



# Tears of the Cheetah: The Genetic Secrets of Our Animal Ancestors

*Stephen J. O'Brien*

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The history of life on Earth is dominated by extinction events so numerous that over 99.9% of the species ever to have existed are gone forever. If animals could talk, we would ask them to recall their own ancestries, in particular the secrets as to how they avoided almost inevitable annihilation in the face of daily assaults by predators, climactic cataclysms, deadly infections and innate diseases.

In *Tears of the Cheetah*, medical geneticist and conservationist Stephen J. O'Brien narrates fast-moving science adventure stories that explore the mysteries of survival among the earth's most endangered and beloved wildlife. Here we uncover the secret histories of exotic species such as Indonesian orangutans, humpback whales, and the imperiled cheetah-the world's fastest animal which nonetheless cannot escape its own genetic weaknesses.

Among these genetic detective stories we also discover how the Serengeti lions have lived with FIV (the feline version of HIV), where giant pandas really come from, how bold genetic action pulled the Florida panther from the edge of extinction, how the survivors of the medieval Black Death passed on a genetic gift to their descendents, and how mapping the genome of the domestic cat solved a murder case in Canada.

With each riveting account of animal resilience and adaptation, a remarkable parallel in human medicine is drawn, adding yet another rationale for species conservation-mining their genomes for cures to our own fatal diseases. *Tears of the Cheetah* offers a fascinating glimpse of the insight gained when geneticists venture into the wild.

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