



Cheetah

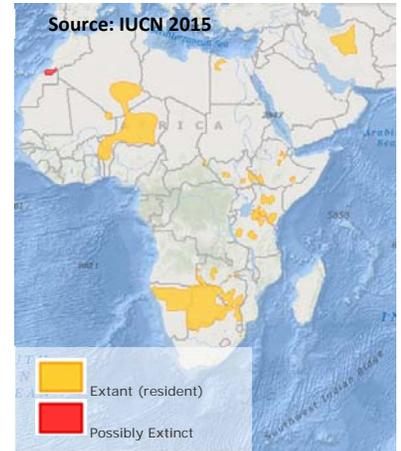
Conservation Summary

State of the Species

It is estimated that roughly 100,000 cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*) were found across Africa and portions of Asia around the turn of the 20th century. By 1975, this was reduced to ~15,000 animals, and dropped to less than 10,000 by 2015. Two subspecies are listed as critically endangered – one in northwestern Africa (*A. j. hecki*) and a second, isolated population in Iran (*A. j. venaticus*), which has been reduced to less than 100 animals.

The cheetah has disappeared from 90% of its historic range on the African continent. Most (~76%) of the remaining range is unprotected land. A large portion lies within trans-boundary areas, requiring international cooperation for conservation. Subpopulations of cheetahs have low levels of genetic diversity, indicating that inbreeding occurred during past population bottlenecks. This is exacerbated by the fact that less than 50% of wild cheetahs are contributing to the gene pool, and populations are highly fragmented.

Approximately 63.5% of the total population is found in Southern Africa, 30% in Eastern Africa, and 6.5% in Western, Central and Northern Africa. Large swaths of the geographic range remain poorly surveyed, particularly in Eastern and Western, Central and Northern Africa.



Status

Range Countries

IUCN Vulnerable

ESA Endangered

CITES Appendix I

AZA SSP[®] Population

Felid TAG Chair Don Goff

SSP Coordinator Adrienne Crosier

AZA Yellow SSP

AZA Population 302 individuals

Primary Threats to the Species

Cheetahs are a particularly wide-ranging species, requiring large swaths of land to support a viable population. This also makes them very susceptible to habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, which is the primary threat to the species. Accordingly, cheetah conservation must include improving land use planning and practice and occur on a very large scale.

Outside protected areas, conflict with farmers and ranchers poses a significant threat to cheetahs. Though they prefer wild prey, cheetahs will occasionally kill livestock or animals on game farms and many are killed in retaliation. Capture in bushmeat snares also poses a threat to the species – cheetahs are typically not targeted, though this can occur in situations of conflict.

CITES allows a limited number of cheetahs to be live-traded and hunted for sport and trophies each year; however, cheetahs are increasingly being illegally caught and exported as 'captive-bred' or smuggled into the Middle East to support the luxury pet trade. More than two-thirds of the cubs smuggled as luxury pets die in transport.

High juvenile mortality rates result from predation by large predators. On the open plains in the Serengeti, this rate can be as high as 95%, largely due to predation by lions. In addition, larger predators frequently steal cheetahs' kills. Other threats to the species include prey loss, road mortality, irresponsible ecotourism practices and disease.

AZA Conservation Support

Between 2011 and 2015, 59 AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums reported taking part in a variety of field conservation projects benefitting cheetahs. Over those five years, the AZA community invested nearly \$1.6 million in cheetah conservation. AZA institutions provide financial support to field conservation organizations like the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), a nonprofit dedicated to conserving cheetahs through research, education and human-wildlife conflict resolution, Action for Cheetahs in Kenya and Cheetah Conservation Botswana. Several institutions directly supported CCF's Livestock Guarding Dog Program (LGD), which focused on breeding and training dogs to patrol livestock farms as a non-lethal method of predator control. This is not an exhaustive list of organizations, but these efforts represent the significant ties that AZA-accredited institutions have with cheetah-focused conservation organizations.

References:

- Durant et al. 2015. *Acinonyx jubatus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2015: e.T219A50649567. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2015-4.RLTS.T219A50649567.en>. Downloaded on 08 November 2016.
- IUCN/SSC. 2007. Regional conservation strategy for the cheetah and African wild dog in Southern Africa. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.
- Purchase, G., Marker, L., Marnewick, K., Klein, R. and Williams, S. 2007. Regional assessment of the status, distribution and conservation needs of the cheetah in southern Africa. *Cat News* 3: 44-46.