

THE ATLAS OF
THE WORLD'S MOST
DANGEROUS
ANIMALS

MAPPING NATURE'S BORN KILLERS

PAULA HAMMOND

 Marshall Cavendish
Reference

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Introduction



Lammergeier



Siberian Tiger

To humans, the most dangerous animals would seem to be those that put us at most risk – the man-killers. Sharks, big cats, bears and snakes: every continent has its own candidate for this gruesome Hall of Fame. From the Asian King Cobra to the North American Grizzly, these fearsome predators kill and maim hundreds of thousands of people every year. Yet not all killers are meat-eaters. Rogue hippopotami and stampeding elephants are just as dangerous and, in many cases, responsible for more human deaths than the natural-born killers. On a worldscale, though, tigers and enraged hippos are mere beginners. More human deaths are caused every year by insects like the humble locust, which devastate crops and bring wide-scale famine.



Wolf Spider



Great White Shark



Green Tree Python

To a Thomson's Gazelle, the most dangerous animal is undoubtedly the cheetah, who lists this lithe member of the antelope family amongst its favourite food. To the snake, it's probably the mongoose, that fast, tenacious little mammal who specializes in making meals out of one of nature's most feared killers. And for members of the insect family, the Wolf Spider seems



Strawberry Poison-Arrow Frog

just as deadly as its full-sized namesake. Whether an animal is dangerous, depends on your point of view. The English poet Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) rightly said that nature was 'red in tooth and claw', and in the animal kingdom the truly dangerous ones are those who want to put you on the menu.

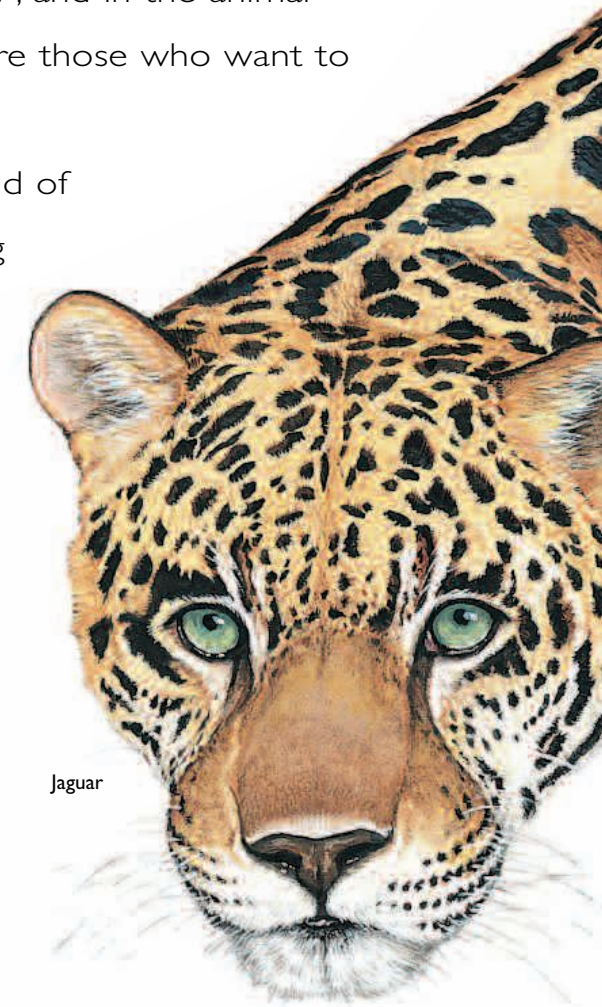
In this volume, we hope to explore the world of dangerous animals from all these perspectives, giving you a fresh look at the man-killers, the predators, the great hunters, and the perhaps not so gentle herbivores.



