

The Cheetah Daddy

The amazing true story of two orphaned cheetahs and the man who taught them to survive in the wilds of Africa

Deep in the wilderness of northern Kenya, two boys heard **frantic** cries. In the bushes, they discovered two starving cheetah cubs whose mother had been killed by a lion.

The cheetahs, only a few weeks old and weighing less than two pounds each,

were in serious danger: In the wild, 90 percent of all cheetah cubs die before reaching 3 months old. They're **prey** for eagles, cobras, hyenas, and, most frightening of all, lions.

But these cubs—both male—were fortunate: The boys rescued them and delivered them to Jane and Ian Craig, who help save endangered animals at the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy.

Love and Comfort

The Craigs and their staff nursed the tiny cheetahs back to health—bottle-feeding them, sleeping beside them, and comforting them. Soon the little cheetah brothers, which they named

Cheetah cubs Toki and Sambu cuddle with their “foster dad,” Simon King.



Sambu and Toki, were dashing around the yard like frisky kittens.

But how would these orphans survive independently? In the wild, cheetah cubs remain with their mothers until they are almost 2 years old—and during that time, their mothers instruct them in

Vocabulary

frantic: filled with fear

prey: an animal that is hunted by another animal for food

commitment: a promise to do something

wildlife refuge: a place where animals live under protection from danger

thrived: lived well



hunting, avoiding danger, and protecting themselves.

The Craigs wouldn't be able to recruit a cheetah mother to instruct the cubs, so they recruited the best alternative: a man named Simon King.

Wild Lessons

King has spent more than

20 years studying cheetahs. Parenting two cubs was a tremendous **commitment**—for two years, he would have them at his side almost constantly—but he felt there was no alternative. Consequently, when the brothers were 1 month old, King became their adoptive father.

The brothers quickly became attached to King and followed him everywhere. If they encountered large, potentially dangerous animals—black rhinos, lions, baboons—King would growl at the cubs the way a mother cheetah would have, signaling to the cubs to stay away.



Cheetahs are the fastest land animals. They can run at speeds of up to 70 miles per hour.

King taught the cheetahs to hunt by rolling around with a stuffed rabbit. The cubs imitated him, chasing and tackling the rabbit as King pulled it around on a string—and with more lessons, they began to hunt on their own.

Tragedy Strikes

When they were almost 2, the brothers were ready to live independently at Lewa: King could monitor the cheetahs' locations using special electronic collars, but they would be on their own. Initially, everything went smoothly.

And then one night, tragedy struck: The brothers were asleep in some rocks when lions attacked. Toki escaped, but Sambu didn't. For King, Sambu's death was devastating—for Toki, it was worse. Life is difficult for cheetahs in the wild, and especially difficult for a solitary male.

Shortly after Sambu's death, Toki was attacked by a gang of three male cheetahs. He recovered only because he had around-the-clock care at Lewa. Could Toki continue to live in the wild? Those three male cheetahs would certainly attack again.

A New Home

King and the Craigs decided that Toki should

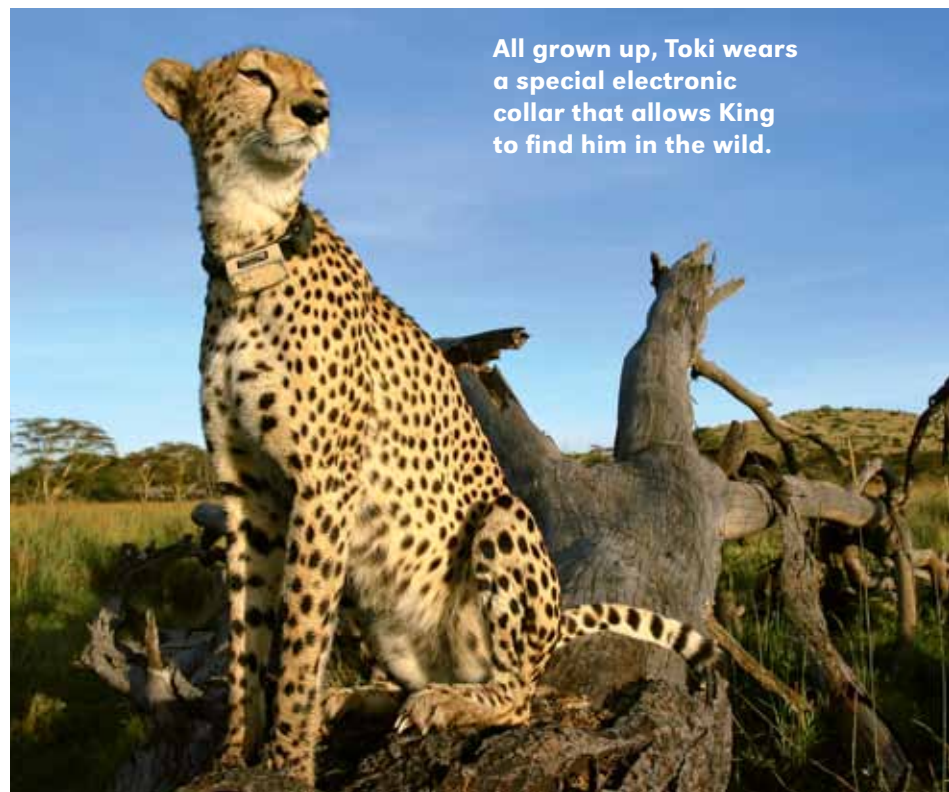
be moved to a nearby **wildlife refuge**, Ol Pejeta, where he could roam free in a protected 1,700-acre area.

Upon Toki's arrival, he appeared delighted to be at Ol Pejeta: He walked confidently, marking his territory—something he had never done at Lewa. Toki **thrived** as a wild cheetah: "This is home," he appeared to say.

Initially, Toki wore an electronic collar that enabled King to track his location—but eventually the collar was removed so that Toki could experience complete freedom.

Today, 12 years after Toki's rescue, King no longer sees Toki—but he remains one proud father.

—Lauren Tarshis



All grown up, Toki wears a special electronic collar that allows King to find him in the wild.