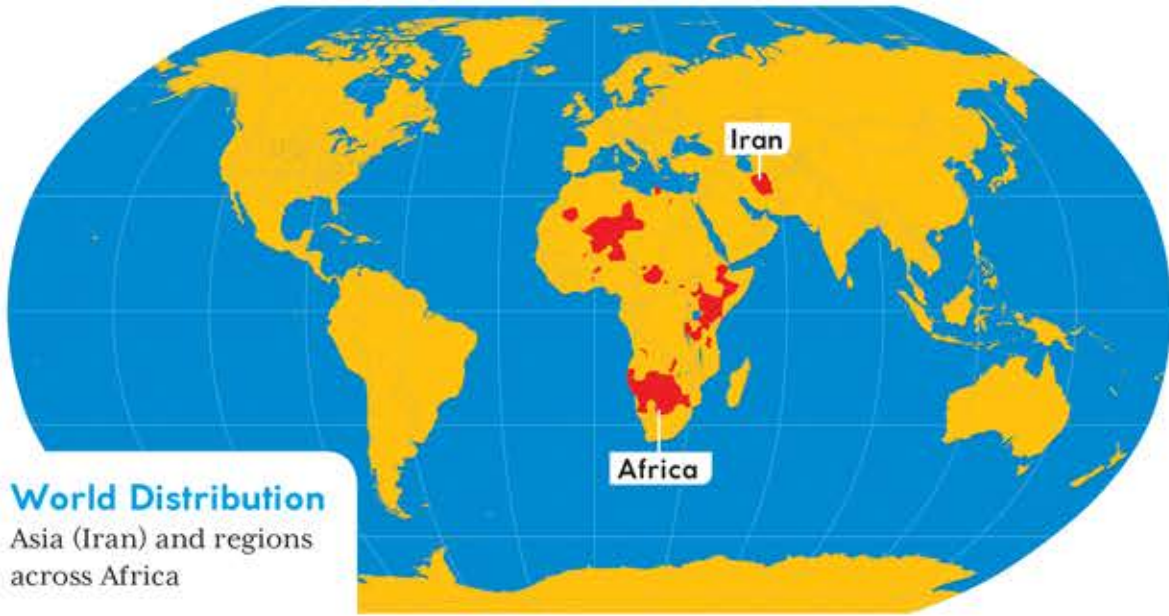


Fact File: Cheetahs



World Distribution
Asia (Iran) and regions across Africa

Habitat

Savannah grasslands, dry forests, semi-desert and desert areas

Habits

During the day, travel far and wide in search of prey; use their speed and stealth to survive; males live in groups; females without cubs live alone

Diet

Mainly small antelope like gazelles; also rabbits, birds, and warthogs

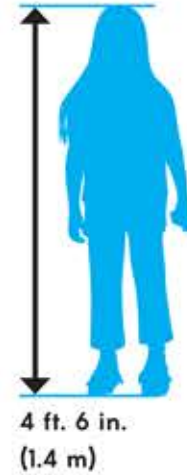
Distinctive Features

Covered with black spots on body and "tear" streaks on face

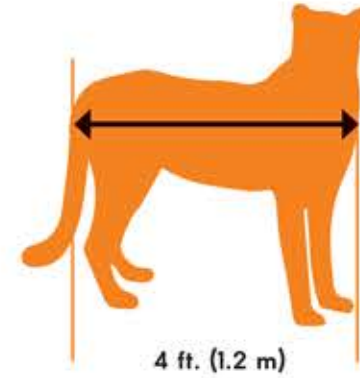
Fast Fact

Cheetah world distribution is less than 10% of what it used to be.

Average Size



Human (age 10)



Cheetah (adult)

Classification

CLASS
Mammalia
(mammals)

ORDER
Carnivora
(carnivores)

FAMILY
Felidae
(cats)

GENUS
Acinonyx
(cats with semi-retractable claws)

SPECIES
Acinonyx jubatus
(cheetah)



◀ A cheetah often gets airborne as it runs.



