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# Need for Speed

Whether it is cheetahs chasing their prey across the savannah or peregrine falcons plummeting from the sky, speed is one of the animal kingdom's most incredible abilities. But have you ever wondered what makes these animals so fast and why they need to be speedy at all? Well, speed helps them survive in the wild. It comes in handy for hunting prey, escaping predators and migrating to new territories.

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*The caracal is a speedy cat found in dry parts of India*





## Fast Animals Have Aerodynamic Shapes

Aerodynamic is a word you are going to encounter often in this book. It is all about the way air moves around objects. Some shapes (think the kingfisher's beak) cut through the air faster with less friction or drag, and we say that's an aerodynamic shape.







## What Makes Them So Fast?

The secret to superspeed in animals lies in their specialized body adaptations and powerful muscles. Some species boast long, muscular legs, while others have impressive aerodynamic body shapes built to reduce friction and maximize speed (think of the sleek shape of a fighter jet or your favourite sports car) that allow them to zoom past you in a blink of an eye!

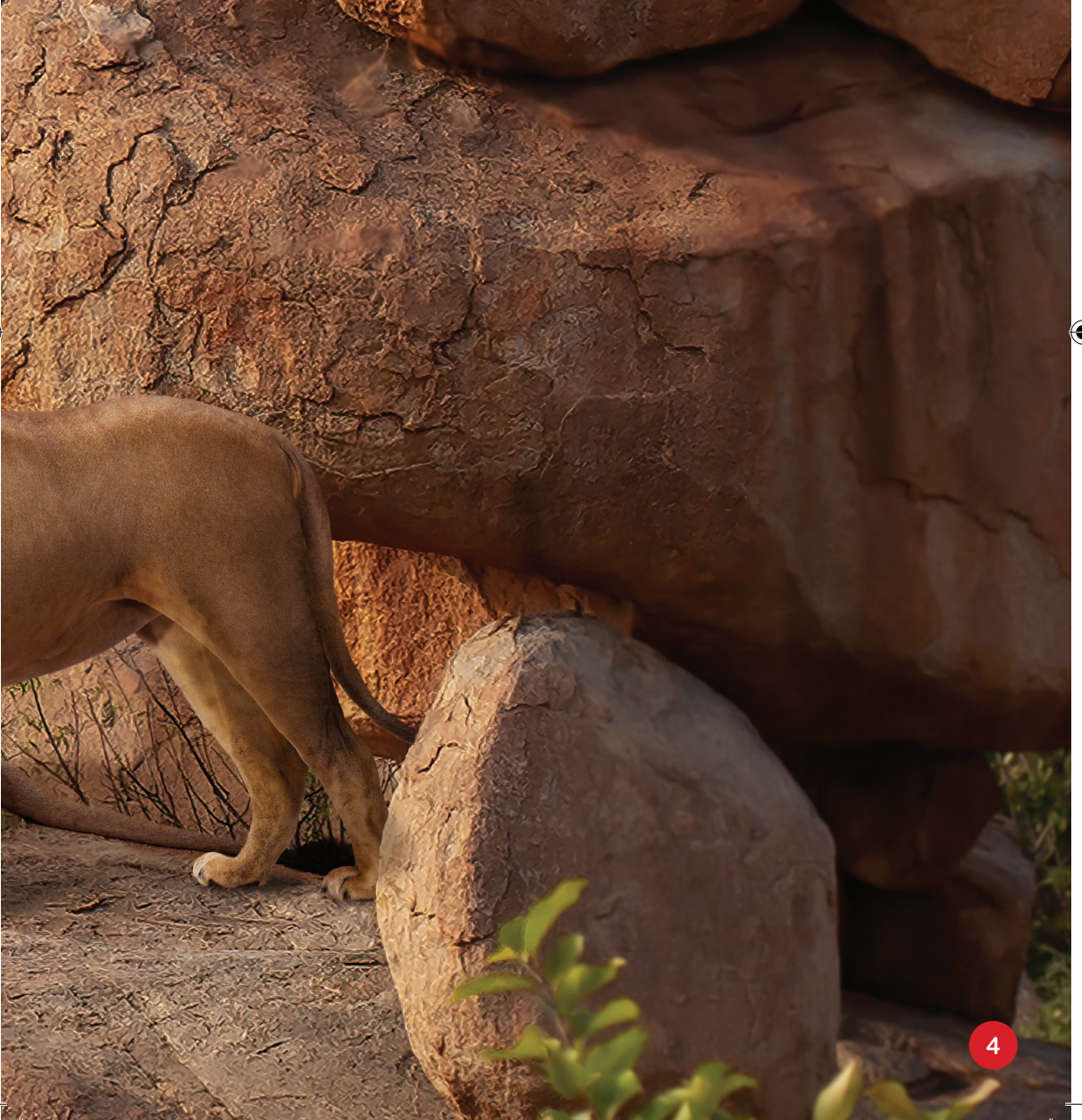






## Why Do Animals Need Speed?

In nature, speed is a critical survival tool. Being faster than their prey is crucial for many predators. The Asiatic lion, found in India's Gir forest, is one such animal. They can run at upto **55 km/h** for short distances while chasing down prey like deer and wild boar. They are not the fastest cats, but lions hunt in packs and rely on both teamwork and bursts of speed to trap their prey.







## Escaping Predators

Prey animals, on the other hand, rely on speed to escape danger. The blackbuck, an antelope native to India, is one of the fastest land animals, capable of running at speeds of up to **80 km/h**. When predators like wolves or tigers approach, it uses its quick reflexes and speed to outrun them and escape to safety.







# Blackbuck

Find Me Here!

In the grasslands  
and scrub forests of  
Gujarat, Rajasthan  
and Haryana.

