

Kalahari cheetahs: adaptations to an arid region

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Abstrak

This book demonstrates how cheetahs are adapted to arid savannahs like the southern Kalahari, and makes comparisons with other areas, especially the Serengeti. Topics dealt with are: demography and genetic status; feeding ecology, i.e. methods used for studying diet, diets of different demographic groups, individual diet specializations of females, prey selection, the impact of cheetah predation on prey populations, activity regimes and distances travelled per day, hunting behaviour, foraging success and energetics; interspecific competition; spatial ecology; reproductive success and the mating system; and conservation. The major findings show that cheetahs are well adapted to arid ecosystems and are water independent. Cheetah density in the study area was stable at 0.9/100 km² and the population was genetically diverse. Important prey were steenbok and springbok for females with cubs, gemsbok, and adult ostrich for coalition males, and steenbok, springhares, and hares for single animals. Cheetahs had a density-dependent regulatory effect on steenbok and springbok populations. Females with large cubs had the highest overall food intake. Cheetahs, especially males, were often active at night, and competition with other large carnivores, both by exploitation and interference, was slight. Although predation on small cubs was severe, cub survival to adolescence was six times higher than in the Serengeti. There was no difference in reproductive success between single and coalition males. The conservation priority for cheetahs should be to maintain protected areas over a spectrum of landscapes to allow ecological processes, of which the cheetah is an integral part, to proceed unhindered.