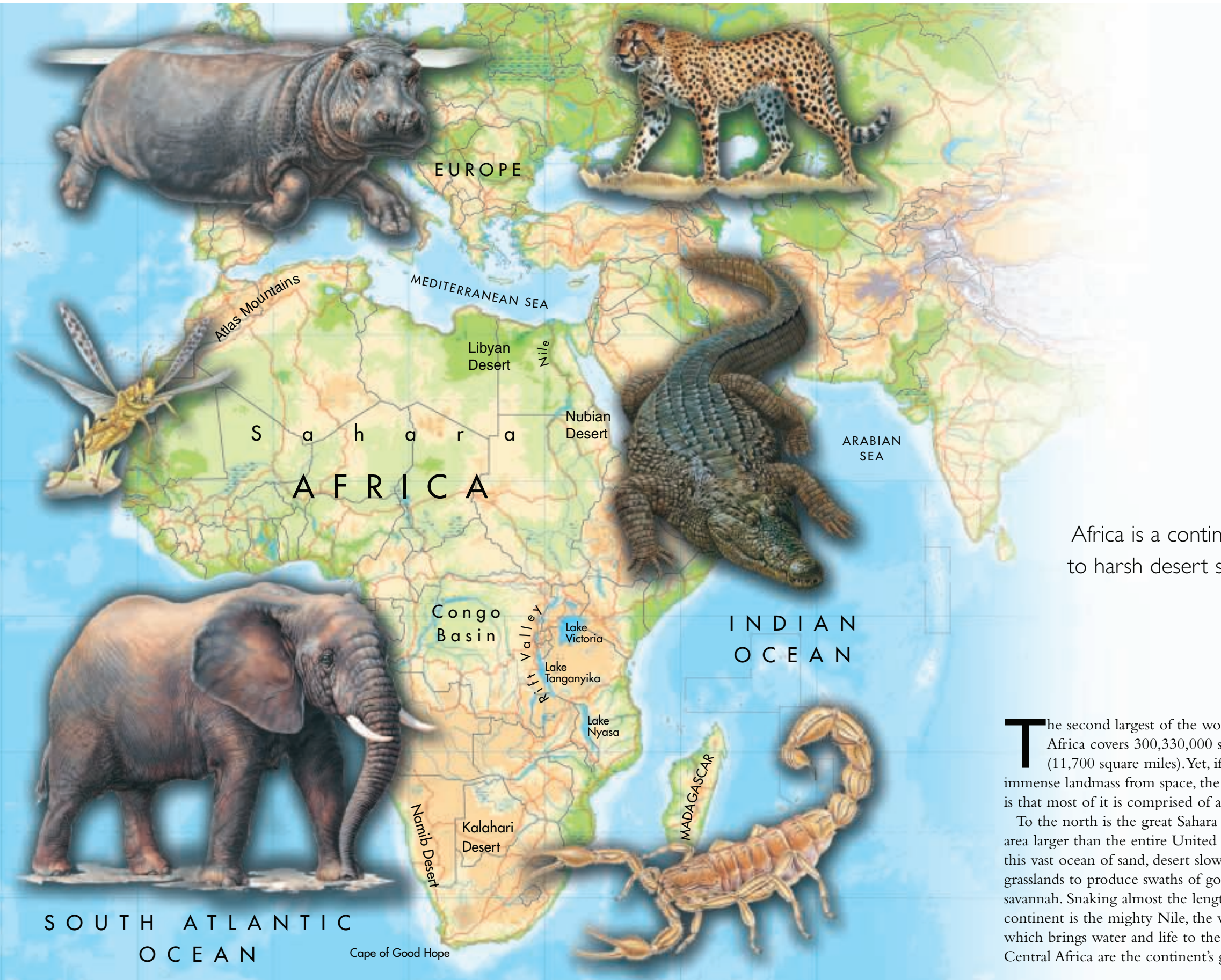
Frilled Lizard



Nile Crocodile



Jaguar



Africa

Africa is a continent of contrasts. From lush, green tropical rainforests to harsh desert sands, nowhere on Earth can we find such astounding variety and natural beauty.

