

ing in, don't you dare move a muscle or hat an eye, or there'll be a vacant chair at your fireside. Wait till they alight, right there in the sand."

And so in time they take to this novel blind, and lie flat out on the damp sand, facing toward the decoys. And again in time they hear the far-away calling of the winged army coming in to rest. "We will burst up their afternoon conversazione this time, for sure," says the man who talks bass. "Wait till they stick their legs down to alight."

And in very faith, that is what the men in the flat blind do, and that is what the geese do. They are not looking for visitors, and they do not suspect the blind even, probably do not see it at all. They come on in, chattering and gabbling, and finally the eyes glaring out from under the sheet at the level of the sand actually do see the legs of the geese stretching down as they alight. Indeed, from the arrangement of the blind, the birds cannot be seen at all until they are practically at the level of the

ground. The eyes of the leader of this expedition into Africa turn upon his lieutenants who lie beside him. He chuckles and nearly breaks out into laughter as he sees the fact of the boy next to him turn ashy pale with excitement.

"Now, jump!" he cries.

The frail covering is thrown off as the shooters spring to their knees or to their feet. A screaming babble of discordant surprise fills all the air. They are closer into the middle of a flock of live wild geese than ever they were before, closer even than when they were lying in the cowpaths.

Yet when they count up the dead birds they find not a hundred, not a score, not a dozen. There are only four dead geese for twice that many shots which have been fired. The boy wonders how it happened, but the man who talks bass is too full of delighted laughter to worry about the net results.

"Didn't we fool 'em?" he exclaims. "Oh, but didn't we just fool 'em that time!"

THE HUNTING LEOPARD OF INDIA

By Charles E. Clay

OF all the various species of the cat family of carnivora there is only one—and that at best a kind of hybrid—that has been trained and subjugated by man to become his faithful and powerful ally in the chase. I refer to the beautiful chita, cheetah, or hunting leopard of India.

This wonderfully strong and courageous animal; ranked by many noted sportsmen and naturalists, among them Sir Samuel Baker, Mr. Blanford and General McMaster, as, for a comparatively short distance, perhaps the swiftest mammal inhabiting the jungle; has a very wide habitat. It is found in many parts of Africa, Persia and India; but only by the natives of Hindostan is it caught and made subservient to the pleasure of man.

In this connection it is curious, as well as interesting, to note that while all aborigines of countries infested with large game, such as elephants, lions, tigers, leopards and bison, become expert hunters and trackers,

to the natives of India and the far east largely must be accorded the palm of capturing them with the ulterior motive of domesticating them in whole or in part for some useful purpose.

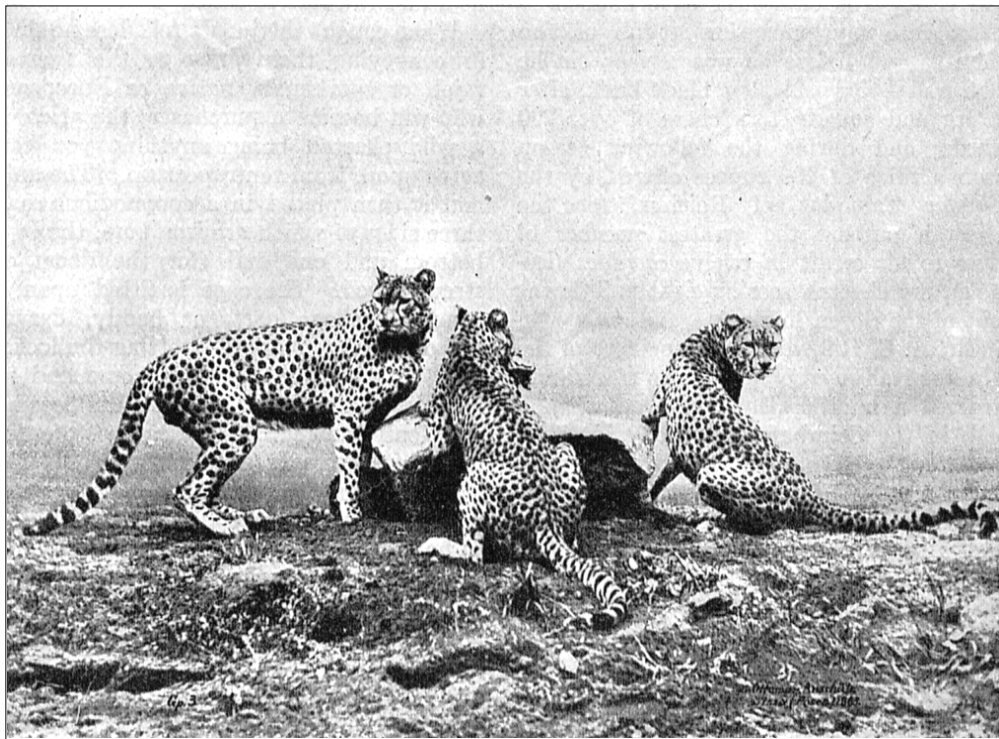
Thus while in Africa the elephant is hunted and slaughtered, wholesale, for his ivory, the same animal, from time immemorial, has been captured in India for the purpose of making him a beast of burden and draught; as well as for the more imposing pageants so dear to the oriental. So, too, tigers, leopards and cheetahs are taken alive and kept by many of the native princes as a recognized adjunct of the royal state.

