

NEWSLETTER MAY '19

A very warm greeting from all of us at Motswiri Private Safari Lodge.

We are excited to share our past autumn adventures with you. Autumn is one of our favourite seasons as the bush is still very green from the past rainy season, but the red dust is starting to fill the sky which provides a canvas for breath-taking sunrises and of course, sunsets.



We have had a roller coaster ride these past two months when it comes to our cheetahs.

In January we had a total population of 7 individuals (4 males, 3 females). Today we only have 3 left.

We lost two of our females due to a stomach virus, leaving only a single female standing from our 2017 relocation project. This particular female went into oestrus and attracted our two southern males (Sable ranch males) into the northern part of the reserve which is in the heart of our other two males' (Phinda males) territory.



Unfortunately, the new visitors were not warmly welcomed by the Phinda males and one of the Sable ranch males came off second best. The remaining Sable ranch male quickly fled the scene and was left to roam the South on his own.

Cheetahs are the fastest land mammals, with documented speeds up to 115 km/hour in captivity and 93 km/hour in the wild, but they cannot maintain such speeds for more than a few hundred metres. By comparison, sprinter Usain Bolt hits a top speed of 45 km/hour over a maximum of 100 metres.

“A cheetah in full flight is one of Africa’s most breath-taking sights – that blindingly rapid and yet sublimely smooth acceleration and the ability to swerve at full speed simply take one’s breath away. And, with a hunting success rate in excess of 50%, cheetahs are amongst the most successful of Africa’s large carnivores when it comes to hunting efficiency, second only to painted wolves.

And yet, the evolutionary sacrifices that cheetahs have made in their quest for speed and agility have placed them at a disadvantage when it comes to defending themselves and their food against other predators. Lions, leopards and hyenas frequently rob cheetahs of their hard-earned meals, and even kill adult and baby cheetahs, in the ongoing brutal battles amongst predators over resources. Game reserves and national parks with high populations of large predators tend to harbour small cheetah populations, and most cheetahs are often found in the vast lands beyond protected areas. Trying to avoid conflict with stronger predators, cheetahs move to unprotected areas. However, there they come into conflict with pastoralists, who see cheetahs as potential livestock killers, which leads to retaliatory killing of cheetahs.

Cheetahs have another reason to fear humans. Their relatively timid nature and lack of brute strength and sharp hooked claws makes cheetahs popular pets for humans. Even though no wild animal species should be tamed and made into household pets or items in personal zoo collections, there is a substantial trade in wild-caught and captive-bred cheetahs. And the recent upsurge in South Africa of tourism ‘predator encounters’ and cub petting facilities has increased the demand for cheetahs, which have a longer usage shelf-life in this regard than do lions.”

-Simon Espley, CEO of Africa Geographic

Cheetahs adapt to various environmental conditions and display different behaviours depending on the area and country.

For example, in Madikwe and other areas in Southern Africa with high large carnivore densities, cheetahs can lose up to 30% of their kills to lions and spotted hyenas.

In these areas, they are primarily active during the day and during full moon periods when there is good visibility and tend to abandon their kills once they have eaten enough. This helps to avoid conflict with lions and hyenas which are predominantly nocturnal.



This allows us to view these beautiful cats during the day.

In contrast, in areas where there are fewer other predators, they have been recorded as being primarily nocturnal, although this may be to avoid the increased human activity in those areas.

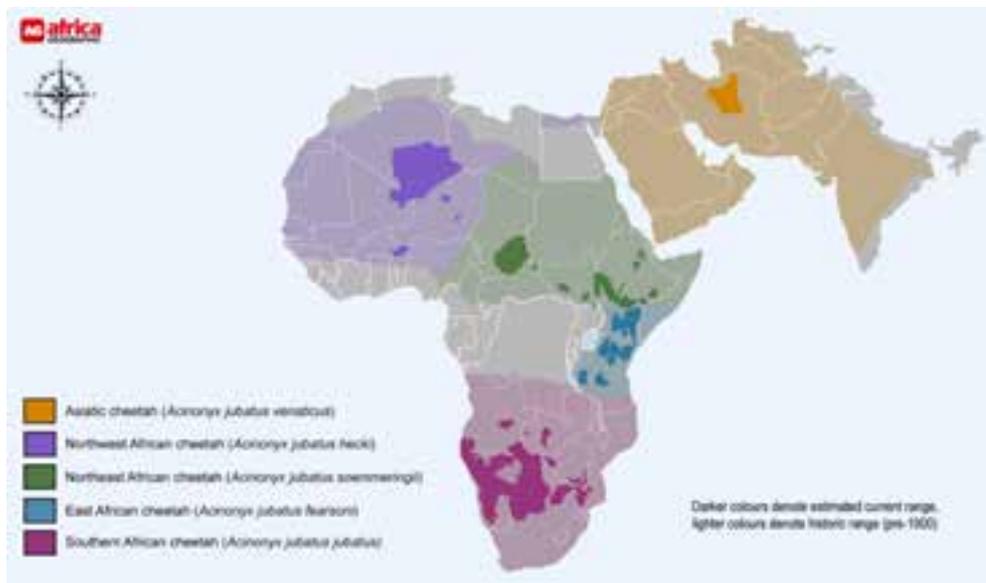
In Kenya's Maasai Mara, cheetahs change their diurnal activity and become nocturnal, depending on current needs and circumstances, and some of them become successful hunters in total darkness!



In the beginning of the 20th Century, over 100,000 cheetahs roamed Africa and Asia, but by the end of that century, the wild cheetah population had reduced to 15,000. Cheetahs are extinct in over 90% of their original range.

Currently, the total population is estimated at 7,100 adult and adolescent animals of known cheetah populations, with the majority living in Southern Africa, and the smallest population in Asia with less than 50 individuals.

The cheetah is classified as 'Vulnerable' in terms of the IUCN Red List, while the two subspecies *A. j. venaticus* (Asiatic cheetah) and *A. j. heckii* (Northwest African cheetah) are listed as critically endangered.



Because cheetahs require such large ranges, they are especially vulnerable to habitat loss and fragmentation.

Those living outside protected areas are often threatened by conflict with livestock and game farmers. Although they do prefer wild prey over livestock, they have been known to kill domestic livestock species, and so face retaliatory persecution by farmers. Game farmers may also target cheetahs due to a perceived threat to their farmed game species.

Because cheetahs rarely scavenge, they are less susceptible to poisoning than are other carnivores such as hyenas, leopards and lions. Cheetahs do however get caught in snares set for bushmeat, even though they may not be the primary target.

With that being said, we are extremely fortunate to be able to spend time with the seeming disappearing cats.

Our newly released pack of wild dogs are doing great. It seems that they are still in exploring mode. They are moving through the whole park and do not stay in one place for too long.

They also recently visited our waterhole. We were privileged to witness them mating. This is a very good sign and creates great optimism and hope in having new puppies within the next couple of months.

They are currently up and down the mountains in search of a den site. The sightings of them will get increasingly less over the next couple of weeks until they emerge with their new offspring in about July (hopefully).



Easter at Motswiri is always a special treat.

As usual, our Chefs went above and beyond to create fun desserts for the younger (and older) guests as well as a delicious Buffet dinner.



Our staff thought of creative ways to decorate the tables with an abundance of chocolate Easter eggs!





Winter is nearly here.....



As our nights get colder and the days get shorter, we are looking forward to beautiful sunsets – created partly by the large amount of dust in the sky - and warm fires when you return home after an eventful game drive with a glass of sherry in hand.



We hope to see you all soon.



Bush greetings

The Motswiri Team