The second largest of the world's seven continents, Africa covers 300,330,000 square kilometres (11,700 square miles). Yet, if we were to view this immense landmass from space, the first thing we'd notice is that most of it is comprised of a huge, wide plateau. To the north is the great Sahara Desert, which covers an area larger than the entire United States. On the edges of this vast ocean of sand, desert slowly merges with grasslands to produce swaths of golden, sun-scorched savannah. Snaking almost the length of the whole continent is the mighty Nile, the world's longest river, which brings water and life to the parched interior. In Central Africa are the continent's great rainforests, a

startling carpet of green nestled in the vast Congo basin. Towards the coast, the picture is completed by narrow strips of bustling coastline. Such a variety of habitats has made Africa home to some of the world's most famous and spectacular wild animals – plus a few surprising ones too. On the South African coast, for example, we can find penguins, who seem much more comfortable basking on tourist-filled beaches than in the frozen Antarctic. It's in the thick dense jungles, steamy swamps and rolling plains, though, that we find Africa's most familiar and dangerous inhabitants and where, every day, hunter and hunted play out their deadly game of survival.

African Elephant

Over 1.6 million years, the African Elephant has evolved into the world's largest land mammal. When roused, these seemingly gentle giants can charge at up to 40km/h (25mph) in a terrifying and unstoppable stampede that brings death and destruction in its wake.

Key Facts

ORDER *Proboscidea*
FAMILY *Elephantidae*
GENUS & SPECIES *Loxodonta africana*

Weight	Male up to 6000kg (13,228lb)
Length	Male up to 4m (13ft), head to rump female up to 3.3m (10ft 10in)
Shoulder Height	Male up to 3.27m (10ft 9in)
Sexual maturity	About 10 years
Breeding Season	All year
Gestation period	22 months
Number of young	1
Birth Interval	3-4 years
Typical diet	Grasses, foliage, shrubs, fruit, flowers, roots
Life Span	50-60 years



Eye Glands

Mid-way between the eye and ear are an elephant's temporal glands. In males, these glands produce a dark, strongly scented substance during the breeding season.



Trunk

An elephant's trunk is a powerful and flexible tool. It can be used not only to breathe and smell, but to grasp and carry objects.

Comparisons

As these pictures show, there are a number of clear differences between African and Indian Elephants. Indian Elephants are generally smaller, with lighter skin and less prominent tusks. They also tend to have a slightly humped back and two lumps on their forehead. Up close, there are less obvious differences. An Indian Elephant, for

example, has five toes on its front feet and four on the back. An African Elephant has four or five toes on its front feet, but only three at the back. It is the ears that are the biggest giveaway: the ears of African Elephants are larger and are shaped, some people say, like the African continent.



African Elephant



Indian Elephant

Modern elephants are the last surviving relatives of the Woolly Mammoth, which became extinct around 4000 years ago. Mammoths belonged to a group known as Proboscideans, who, like elephants, had elongated snouts or trunks. Once common throughout Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, elephants have been rapidly declining in numbers since the 1970s. African Elephants are larger than their Asian relatives, but there are now only about 500,000 remaining. These include the Forest Elephant of Central Africa and the West African Elephant, which lives in both forests and savannahs, but it is the Savannah Elephant, living south of the Sahara Desert, that is largest and the undisputed king of the grasslands.

Family Ties

Wild elephants live for around 60 years. During this time, they form close-knit family groups of about 10 or 12, headed by a dominant, older female called the matriarch. Elephants are generally social animals. They enjoy the company of the herd and are extremely expressive and communicative, using a series of low stomach rumbles as well as touch, scent and body posture to 'bond' with the rest of the group.

Male (bull) elephants generally stay with the herd only until they're about 12 years old, when they leave to form troops of their own. Exiling mature males from the family group in this way may be a safety measure. An adult bull elephant has glands between the eye and ear, which

become active for about three months each year. During this time, the mature males enter a condition called must, which means madness. In this heightened state of sexual arousal, these elephants are very dangerous and frequently use their tusks and huge bulk to gouge and trample other elephants and, occasionally, humans.

