

# A SLOW BUT LOVING START FOR

THE cheetah is known as the fastest and one of the most beautiful animals on earth. Film of it bringing down prey with its sheer amazing speed has long been a staple of African wildlife documentaries.

But its 'home life', raising and protecting its young, has been little seen until now, with these incredible pictures showing how a mother raises her litter of cubs.

The cheetah may be a predator, but it is also preyed upon, and recent studies in Kenya and the Serengeti park in Tanzania show that 90 per cent of cubs die before reaching the age of three months. So a mother cheetah's maternal role is critical to the survival

of the species, which has been considered endangered since the Sixties. As animals built for speed, cheetahs have weak jaws and small teeth and are unable defend their young against lions, hyenas, jackals, birds of prey, and other predators.

For 18 months, mothers must raise their cubs from tiny, helpless creatures — only ten ounces in weight and less than 12 inches long — into grown animals capable of taking care of themselves. One day, when she judges the time right, she will abruptly leave them, often while they are sleeping. They have made the passage into adulthood. These beautiful photos show the first stages of that dangerous journey...



Mother love: Female cheetahs often wash, suckle and cuddle their cubs

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# THE FASTEST ANIMAL ON EARTH



Family ties: Cheetahs give birth to between four and six cubs, and nurture them till they are 16-18 months old – when they abandon them to fend for themselves



Lean on me: Cubs are born blind, helpless and unable to crawl. They are totally dependent on their mother



Helping hand: Cubs cannot walk until they are 16 days old