



Project Cheetah and Radio Collar Infections

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

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

Source: IE

Why in News?

Recently, the use of **radio collars** in the [cheetah reintroduction project in Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary](#), Madhya Pradesh, India, has resulted in unexpected setbacks, with cheetahs experiencing neck wounds and septicaemia, an infection of the blood by bacteria.

- This situation has raised concerns among experts familiar with collaring practices in India and Africa.

What are Radio Collars?

- **About:**
 - Radio collars are used to **track and monitor animals in the wild**.
 - They consist of a **collar with a small radio transmitter**.
 - Collars provide **data on animal behavior, migration, and population dynamics**.
 - They can be combined with GPS or accelerometers for additional information.
 - Collars are designed to be **lightweight and comfortable for animals**.
 - Potential risks and challenges, such as injuries or infections, must be managed.
- **Challenges Associated with Radio Collars:**
 - **Festering Neck Wounds and Septicaemia:**
 - **Two cheetahs in Kuno died due to suspected septicaemia** caused by festering neck wounds from radio collars.
 - Additional cheetahs, including Oban, Elton, and Freddie, have exhibited similar injuries.
 - These setbacks have raised concerns about the use of radio collars in the cheetah reintroduction project.
 - **Problems with Long-term Collar Usage:**
 - Carrying something on the body for an extended period can have downsides, as seen in studies on watch wearers and pet dogs.
 - **Staphylococcus aureus bacteria** presence was higher on watch wearers' wrists, which can lead to sepsis or death.
 - Dogs wearing collars can develop **acute moist dermatitis or hot spots, aggravated by ticks or fleas**.
 - Tight-fitting collars can cause **pressure necrosis and rapid hair loss around the neck**, similar to bedsores.
 - **Weight Considerations:**

- Globally, the general guideline is to keep **radio collar weight below 3% of the animal's body weight**.
- Modern collars for wild cats typically weigh **around 400g**, which is suitable for cheetahs weighing between 20 kg and 60 kg.
 - However, fitting collars on cheetahs can be challenging due to their **small necks, especially for younger animals**.
- **Vulnerability to Collar-Induced Injuries:**
 - Cheetahs' winter coat, **which is thicker and furrier than that of tigers or leopards**, can retain more water and take longer to dry.
 - In a 2020 study, the collar weight rule was criticized for not considering **animal athleticism**, revealing that **collar forces can surpass the collar's weight during movement**.
 - For instance, the forces exerted by collars were found to be generally **equivalent to up to five times the collar's weight for a lion and a staggering 18 times for a cheetah**.
 - African Cheetahs may be **more susceptible to local pathogens compared to Indian tigers and leopards**, potentially due to differences in immunity and environmental conditions.
- **Lack of Adaptation to Monsoon Conditions:**
 - Secondary bacterial infections under collars are not commonly reported in **African conditions due to drier skin between rain spells**.
 - In historical times, **cheetahs in India did not wear collars during the monsoon and may have adapted differently to the local climate**.
- **Implications for the Reintroduction Project:**
 - Tracking, immobilizing, and assessing cheetahs for neck injuries poses challenges and potential delays.
 - The absence of a clear roadmap for the next monsoon raises questions about re-collaring cheetahs and their well-being.

What is Cheetah Reintroduction Project in India?

▪ About:

- The Cheetah Reintroduction Project in India formally commenced on **September 17, 2022**, with the objective of restoring 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.

▪ Reintroduction Process:

- **20 radio-collared cheetahs** were translocated from **South Africa (12 cheetahs) and Namibia (8 cheetahs) to Kuno National Park**.
 - In March 2023, India announced the **birth of 4 cubs** to one of the eight cheetahs that were relocated from Namibia.
- The cheetahs underwent a **quarantine period** and were then shifted to larger acclimatization enclosures.
- Currently, there are **11 cheetahs in free-ranging condition and 5 animals, including a cub**, in quarantine enclosures.
- Dedicated monitoring teams ensure round-the-clock monitoring of the free-ranging cheetahs.

▪ Mortalities:

- 8 cheetahs have died in Kuno National Park due to natural causes.
- Preliminary analysis by the [National Tiger Conservation Authority \(NTCA\)](#) indicates that the **deaths were natural and not related to other factors like radio collars**.

▪ Project Implementation and Challenges:

- The project is implemented by the NTCA in collaboration with the **Madhya Pradesh Forest Department**, [Wildlife Institute of India \(WII\)](#), and cheetah experts from Namibia and South Africa.
- Challenges in the project include monitoring, protection, and management of the reintroduced cheetah population.

▪ Conservation Efforts and Measures:

- Consultation with international cheetah experts and veterinary doctors from South Africa and Namibia is ongoing to investigate the cause of cheetah deaths.
- Independent national experts are reviewing monitoring protocols, protection status, managerial inputs, veterinary facilities, training, and capacity building.
- Efforts are underway to establish a **Cheetah Research Center**, expand forest areas under **Kuno National Park's administrative control**, provide additional frontline staff, establish a Cheetah Protection Force, and create a second home for cheetahs in [Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary](#).
- The government is committed to conserving the reintroduced cheetah population and ensuring its long-term success.



Cheetah

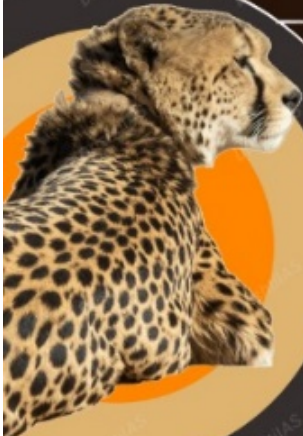
Common Name - Cheetah

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.

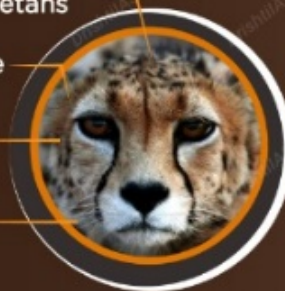


Slightly brownish and golden skin; thicker than the Asiatic Cheetahs

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

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)

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