Ancient Tanks

In the second century BC, the great North African general Hannibal (247–183 BC) crossed the Alps into Italy and

African Elephant habitat



declared war on the Roman Empire. He took with him 26,000 soldiers, 6000 horses and dozens of war elephants. Elephants were the ancient world's equivalent of the tank. On a battlefield, they caused panic, not only because of their great size, but owing to their unpredictable nature. They could easily smash apart an enemy army, but were just as likely to inflict damage on their own troops. These enormous mammals have poor eyesight, so when alarmed or threatened they will charge blindly towards the source of the noise. Bull elephants can weigh up to 6 tonnes (6.5 tons), with tusks growing to 3m (10ft) in length, so there's little that can stop an angry or distressed elephant from stampeding. Hannibal's elephant riders were aware of this, and came equipped with a hammer and a huge, metal spike. If at any time they lost control of the elephant, the only way to stop it was to drive the spike into its brain.

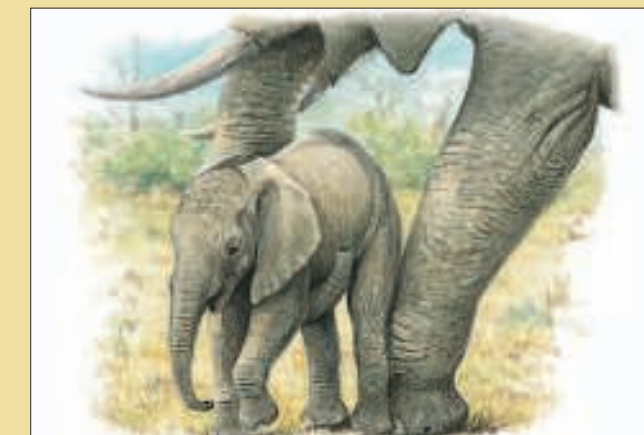
Stampede!

It's in extreme conditions that elephants are at their most dangerous, yet not all elephant attacks are obviously defensive. Elephants are extremely intelligent, complex animals and sometimes their behaviour seems almost human. In 2002, for example, a herd of elephants attacked a village that was encroaching on their range. After drinking stores of beer, they went on what seemed like a drunken rampage, pulling down homes, destroying crops and killing whoever stood in their way.

In another village, an elephant attacked a man who was trying to hide from the herd up a tree. The elephant shook him down from the tree and used his powerful, column-like legs to trample him to death. Later, he bathed the body and stood guard over it, almost as though he regretted his actions.



From the moment of birth, a newborn becomes the centre of attention within the family group.



If necessary, the young calf is gently helped to its feet, either by the mother or by another female.



