



Cheetah Reintroduction Plan

This editorial is based on [“Ecotani / 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 16th 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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