## CRITTER STATS

**Scientific name:** *Antelope cervicapra*

**Size:** 100–130 cm – like a motorcycle

**Weight:** 35–45 kg

**Lifespan:** 10–15 years

**Habitat:** plains, short grasslands and open scrub

**Conservation status:** least concern





**Found in the plains of the subcontinent, blackbucks with their stunning black-and-white fur and amazing speed, sure are an impressive sight! The striking colour of their fur actually helps them stay hidden in their natural habitat.**



They are easier to spot in motion as they bound across a grassland. Blackbucks run fast to stay safe from predators and cover large distances in search of food.

Until it was hunted to extinction in 1952, the Asiatic cheetah – the cheetah species native to India – was the chief predator of the blackbuck.







To stay safe and outrun cheetahs, blackbucks had to learn to run incredibly fast. Today, those skills are put to good use as they evade predators such as wolves and leopards.

The sleek blackbuck can reach speeds of up to **80 km/h!** And when pursued by an equally swift animal, they change direction superfast, making it even harder for predators to catch them.







# DID YOU KNOW?

**Blackbuck males put on a display in order to attract females. Males competing to win a female will lock horns and fight it out.**



**Blackbucks live in groups called herds. In fact, they are known to form three types of groups. Females will often band together, as will mature male blackbucks, with young "bachelor" herds coming up as a result.**

**Male blackbucks have cool spiral-shaped horns. These are never shed, and instead, keep growing through the entire life of the animal.**







# Caracal

Find Me Here!

Dry areas of  
Rajasthan, Gujarat  
and Madhya  
Pradesh.

## CRITTER STATS

**Scientific name:** *Caracal caracal*

**Size:** 61–106 cm – like a medium-sized dog

**Weight:** 8–20 kg

**Lifespan:** 10–12 years

**Habitat:** arid areas, scrub and rocky outcrops

**Conservation status:** least concern





**The forests and deserts of India are home to a mysterious feline resident, the caracal. It has a distinct reddish-brown coat and beautiful pointy black-tipped ears. But even more amazing than its looks are its unique superpowers of jumping and running!**



Unlike blackbucks, caracals aren't known for long-distance running. They are, however, known for their impressive leaping abilities.

*\*Image not from India*