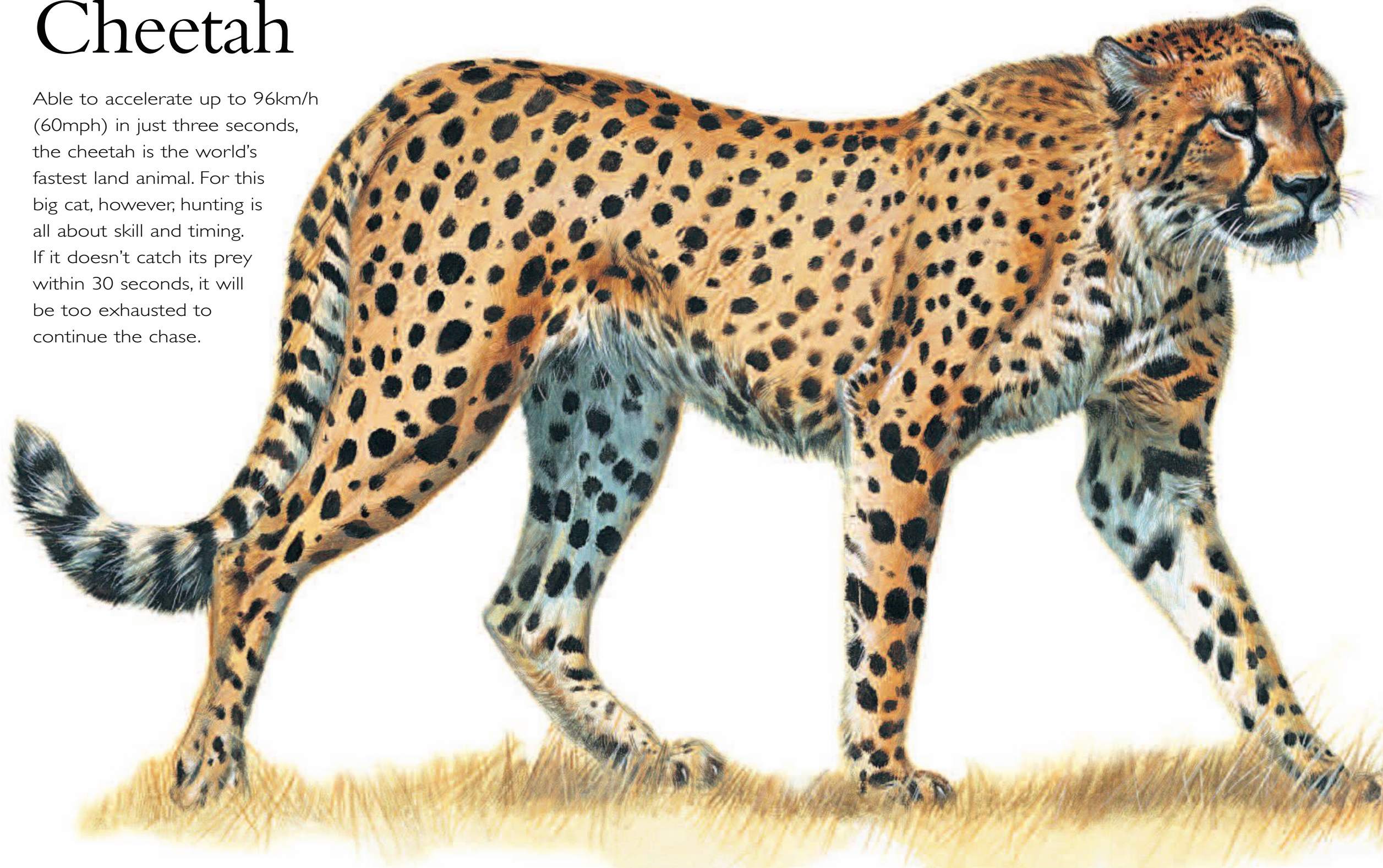
The mother keeps a close watch over the calf on the move, ready to steady the newborn with her trunk should it falter.



The mother shields the calf from the fierce sun during the heat of the day.

Cheetah

Able to accelerate up to 96km/h (60mph) in just three seconds, the cheetah is the world's fastest land animal. For this big cat, however, hunting is all about skill and timing. If it doesn't catch its prey within 30 seconds, it will be too exhausted to continue the chase.



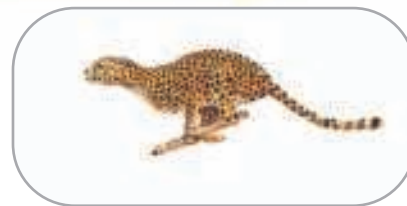
Forelegs

Cheetahs are able to stretch their legs much further than other animals. This allows them to cover vast distances when running.



Spine

Shoulder blades lie to the side of the body, so cheetahs can arch their spines to cover distances at speed.



Claws

Most cats pull back their claws when not in use. Cheetahs can't, using them instead for grip while running.



Key Facts

ORDER *Primates* / FAMILY *Pongidae*
GENUS & SPECIES *Pongo pygmaeus*

Weight	34–68kg (75–150lb)
Length	
Head and body	1.3–1.5m (4ft 3in–4ft 11in)
Tail	60–80cm (24–31in)
Sexual maturity	20–24 months
Mating season	Throughout the year
Gestation period	90–95 days
Number of young	Up to 8, but usually 2 to 5
Birth interval	17–20 months
Typical diet	Gazelles and other antelope species; also hares, rodents and gamebirds
Life Span	Up to 12 years in the wild

