



One Year of Project Cheetah

For Prelims: [Cheetah Reintroduction Plan](#), [Kuno-Palpur National Park \(KNP\)](#), [CITES](#)

For Mains: Challenges Associated with the Translocation of Cheetah in India, Importance of Biodiversity, Genetic, Species, Ecosystem.

Source: IE

Why in News?

Project **Cheetah**, India's ambitious attempt to introduce **African cheetahs** in the wild in the country, has been **completed a year** after its launch in **September 2022**.

- The project has claimed to have achieved **short-term success on four counts: “50% survival of introduced cheetahs from South Africa and Namibia, the establishment of home ranges, the birth of cubs in Kuno”**, and revenue generation for local communities.

What Are the Comprehensive Outcomes of Project Cheetah's First Year?

- **Survival in the Wild:**
 - According to [the Cheetah reintroduction project](#), Cheetahs, meant for a total of **142 months in the wild, spent less than 27 months combined**.
 - The project faced a **setback with a 40% loss in the functional adult population**, resulting in the **death of six out of 20 cheetahs**, including Dhatri, Sasha, Suraj, Uday, Daksha, and Tejas.
 - Additionally, four cubs were born in India, of which three died, and the fourth is being raised in captivity.



- **Home Range Establishment:**
 - The goal was for cheetahs to establish home ranges in Kuno.
 - **Only three cheetahs**, namely Namibian imports Asha, Gaurav, and Shaurya, spent more than three months continuously **in the wild**. However, they have been confined to bomas(enclosures) since July 2023.
 - There are doubts about the successful establishment of "home ranges" in Kuno.
- **Reproduction Success:**
 - The Action Plan aimed at successful cheetah reproduction in the wild.
 - **Siyaya aka Jwala, a Namibian female**, gave birth to four cubs in Kuno. However, she was captive-raised and considered unfit for the wild. Her cubs were born inside a hunting boma.
 - The reproduction goal faces challenges and compromises, raising questions about the project's long-term success.
- **Contribution to Local Livelihood:**
 - Project Cheetah positively contributed by generating jobs, and contracts, and **appreciating land prices around Kuno**.
 - **No reported human-cheetah conflicts** in the area, indicating a harmonious coexistence between the introduced cheetahs and local communities.

What Challenges Does Project Cheetah Face?

- **Integrity Challenges:**
 - Three Namibian cheetahs, Sasha (the project's first casualty), Jwala, and Savannah alias Nabha, were captive-raised as "**research subjects**," compromising the integrity of the project.
- **Shift in Stance:**
 - India's decision to abstain from the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\) vote against trade in elephant ivory](#) weeks after importing cheetahs raised ethical concerns about the project's commitments.
- **Paradigm Shift Ahead:**
 - Kuno's inability to support a **genetically self-sustaining population** necessitates a paradigm shift towards a **meta-population approach**.
 - A meta-population approach involves managing distinct populations of a species in fragmented habitats, acknowledging their interdependence for long-term viability and genetic diversity.
 - Unlike leopards, **cheetahs cannot travel long distances** between scattered populations on their own.
 - Borrowing from the South African model of periodic translocation for genetic viability is proposed, but concerns arise about the impact on forest connectivity for natural wildlife dispersal.
- **Kuno's Carrying Capacity:**
 - The Cheetah Action Plan estimated a high probability of long-term persistence with populations **exceeding 50 individuals**.
 - A feasibility report in 2010 estimated 347 sq km of Kuno could sustain 27 cheetahs, while the larger 3,000 sq km landscape could hold 70-100 animals.
 - Revised assessments in 2020 indicated Kuno's cheetal density at 38 per sq km, supporting 21 cheetahs, challenging the feasibility of a single population of 50 cheetahs.
- The project's only option now is a **meta-population scattered over central and western India**, posing challenges compared to the South African model of assisted dispersal.

What is the Cheetah Reintroduction Project?

- The Cheetah Reintroduction Project in India formally commenced on September 17, 2022, to restore **the population of cheetahs**, which were declared **extinct in the country in 1952**.
- The project involves the translocation of cheetahs from South Africa and Namibia to **Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh**.
- The project is implemented by the [National Tiger Conservation Authority \(NTCA\)](#) in collaboration with the **Madhya Pradesh Forest Department**, [Wildlife Institute of India \(WII\)](#),

and cheetah experts from Namibia and South Africa.

Cheetah

Common Name - Cheetah

Scientific Name - *Acinonyx jubatus*

- *Acinonyx jubatus jubatus* (African Cheetah)
- *Acinonyx jubatus venaticus* (Asiatic Cheetah)

Reintroduction of Cheetah to India:

- The "Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India" was released by MoEF&CC at the 19th meeting of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) (January 2022).
 - Such a plan was first proposed in 2009.
- In September 2022, eight cheetahs landed in India from Namibia.
 - The 8 cheetahs have been relocated to the Kuno-Palpur National Park, Madhya Pradesh.
- The relocation of cheetahs to India from Namibia is the world's first inter-continental large wild carnivore translocation project.

Slightly brownish and golden skin; thicker than the Asiatic Cheetahs

More prominent spots and lines on the face

Found all over the African continent

IUCN Red List Status - Vulnerable

African Cheetah

Slightly smaller than the African ones.

Pale yellowish fawn coloured skin - more fur under body, belly specifically.

Found only in Iran; the country claims there are only 12 of them left. Year 1952 - Asiatic Cheetah officially declared extinct from India.

IUCN Red List Status - Critically Endangered

Asiatic Cheetah



Note:

- Cheetahs, the **fastest land animals**, are considered "**crepuscular**" hunters, meaning they hunt at sunrise and sunset.
- Cheetah females have a **gestation period of 92-95 days**; and will give birth to a litter of approximately three or five cubs.

https://youtu.be/0sm_NIXrgTQ

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following: (2012)

1. Black-necked crane
2. Cheetah
3. Flying squirrel
4. Snow leopard

Which of the above are naturally found in India?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (b)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/one-year-of-project-cheetah>