The word chita, pronounced by natives, and generally spelled by Europeans, cheetah, simply means "spotted," and doubtless accounts for the older scientific classification of the hunting leopard as *Felis jubata* or "spotted cat." But as many other members of the felidæ, such as the lynx and true leopards, are also spotted, many

modern naturalists have renamed the real and only cheetah or hunting leopard, *Cynelurus jubatus*. The natives of India often call the leopard or panther (*Felis pardus*), the "bearded pard" of Shakespeare, chitabagh or spotted tiger. Thus distinguishing it from the cheetah or hunting leopard.

The most salient characteristics of the hunting leopard, whereby it may be readily distinguished from the panther (*F. pardus*), are the slenderness of its body, the greater relative length of its limbs, which are longer than in any of the true cats—not

uted splotches of black, over almost the whole of the animal, excepting its buff colored chin and throat; these spots are solid (*maculata*), not ringed (*annulata*) with lighter colored centers, as panthers are marked, nor are they arranged in rosettes or in lines, but spread in a higgledy-piggledy fashion all over the skin. The ears are black outside and tawny on the margins and at the base. On the tail, which is relatively long, being equal to more than half the length of the head and body, the spots are confined to the upper sur-



"THE HAUNTS OF THE CHEETAH ARE THE LOW, ISOLATED, ROCKY, BROKEN GROUNDS BORDERING THE PLAINS.

even excepting the lynxes—the fact that its claws are only partially retractile and cannot be completely withdrawn into the sheath at the end of the toes, and the texture of the fur, which, in the adult, resembles much more the hair of a dog, albeit smooth and glossy, than the soft velvety covering of the cat.

The color of the cheetah varies from tawny to a bright rufous fawn tint, becoming considerably paler beneath the belly, chest and on the legs. On this body color, if I may be allowed the term, are distrib-

face; toward the tip the spots converge until incomplete rings are formed.

Such is the general coloring of a full grown cheetah in his prime, when about five years old. I have, however, seen cheetah cubs, from two to six months of age, whose long hairy fur was as gray as that of a tabby cat; but when it was rubbed the wrong way the glint of the coming spots could plainly be made out.

At maturity the male cheetah stands about 30 to 33 inches high at the shoulder, though an animal I had and hunted with

for three years in the Deccan, which I bought as a cub, not three months old, from a couple of jungle wallahs in the forests of South Canara, measured 34 inches when full grown. His total length was 76 inches, of which 31 inches was tail.

Native shikarees and trainers, in whose charge the rajahs and sirdars place their cheetahs, say that these animals, when captured as cubs, cannot be taught to course antelope when full grown. I must take exception to so broad a statement; for, in two instances, at least, within my own experience, the contrary has been the case. The cheetah I have alluded to came into my possession a cub of two months and before he was a year old he had pulled down his first black buck, after a fair and square stern chase of over 200 yards; and during the following season won a prize of 200 rupees offered by the Sudder Taluqdar of Raichur, for the cheetah putting the greatest number of deer to his credit in twelve *chordaos* (let-go's), my cheetah scoring eight pull-downs out of the dozen loosings.

Mr. A. C. Hill, divisional engineer of the Madras Railway Company, also reared and trained a hunting leopard taken when a cub in the Coimbatore district. He used to carry the animal with him when inspecting the line; the cage on its traveling cart, being loaded on a flat construction car, and I have seen this cheetah show as fine sport after black buck as any animal captured and trained after it had reached maturity.

Cheetahs, as a rule, do not breed well in captivity; at least that is not the practice, because the jungle people will not trap the female, being, as she generally is, smaller than the male, and therefore less readily sold to the rajahs who naturally prefer the bigger and handsomer males for their kennels. Another reason, and probably the real one, is that greater labor and trouble is involved in training a cub to course deer, than to simply direct the movements of subjugated adults who have while wild fully acquired the art of stalking and seizing their prey. It is a generally accepted fact that hunting leopards in captivity merely use their natural instincts and never develop fresh mental powers, nor learn any new sagacity from their human trainers.

The haunts of the cheetah are the low,

isolated, rocky, broken grounds bordering the plains, chiefly cultivated in cotton or grain, which are the favorite grazing places of their principal prey, the antelope. The jungle wallahs who trap them say the cheetah usually hunt in pairs or families, having a recognized trysting place, generally a tree or rock. Here several members congregate and watch for their quarry. While looking for antelope they employ their leisure in sharpening their claws by scratching the bark of the tree or rock. The trappers search for these signs, and capture the leopards by spreading strong nets and rawhide nooses.

