

Reintroduction of the Cheetah in India

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In news– Recently, India and Namibia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to reintroduce the African cheetah in India.

Cheetah reintroduction Measures-

- **The Indian government has been attempting to reintroduce cheetahs in India since the 1960s and the 1970s**, but over the past decade these plans have gained more momentum.
- **The State Wildlife Board of Andhra Pradesh was the first to suggest the policy in 1955**, on an experimental basis in two districts of the state.
- **In the 1970s**, the Department of Environment formally requested **Iran, which had 300 Asiatic cheetahs at the time, for some cheetahs**. The Shah of Iran was deposed before any deal could be reached.
- **Attempts to bring cheetahs to India were revived once more in 2009**, when the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Wildlife Trust of India conducted a meeting to discuss the feasibility of cheetah reintroduction. **Several sites were chosen, of which Kuno-Palpur National Park was seen as the most suitable**.
- **The Supreme Court in 2010 stayed the order to reintroduce cheetah to Kuno- Palpur** because the National Board for Wildlife had not been privy to the matter. The court said that priority should be given to the reintroduction of the Asiatic lion, which is only found in Gir National Park, Gujarat.
- **In 2020**, while responding to a plea by the government, the Supreme Court announced that **African cheetahs could be introduced in a “carefully chosen location”** on an

experimental basis.

- **The current MoU aims to facilitate cheetah conservation in both countries by way of exchange of expertise,** sharing of good practices in the field of wildlife conservation, use of technology and sustainable management of biodiversity.
- As part of the plan, India will bring cheetahs from South Africa to Madhya Pradesh's Kuno-Palpur National Park by August 2022 .

About Cheetah-

- **There are two subspecies of cheetahs recognized today,** the Asiatic (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*) and the African (*Acinonyx jubatus jubatus*).
- However, the ecologists argue that it is still debatable if there is a biological basis for their differentiation, as cheetahs across continents have been seen to be genetically comparable.
- Its head is small and rounded, and has a short snout and black tear-like facial streaks. The coat is typically tawny to creamy white or pale buff and is mostly covered with evenly spaced, solid black spots
- It can reach speeds of up to 70mph (113km/h), making them the world's fastest land animal.
- It occurs in a variety of habitats such as savannahs in the Serengeti, arid mountain ranges in the Sahara and hilly desert terrain in Iran. The cheetah is threatened by several factors such as habitat loss, conflict with humans, poaching and high susceptibility to diseases.
- **Only about 7,000 cheetahs remain in the wild worldwide** and the animals are **classified as a vulnerable species** under the International Union for Conservation of Nature red list of threatened species.
- **Namibia has the world's largest population of cheetahs.**
- **The cheetah is the only large carnivore to have gone**

extinct in India, primarily due to hunting and habitat loss.

- The **earliest available record for cheetahs being used for hunts in India, comes from the 12th century Sanskrit text Manasollasa**, which was produced by the Kalyani Chalukya ruler, Someshvara III (reigned from 1127-1138 CE).
- In 1947, there were confirmed records of the cheetah's presence in India, but the three surviving males were gunned down by Maharaja Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo of Surguja state in what is now Guru Ghasidas National Park in Chhattisgarh.
- **In 1952, the Indian government officially declared the Cheetah extinct in the country.**
- **The Asiatic cheetah is a critically endangered species surviving only in Iran.**

Kuno wildlife sanctuary & National park-

- The protected area was established in 1981 as a wildlife sanctuary with an area of 344.686 km² in the Sheopur and Morena districts of Madhya Pradesh.
- This area which has become a National Park today started out as a sanctuary of about 350 sq. kms. And was in the shape of a leaf with the Kuno river forming the main centre spine.
- It is widely believed that the Kardhai tree, which is found in abundance here, turns green even with just presence of humidity in the atmosphere, even before the arrival of first monsoon showers.
- It was also known as Kuno-Palpur and Palpur-Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Received the status of national park in 2018.
- In the 1990s, it was selected as a possible site to implement the Asiatic Lion Reintroduction Project, which aimed at establishing a second lion population in India.

- In 2009, Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary was also proposed as a possible site for Cheetah reintroduction in India.

Further

reading:

<https://journalsofindia.com/kuno-national-park/>