

Cheetah Reintroduction Project

Why in news?

Following the death of two cheetahs in three days at Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh wildlife officials suggested to remove radio collars from 10 free ranging cheetahs.

What is Project Cheetah?

- Project Cheetah is India's cheetah relocation programme.
- This is the first intercontinental reintroduction of a wild, large carnivore species.
- The project is to bring in 5-10 animals every year, over the next decade, until a self-sustaining population of cheetahs is established.
- **Historic cheetah in India** - Asiatic Cheetahs were once abundant in India but the last cheetah in the country died in 1952.
- **Reintroduced cheetah** - The animals brought from Namibia and South Africa are the Southeast African cheetahs.
- **Location** - Under Project Cheetah, the animals are translocated from the forests of South Africa and Namibia to the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh.
- Since last year, Kuno National Park has received 20 cheetahs with the aim of establishing a free-ranging population.
- **Authorities** - The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is the apex body entrusted with the implementation of Project Cheetah.
- NTCA comes under the Ministry of forest, environment and climate change.
- The Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) is also assisting the Indian government in reintroducing cheetahs in India.

What is the debate?

- 20 cheetahs were translocated from South Africa and Namibia to Kuno National Park.
- Of the 20, six imported cheetahs including three new-borns have died.
- **Reasons** - The two cheetahs that died recently have a similar organ damage.
- The radio collar can be a contributing factor for the cheetah deaths.
- There is a possibility for an infection breaking out because of the radio collar due to the monsoon.
- Because of high moisture, the cheetah may scratch its skin, which can break out an infection.

What are the criticisms against this project?

- **Scientific basis** - Wildlife specialists said that India's cheetah reintroduction strategy was based on an unfounded assumption.

- They also claimed that the plan disregards critical scientific results from recent demographic research on free-roaming cheetahs.
- **Choice of site** - Several wildlife and conservation experts contend that Kuno National Park may not be a suitable habitat for accommodating a large population of cheetahs.
- **Spatial requirements** - Cheetahs typically require expansive habitats spanning thousands of square miles to roam freely but the area of Kuno NP is expected to be below 500 square miles.
- **Habitat requirements** - Kuno is inadequate to accommodate such a large number of cheetahs.
- The Supreme Court bench expressed concern over the high density of cheetahs in a particular location.
- **Alternatives** - It further suggested exploring alternative habitats that may be more suitable than Kuno.
- There are plans to develop a second reserve in Gandhisagar, Madhya Pradesh and also establish a cheetah rehabilitation centre.
- **Approach** - The preservation of carnivores in environments that are heavily influenced by human activity needs a multidisciplinary approach.
- **Prolonged captivity** - Quarantining cheetahs for extended periods have affected their adaptive capabilities and given them psychological adjustment problems, making them more vulnerable.

What are the arguments in support of this project?

- **Too early to judge** - The Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) has expressed the progress in India is positive.
- It underscored that the cheetah's home ranges can be accurately determined only after they firmly established their territories.
- **Knowledge** - India is advancing its knowledge and understanding of cheetahs in a diverse range of veterinary concerns and behavioural patterns linked to cheetahs that roam freely.
- This knowledge positively impact the long run success of the project.
- **Breeding conducive** - Cheetahs from 2 distinct countries possess varied genetic makeup whose diversity can be preserved from careful breeding.
- Cheetah exhibit high reproductive rates in favourable ecological conditions and the successful birth of 3 female cubs suggest the conducive environment of Kuno NP.
- **Protracted process** - The efficacy of wildlife breeding initiatives necessitates an assessment conducted over extended time periods.
- Like Project Tiger, conservation projects of rhinoceros and Asiatic lion a genetically viable population of cheetahs for a prolonged period is possible.
- Hence, it is premature to make a judgement on the programme.
- **Damages** - Fatalities are inevitable in any animal's reintroduction project.
- **Ecological Benefit** - The cheetah reintroduction project enhances the value of grasslands and savannahs which has been neglected for a long time.
- **Biodiversity benefit** - The Cheetah is the flagship species of grasslands and its conservation will enhance the grassland biodiversity.

Quick Facts

Cheetah

Scientific name - *Acinonyx jubatus*

Cheetahs are the fastest land animals.

Cheetah are large wild cats

IUCN Status - Vulnerable

CITES - Appendix I



Cheetah Conservation Fund

- The Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) is an international non-profit organization.
- It is the longest-running cheetah conservation project in Africa.

NTCA

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) was established in 2005.
- NTCA is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- It has been constituted under Section 38 L (1) of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- It is headquartered in New Delhi.
- The Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change is its Chairperson.

References

1. [The Hindu - How are cheetahs faring in India?](#)
2. [IE - After Kuno deaths, radio collars set to be taken off 10 cheetahs](#)
3. [IE - Project Cheetah: Is it problematic, or is it too early to judge?](#)