvarks (often expanded by warthogs or porcupines), or caves and crevices in rocky areas.

African wild dogs are very social, and packs have been known to share food and to assist weak or ill members. Social interactions are common, and the dogs communicate by touch, actions, and vocalizations. They often hunt as a cooperative unit; in a sprint,
African wild dogs can reach speeds of more than 44 miles per hour.

Wild dogs are crepuscular, favouring the early mornings and evenings for hunting. They are not particularly active at night, except around the full moon. They are a wide-ranging, low density species and need vast areas of intact habitat to support a viable population. A single pack can range over 3,000km², but average home ranges tend to be more in the region of 300-800km². During the denning season, home ranges are severely restricted, often to as small as 80km².

Fast Facts – African Wild Dogs

- **Type**: Mammal
- **Diet**: Carnivore (mostly eats gazelles 15-30kg)
- **Conservation Status**: Endangered
- **Group name**: Pack
- **Lifespan in the wild**: Up to 11 years
- **Adult size (length)**: 30 to 56 inches (75 to 110 cm)
- **Adult weight**: 40 to 70 lbs (18 to 32kgs)

Habitat and Diet

Wild dogs are almost exclusively hunters and rarely scavenge. Packs typically hunt antelopes, particularly impala in southern Africa, and will also tackle much larger prey, such as wildebeests, if they are hunting as a pack. Contrary to popularly held
misperceptions, African wild dogs are quick and efficient killers, which rarely kill more than they can eat.

As human settlements expand, and the wild dogs come into contact with livestock, they can predate on goats or sheep and occasionally calves. However, they are easily scared off by people, so significant damage is rare. Unfortunately, they are often hunted and killed by misinformed farmers who fear for their domestic animals or their own safety, although wild dogs are not a danger to people.

African wild dogs are habitat generalists and can survive in a wide range of environments. Nowadays, they typically roam the open plains and sparse woodlands of sub-Saharan Africa.

**Wild Dog Range and Conservation Status**

African wild dogs have disappeared from much of their former range. They are currently found only in about 14 countries in Africa, with viable populations in only eight countries (Botswana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

Population densities for African wild dogs vary considerably, but in no instances can they be considered a high density species (some of the highest densities ever recorded are only c. 4 dogs per 100km²; average 2 per 100km²). Because pack size is so variable, it is more meaningful to talk about the number of packs – or breeding units – as the unit for wild dog populations.
There are currently estimated to be only 660 packs (or breeding females) left in the wild (Woodroffe & Sillero-Zubiri 2012). This is about 6,600 adults and yearlings in 39 subpopulations. Population size is continuing to decline as a result of ongoing habitat fragmentation, conflict with human activities, and infectious disease.

Wild dogs are not listed on CITES (because they are generally not traded), although at the 2016 CITES CoP there was a motion to list them on Appendix III. They are listed on Appendix II of the Convention of Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) and as ‘endangered’ with a declining population trend on the IUCN Red List.
Threats to Cheetah and African Wild Dogs

Cheetah and African wild dogs face similar threats. The major threat to both species is loss of habitat and isolation of existing habitat patches. Because cheetah and wild dogs occur at low densities, conservation of viable populations requires large scale land management planning, including a focus on conservation outside of protected areas, because most existing protected areas are not large enough to ensure the long term survival of these species.

A depleted wild ungulate prey base is of serious concern to the conservation of both these species, particularly where bushmeat poaching is rampant. In some places mortality on roads can be a threat, particularly where high speed main roads traverse protected areas.

Conflict with farmers and ranchers is another serious threat to cheetahs and wild dogs in southern Africa particularly. Cheetah and wild dogs are often killed or persecuted because they are a perceived threat to livestock, despite the fact that they cause relatively little damage. Both species are also vulnerable to being caught in snares or gin traps set for other species. As well as suffering direct persecution due to occasional livestock predation, both species are also quite susceptible to diseases spread by domestic animals, particularly rabies and canine distemper from domestic dogs to wild dogs.

Natural threats to both wild dogs and cheetah include direct and indirect competition from lions and spotted hyenas. On the open,
short-grass plains of the Serengeti, juvenile mortality of cheetah can be as high as 95%, largely due to predation by lions. However, mortality rates are lower in more closed habitats. For wild dogs, direct predation of pups by lions is also a threat, as is competition for prey, and stealing of kills, particularly by hyenas in less densely vegetated habitats.

Because of this, both cheetah and African wild dog densities are lowest where lions and hyenas are numerous, and it is believed they often move outside of protected areas – and thus into conflict with humans – to try and avoid lions and hyenas.

Constraints to mitigating these threats

There are four sets of constraints to mitigating these threats across a large spatial scale:

- **Political constraints** include lack of land use planning, insecurity and political instability in some ecologically important areas, and lack of political will to foster cheetah and wild dog conservation.
- **Economic constraints** include lack of financial resources to support conservation, and lack of incentives for local people to conserve wildlife.
- **Social constraints** include negative conceptions of cheetahs and wild dogs, lack of capacity to achieve conservation, lack of environmental awareness, rising human populations, and social changes leading to subdivision of land and subsequent habitat fragmentation.
• **Biological constraints**, which are characteristic of cheetahs and wild dogs and cannot be changed, include wide-ranging behaviour, negative interactions with other large carnivores, and potential susceptibility to disease.

Conservation Solutions

For both cheetah and African Wild Dogs, some of the most impactful interventions for conservation are habitat preservation, range expansion and creating of areas of connectivity between isolated habitat fragments.

Working to reduce the illegal bushmeat trade is also key to reducing cheetah and wild dog deaths from wire snares or gin traps, and to minimise the depletion of the species’ natural prey base.

In addition, community engagement and education is important to address negative misperceptions and to help encourage tolerance though reducing livestock losses and providing benefits. Promotion of livestock management regimes which minimize conflict with cheetah and wild dogs are an important conservation measure, including more intensive livestock herd protection and using guard dogs.
References and Reading List


Acknowledgements and Thanks

This booklet has been produced by the Range Wide Conservation Program for Cheetah and African Wild Dogs, in partnership with the Institute of Biodiversity and Conservation Areas.