



## Cheetah Reintroduction Plan

This editorial is based on [“Ecostani / Despite concerns, the Cheetah project is worth pursuing”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 25/07/2022. It talks about India's plan to reintroduce Cheetah and related concerns.

**For Prelims:** Cheetah Reintroduction Plan, Kuno-Palpur National Park (KNP), Ecotourism, Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Chintu Cheetah

**For Mains:** Causes of Extinction of Cheetahs in India, Challenges Associated with the Translocation of Cheetah in India, Reintroduction Programmes Across the Globe

The fastest land animal in the world, [Cheetah](#), **declared extinct in India in 1952**, will find a new home in the [Kuno-Palpur National Park \(KNP\)](#). African cheetahs are being brought under an **intercontinental translocation project** between **India** and **Africa** (mainly from **South Africa** and **Namibia**).

The plan to bring cheetahs to India initially from Iran and now from the African continent has been decades in the making, and **fraught with controversy**. Conservationists in India are skeptical of the plan's success and **fear it will detract attention from the conservation of other endangered species** in need of translocation, like the [Asiatic lion](#).

Let us understand India's rationale behind reintroduction and related challenges.

### What is India's Rationale behind Reintroduction of Cheetah?

- **Biological Objectives:** To **re-establish the ecosystem function role of the cheetah in representative areas of its former range** and **contribute to the global effort towards the [conservation of the cheetah](#)** as a species.
  - Bringing the Cheetah back **will make India the only country with five species of big cats: tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard and cheetah.**
- **Enhancing Livelihood Options:** Cheetah reintroduction will boost and **enhance living conditions of the local communities in and around the landscapes** where the cheetah is likely to be introduced **through increased revenues from [ecotourism](#) and associated activities.**
- **Keeping the Food Chain Intact:** Top predators regulate all levels in a food chain and are considered as umbrella species for the food chain.
  - **Cheetah** can be a **charismatic flagship** and **umbrella species** to garner resources for **restoring [open forest ecosystems](#)** and **bringing back the balance in the [food web](#).**
- **Climate Change Mitigation:** It will **enhance India's capacity to sequester carbon through ecosystem restoration activities in cheetah conservation areas** and thereby contribute

towards the global [climate change](#) mitigation goals.

## What Caused the Extinction of Cheetahs in India?

- The cheetah in India has been recorded in history from before the **Common Era**. Records of cheetahs being captured go back to the **1550s**.
- **Reduced levels of genetic heterogeneity** due to a historical genetic bottleneck resulting in **high infant mortality in the wild** and its **reduced ability to breed in captivity were some of the major factors for extinction**.
- **Sport hunting**: The **consistent and widespread capture of cheetahs from the wild** (both male and female) over centuries.
  - **From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards**, detailed accounts of its interaction with human beings are available as it was recorded by the **Mughals** and other kingdoms in the **Deccan**.
- **Bounty killings**: The **British** added to the woes of the species by **declaring a bounty for killing it in 1871**.
  - The final phase of its extinction coincided with British colonial rule.
- It is recorded that the **last cheetahs were shot in India in 1947**, and officially **declared extinct in 1952**.

## What are Challenges Associated with the Translocation of Cheetah in India?

- **Transition from Enclosure to Wild**: A pivotal issue is whether a cheetah living in an enclosure and being fed with a prey will be able to hunt in the wild on its own.
  - For instance, **Sundari**, the **tigress which returned from Satkosia in Odisha** after a failed relocation attempt, was **finally kept captive for life in Bhopal Zoo**.
- **Adaptability: Reintroduced species experience increased vulnerability** to influences of **drift, selection, and gene flow evolutionary processes** due to their **small sizes**, and **climatic and ecological differences between source and native habitats**.
  - African Cheetahs need long open spaces to run. **Indian parks tend to be much smaller than those in Africa, offering less chance for such free movement**.
    - Studies in Africa have shown that **female cheetahs are solitary and roam vast distances** whereas **male defend smaller territories** and mate when females pass through, **creating breeding issues**.
- **Coexistence of large predators**: It has never occurred anywhere else, so there is no real life experience to draw upon to suggest the **coexistence of cheetahs, lions, tigers, and leopards** could be comfortable.
  - Studies have shown that in Africa, the **leopards have hunted down cheetahs as prey**, and **similar fears are being expressed for Kuno, which has about 50 leopards** in and around the core area, where cheetahs will be housed.
- **Rehabilitation Concerns**: For Cheetah's habitat to be adequately protected, many villages will have to be relocated, which will certainly impact the locals and cause disturbance and [migration](#).

## What are the Other Reintroduction Programmes Across the Globe?

- **Bisalpur Rewilding Project in 2018**: The project brought back over **150 of the endangered [Indian antelope](#)**, apart from several other species of fauna and flora in and around the Jodhpur area.
- **Gaur (Indian Bison)** : An African-based safari company was at the forefront of the **translocation of 19 gaur at [Bandhavgarh National Park](#) in Madhya Pradesh**.
  - Over a decade, the gaur herd numbered **more than 70**.
- **American Bison**: Due to excessive hunting and slaughter for the fur trade, the **American Bison population** came down to as few as 750 animals in the 1890s.
  - Through conservation initiatives, re-introduction and population management the **population has rebounded to around 350,000**.
- **Gray Wolves**: Reintroduction of **gray wolves at Yellowstone** over 21 years ago, helped successfully **reverse the degraded ecosystem at the American national park**.

## What are the Other Recent Initiatives for Wildlife Conservation in India?

- **Legal Framework:**
  - [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#)
  - [Environment Protection Act, 1986](#)
  - [The Biological Diversity Act, 2002](#)
- **India's Collaboration With Global Wildlife Conservation Efforts:**
  - [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#)
  - [Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals \(CMS\)](#)
  - [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#)
  - [Global Tiger Forum \(GTF\)](#)

## What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Post-Release Monitoring:** There needs to be a proper strategy of monitoring with veterinary supervision and scientific evaluation of extent of adaptation.
  - **Tracking teams must be organized** to keep an eye on the cheetahs and other carnivores released into the wild.
- **Awareness Campaign:** To spread awareness among local people and sensitize the youth, various outreach & awareness programs should be conducted to familiarize the locals with the reintroduction plan.
  - **Chintu Cheetah, the official mascot to spread awareness for the Cheetah introduction program** is a progressive step in this direction.
- **Priority List Management:** There should be a **proper mechanism to formulate the priority list** for evaluation and implementation of policies for **conserving different wildlife animals**.
  - The **Cheetah Introduction plan is missing in our [National Wildlife Action Plan](#) including the current plan for the period 2017-2031**, while the translocation of lions has been a national priority since the 1950s.
  - Equal attention should be given to safeguard native species and their habitat.
- **Proper Rehabilitation Mechanism:** There is need to devise proper rehabilitation policy including a **proper communication between administrative officers and locals to ensure their safety and satisfaction**.

### *Drishti Mains Question*

Discuss the causes of the extinction of cheetahs in India. What are the ecological challenges associated with reintroduction of Cheetah in India?

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

**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)**

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