When caught the jungle folk lose no time in conveying their prize to the nearest rajah or sportsman, native or European, who will become a purchaser; the price of a wild cheetah being anything you can agree upon, from ten rupees up. The animal is then placed in a commodious cage three sides of which are iron bars, the top, bottom and one end (for the door) of strong wood. The cage is fitted upon a common village cart, or bandy, drawn by one or a pair of trotting bullocks. This becomes the cheetah's home and in it he is carried afield, when he has become sufficiently amenable to discipline to enter upon his career as a coursing or hunting leopard. The period for domestication is much shorter than would be supposed to be necessary for a creature so fierce and bloodthirsty in its savage state; but, during the process of handling, the cheetah is always kept gorged; the road to its affections, like that of many a higher animal, not altogether excepting man, being through its stomach. Kindness and constant companionship are also prime factors in its subjugation. When a cheetah submits to the caresses of its keeper as freely as any domestic pussy courts the fondling of its mistress, and allows itself to be hooded and unhooded without fighting or resentment, then it is considered ready to be tried as a hunter.

All hunting leopards are hooded with a stiff leather cap drawn over the eyes, similar to the caps worn by falcons when hawking. Some shikarees keep their charges hooded all the time, whether at home or afield, except when actually hunting, saying that it makes their eyesight keener, but I very much doubt this. The probable reason the cheetah is hooded

when going a hunting, is that he travels more quietly in his cage when blindfolded, and does not fret or frighten the bullocks throwing him to the hunting ground; for generally you hire village cattle for this purpose and the very smell of the cheetah in the cage behind them is apt to make bullocks restive, to say nothing of my angry snarling the animal may indulge in, excited and hungry as he is when about to be coursed.

Before a new accession to a kennel of trained cheetahs is to be tried after black buck, the keeper takes him hooded in his bullock cart, to an extensive maidan or empty level plain surrounding most Indian villages, where hundreds of hungry homeless, pariah dogs are always prowling. The keeper having singled out a likely looking dog, the cheetah is dropped from the cage and unhooded. The instant he sees his prey he gives chase, and such is the velocity of his furious charge that the short run appears like the repetition of the familiar hare and tortoise fable. For a sprint of anything under a quarter of a mile, where the going is firm and fairly level, the cheetah will overhaul the swiftest greyhound, or the fleetest racehorse that ever looked through a bridle. He does not bound upon his prey like a lion or a tiger, but fairly runs it down as a dog does, gripping the throat as he goes at full speed, and once the quarry is brought to earth there he holds it pinned until his keeper hoods him, always rewarding him the while with plenty of blood and the warm viscera of the game he has captured. After one or two preliminary breathers of this kind the cheetah is ready to be loosed at its legitimate quarry, the fleet black buck.

This species of coursing is of the most intensely exciting and exhilarating character. The contestants, if that term be appropriate, are pitted on a fairly equal footing. On the one hand the fleetest of living quadrupeds, free, wild and on his native heath, with all his wits about him, keen of sight and of scent; on the other, a creature as wild as its prey, noble, beautiful and strong, the acme of symmetry and grace, ready to match instinct with instinct, strength against strength, speed against speed. Man is scarce an accessory in the fine duel to be fought; a spectator only and eager to award the palm to the one whose natural powers gain the victory.

How eagerly I have scanned the dewy green and how often felt the thrill of joy that makes the blood course faster in the veins as the glasses fell upon a distant herd cropping the tender shoots that lay beneath the shrub. Then come the wary and cautious approach towards the game until the lordly buck descries our slow advance; the sudden halt, the stealthy stalk of the cunning cheetah; the terrific rush as soon as instinct tells him he is within striking distance; the wild, mad gallop as you strain every nerve to get a view of the capture that you feel must follow; the loud hurrah that makes the welkin ring as the bounding form of mottled gold ranges alongside of the panting buck, and the next moment both pursuer and pursued roll over in a cloud of dust and the chase is at an end.

If that be not a realization of a hunter's brightest dreams, then match me another as fair.

But the cheetah, swift and sure though is his general rush, not infrequently fails to overtake the flying prey; then the conditions are not so rosy, nor the sport so entirely devoid of danger to the keeper and spectators as might be inferred. For be it remembered, the cheetah is asked to do his hunting on an empty stomach, and, in order that he may be at his best, he has usually been kept fasting for forty-eight hours. When, therefore, he finds he has missed his expected refreshment, he flies into a furious passion and is ready to seize upon and rend the first thing that comes his way. When in one of these ungovernable rages not even his keeper, of whom at other times he is exceedingly fond, would stand the chance of going scot free did he not provide himself with a tempting morsel with which to make his peace ere he attempted to hood his disappointed favorite and place him again in his cage.

Cheetahs that have failed in their first effort may be loosed again during the same morning at a fresh buck subsequently sighted; but let a cheetah make his first course successfully and be blooded fully as a reward for his prowess, then nothing will coax or tempt him to run again; those therefore lucky enough to have a large kennel of hunting leopards generally take out five or six, and with this number, if game be plentiful, a magnificent morning's sport may be had.