



India's Cheetah Translocation Project

For Prelims: [Cheetah Reintroduction Plan](#), [Kuno-Palpur National Park \(KNP\)](#), Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, Mukundara Tiger Reserve

For Mains: Challenges Associated with the Translocation of Cheetah in India,

Why in News?

India's ambitious [Cheetah Translocation Project](#) is facing a new set of challenges as two cheetahs have died, bringing the number of cheetahs left in the project to 18 out of the initial 20.

- **Uday, a six-year-old male cheetah**, died on April 23, 2023, in [Kuno National Park](#), and **Sasha, a five-year-old female cheetah**, died on March 27, 2023, in the same park.
- Therefore, the government is now considering alternative conservation models, such as the **South African model of conserving cheetahs in fenced reserves.**

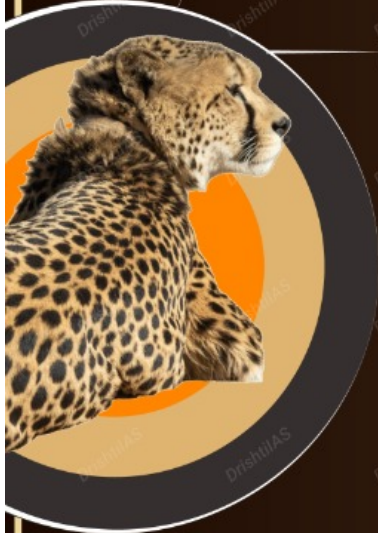
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Cheetah

Common Name - Cheetah

Scientific Name - *Acinonyx jubatus*

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



Reintroduction of Cheetah to India:

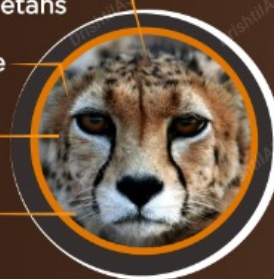
- The "Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India" was released by MoEF&CC at the 19th meeting of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) (January 2022).
 - Such a plan was first proposed in 2009.
- In September 2022, eight cheetahs landed in India from Namibia.
 - The 8 cheetahs have 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



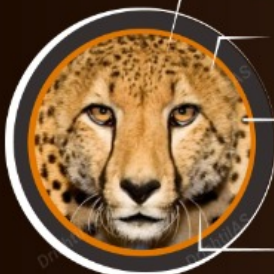
African Cheetah

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



Drishti IAS

Drish
the Vision

Were these Deaths Expected?

- The project anticipated a high mortality rate, and its short-term goal was to achieve a **50% survival rate for the first year, which is 10 out of 20 cheetahs**.
 - However, experts pointed out that the project had overestimated **Kuno National Park's carrying capacity for cheetahs, and this added pressure on the project staff to look for alternative sites**.
- **Causes of Death:**
 - A South African study found that **predation was the biggest killer**, accounting for 53.2% of cheetah mortality. Lions, leopards, hyenas, and jackals were primarily responsible.
 - **Cheetahs suffer very high cub mortality - up to 90%** in protected areas - mainly due to predation.
 - In Africa, **the lion is the chief predator of cheetahs**; in India, where lions are absent (except in Gujarat), **leopards are likely to slip into that role** in potential cheetah landscapes.
 - Other causes of mortality can be **holding camps, immobilization/transit, tracking devices**, and other wildlife killing cheetah (cubs) including warthogs, baboons, snakes, elephants, crocodiles, vultures, zebras, and even ostriches.

South African Model for Conserving Cheetahs:

- In South Africa, a conservation strategy called **meta-population management** was used to protect cheetahs.
- This strategy involved **moving cheetahs from one small group to another** to ensure that they have **enough genetic diversity and to maintain a healthy population**.
- This approach was successful in maintaining a **viable population of cheetahs in South Africa; in 6 years, the meta-population grew to 328 cheetahs**.

What are the Options Available to the Project?

- The authorities are exploring the possibility of preparing [Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in the Chambal River valley](#) as the **second home for cheetahs**.
- Another option is to move a few cheetahs from Kuno to the safety of an 80-sq-km fenced area in [Rajasthan's Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve](#).
 - However, both options would mean shifting the project's goal from establishing the cheetah in **an open landscape to managing the African imports as a few pocket populations in fenced-in or restricted areas**.

Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is located in **Madhya Pradesh** on the northern boundary of the Mandsaur and Nimach districts, adjoining Rajasthan
- The landscape is characterized by **vast open landscapes and rocky terrain**
- The vegetation includes northern **tropical dry deciduous forest, mixed deciduous forest, and scrub**
- Some of the flora found in the sanctuary are **Khair, Salai, Kardhai, Dhawda, Tendu, and Palash**.
- The fauna includes **Chinkara, Nilgai, Spotted Deer, Striped Hyena, Jackal and crocodiles**.

Mukundra Tiger Reserve

- it is situated near **Kota, Rajasthan**, in a valley formed by **two parallel mountains, Mukundra and Gargola**.
- The valley is bounded by four rivers - **Ramzan, Ahu, Kali, and Chambal** - and drained by their tributaries.

- **Protected area:**
 - Mukundra Hills was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1955 and a National Park (Mukundra Hills (Darrah) National Park) in 2004.
 - It was declared a **Tiger Reserve** in 2013, becoming the third in Rajasthan after **Ranthambore** and **Sariska**.
- **Parks and sanctuaries:**
 - Mukundra TR consists of three Wildlife Sanctuaries - Darrah, Jawahar Sagar, and Chambhal - and covers four districts of Rajasthan: Kota, Bundi, Chittorgarh, and Jhalawar.

Way Forward

- The success of the cheetah project should **align with India's traditional conservation ethos**. India's conservation approach emphasizes **protecting naturally dispersing wildlife in viable non-fragmented habitats**.
- The Cheetah Project can choose to cut the risk by settling for the South African model of retaining a few pocket populations in fenced-in reserves.
 - However, keeping cheetahs in leopard-proof enclosures might not be a **sustainable solution**. Also, repeated sedate-and-recover interventions to restrict cheetahs to sanctuaries and national parks **can harm the animals**.

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)

Source: IE