

# **Cheetah Reintroduction Project**

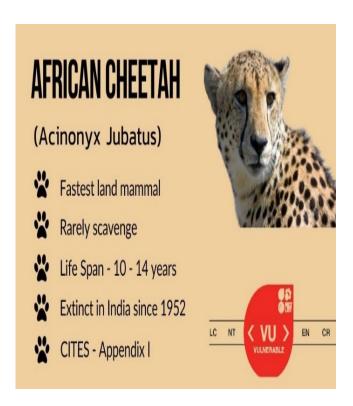
## Why in news?

Seventy years after being extinct from India, world's fastest land animal Cheetahs walk on the Indian ground once again.

# How did cheetahs go extinct in India?

#### Cheetah

- Scientific name- Acinonyx jubatus
- The planet's fastest land animal
- The least dangerous big cat
- Population- Around 7,100 cheetahs left in the wild
- IUCN Status- Vulnerable
- **Appendix I** of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- The cheetah has an ancient history, with a Neolithic cave painting of a spotted feline being hunted having been found at Chaturbunj Nala in Mandasur, Madhya Pradesh.
- The name 'cheetah' is believed to have originated from Sanskrit word chitrak, which means 'the spotted one'.
- In India, the cheetah was found from Jaipur and Lucknow in the north to Mysore in the south, and from Kathiawar in the west to Deogarh in the east.
- The cheetah was officially declared extinct by the Indian government in **1952**.
- Reasons for extinction
  - Over-hunting
  - Decimation of its relatively narrow prey base species
  - Loss of its grassland-forest habitat



## Why is the cheetah being brought back?

- Cheetah Reintroduction Project- India carried out negotiations with Iran in 1970s as it was Asiatic.
- But our potential release sites needed upgradations with an increase in prey base and greater protection.
- This is no longer possible as the cheetah population in Iran has dwindled to under 50.
- A plan to reintroduce cheetahs in India was endorsed in 2009 by then Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh.
- However, it was shot down by the Supreme Court in 2013.
- The idea was revived in 2017 by the Narendra Modi government, and the SC cleared the move in 2020 "on an experimental basis".
- <u>Kuno-Palpur National Park</u>, **Madhya Pradesh** was found to be ready to receive the cheetah immediately, as it had already been prepared for the translocation of Asiatic Lion.
- Need for reintroduction- The main objective is
  - $\circ$  To restore India's historic evolutionary balance
  - $\circ$  To develop a cheetah metapopulation that will help in the global conservation of the animal
- As it is a **flagship species**, the conservation of the cheetah will revive grasslandforests habitat, much like Project Tiger has done for forests.
- The genetic difference between the African and Indian cheetahs is so small, and the ecological functions are practically the same.

#### What are the concerns with cheetah reintroduction?

- **Gene flow-** The transfer of genetic material from one population to another (Gene flow) is a matter of concern.
- Maintaining genetic diversity and preventing inbreeding is a challenge in such a small

group of cheetahs.

- **Habitat and prey base** The factors that caused a species to go extinct must be dealt with to secure the habitat, before restocking.
- Physical security, enough space, and ample food are the priorities.
- Landscape viability- Animals has the possibility to remain susceptible to demographic and environmental events in a broken landscape.
- **Homing instinct** Most animals have an ability to sense direction and, if displaced, find their way back.
- In the case of big cats, this not only risks losing the released animal from the target site but also causes man-animal conflict.
- **Rehabilitation of people** The relocation of Bagcha residents in Madhya Pradesh has spurred up fights for their rights.
- Bagcha village is dominated by Sahariya adivasis falling under the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).

#### **References**

- 1. <a href="https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/what-takes-successfully-move-big-cats-chee">https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/what-takes-successfully-move-big-cats-chee</a> tahs-natural-habitats-8153494/
- 2. <a href="https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-cheetah-relocation-extinction-narendra-modi-explained-8155532/">https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-cheetah-relocation-extinction-narendra-modi-explained-8155532/</a>
- 3. <a href="https://indianexpress.com/article/india/cheetah-reintroduction-project-ready-for-relocation-bagcha-villagers-put-up-fight-for-rights-8156161/">https://indianexpress.com/article/india/cheetah-reintroduction-project-ready-for-relocation-bagcha-villagers-put-up-fight-for-rights-8156161/</a>

### **Quick facts**

- **Metapopulation** A group of populations or subpopulations that occupy spatially distinct habitat patches that are close enough to support dispersal among patches.
- **Inbreeding** The mating of individuals or organisms that are closely related through common ancestry.
- **Genetic diversity** It is the diversity or variability within species, community or assemblage. The combined differences in the DNA of all individuals in a species make up the genetic diversity of that species.
- **Gene flow (Gene migration)** The transfer of genetic material from one population to another.