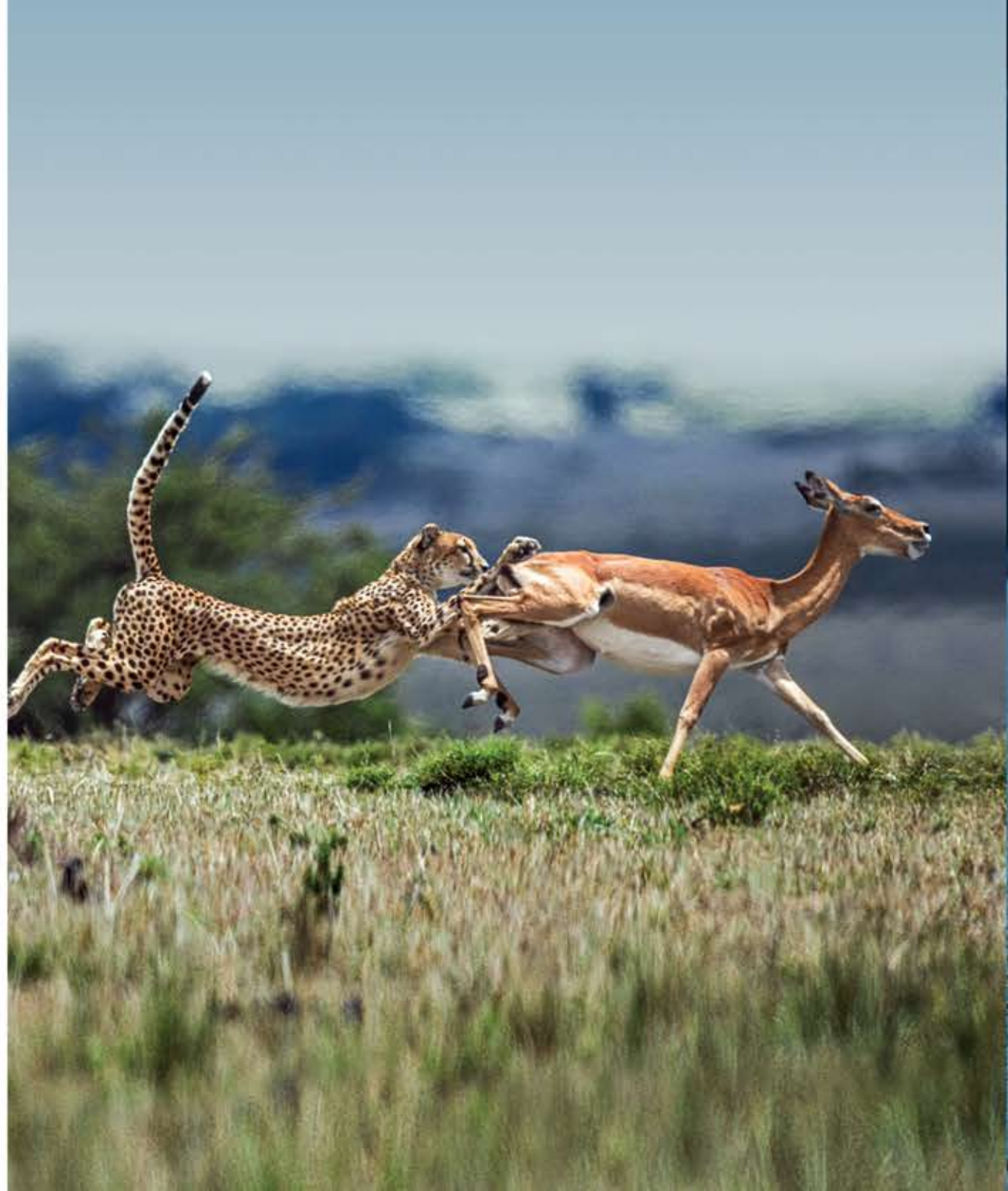
CHAPTER 1

Fastest Feline

It is quiet on the African grasslands. The hot sun beats down. The impala twitch their tails, swatting away flies as they graze. They don't notice the slight movement in the long grass a few dozen yards away. Suddenly, a spotted cat bursts through, racing toward the impala at top speed. It's a mother cheetah, and she is hungry and determined. The impala scatter, trying to get away. They are speedy, but the cheetah is speedier. One of those impala will be breakfast for her and her cubs today.

Did you know cheetahs are the fastest land **mammals** on Earth? In just three strides and three seconds, these cats can reach speeds up to 60 miles (96.6 kilometers) per hour! This **acceleration** rate is faster than any car—and it plays an important role in helping these hunting cats capture their **prey**.

► A cheetah catches impala by tripping them from behind.



Built for Speed

Cheetahs don't have the strength of the true big cats, but they do have a superpower—their speed! This sets cheetahs apart from all other land mammals and has helped them survive for millions of years.

It's estimated that cheetahs can achieve top speeds of 75 mph (120.7 km/h). How do they do this? Cheetahs have the longest and most flexible spine of any cat. While running, the cheetah bunches its feet underneath its curved spine. Then it lengthens its spine into a lunge, pushing off with its powerful hind legs. This unique running style helps cheetahs cover up to 23 feet (7 meters) in one stride! Cheetahs also have swiveling hips and flexible shoulder blades. These help the fast cat change direction easily while running at full speed.

Cheetahs are amazing runners for other reasons, too. They have small, light heads and flat ribs, which improve their **aerodynamics** as they run. And the cheetah's **semi-retractable** claws act like cleats to provide traction.

