

## 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)*
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- 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”.
- **Kuno-Palpur National Park, 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
  - To restore India’s historic evolutionary balance
  - 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 grassland-forests 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. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/what-takes-successfully-move-big-cats-cheetahs-natural-habitats-8153494/>
2. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-cheetah-relocation-extinction-narendra-modi-explained-8155532/>
3. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/cheetah-reintroduction-project-ready-for-relocation-bagcha-villagers-put-up-fight-for-rights-8156161/>

## 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.