

Asiatic Cheetah relocation

March 22, 2021

In news: By the end of the year 2021, nearly 70 years after the cheetah was declared locally extinct or extirpated, India will receive its first shipment of the cheetahs from Africa.

Key Updates

- As part of the programme, **two experts, one from Namibia and the other from South Africa** the two countries with the highest cheetah populations in the world, will arrive to train Indian forest officers and wildlife experts on handling, breeding, rehabilitation, medical treatment and conservation of the animals.
- This is the first time in the world that a large carnivore will be relocated from one continent to another.

Cheetah in India & India's effort related to relocation of Cheetahs

- In India, this animal is **believed to have disappeared from the country when Maharaja Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo of Koriya hunted and shot the last three recorded Asiatic cheetahs in India in 1947.**
- It was **declared extinct by the government in 1952.**
- The current relocation attempt began in 2009, it is only last year that the Supreme Court gave the green signal to the Centre.
- Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change had set up an expert committee **under the chairmanship of Wildlife Trust of India board member** and former Director Wildlife of the Indian Government, **Dr M K Ranjitsinh,** along with members of the Wildlife Institute of India, WWF, NTCA and officials from the Centre and states, have completed an assessment of the sites for relocation.
- As part of the programme, **six sites, which had**

previously been assessed in 2010, have now been re-assessed by Wildlife Institute of India, Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve and Shergarh Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan and Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, Kuno National Park, Madhav National Park and Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary **in Madhya Pradesh.**

- Of these six sites, **the expert committee has identified Kuno National Park as being ready for the relocation.** The site has been monitored since 2006 as it had also been identified for relocating the Asiatic Lion.
- The site has been monitored since 2006 as it had also been identified for relocating the Asiatic Lion. Both animals share the same habitat semi-arid grasslands that stretch across Gujarat-Rajasthan-Madhya Pradesh.
- **The court had instructed that the lion be introduced at Kuno in 2013;** that is yet to happen.
- And WII has finalized Kuno national park the relocation under the initial phase
- The Park spans across 261 square kilometres and is a part of the Kuno wildlife division with an area of 1,235 square kilometres. It has a healthy population of chital, sambar, nilgai, wild pig, chinkara and cattle
- It is not the first time that India has attempted a relocation of the cheetah. In the early 1970s, Dr M K Ranjitsinh carried out negotiations with Iran on behalf of the Indira Gandhi administration.

Advantages of conservation of Cheetah

As a flagship species, the conservation of the cheetah will revive grasslands and its biomes and habitat, much like Project Tiger has done for forests and all the species that have seen their numbers go up.

About Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*)

- It is a large cat native to Africa and central Iran.
- It is the fastest land animal, estimated to be capable

of running at 80 to 128 km/h with the fastest reliably recorded speeds being 93 and 98 km/h, and as such has several adaptations for speed, including a light build, long thin legs and a long tail.

- **IUCN:** Vulnerable, but in North Africa and Asia, they are considered “Critically Endangered.”
- **CITES:** Appendix I (which means commercial international trade in wild-sourced cheetah is prohibited.)

Main threats

- These big cats are frequently killed by farmers, either preemptively or in retaliation for livestock predation, even though the actual damage they cause to livestock is relatively minor.
- They are profoundly affected by loss of prey from human hunting and the development of land for agricultural and other purposes.
- Direct hunting in some parts of Africa for skins contributes to cheetah population declines, as does the illegal trade in live cubs and adults,