



## **Cheetah Translocation Project**

**The fastest land animal in the world, Cheetah**, declared extinct in India in 1952, **will find a new home in the Kuno-Palpur National Park (KNP)**. **African cheetahs are being brought under an** intercontinental translocation project **between India and Africa(mainly from South Africa and Namibia)**.

**The plan to bring cheetahs to India initially from Iran and now from the African continent has been decades in the making, and** fraught with controversy. **Conservationists in India are skeptical of the plan's success and** fear it will detract attention from the conservation of other endangered species **in need of translocation, like the Asiatic lion**.

**Let us understand India's rationale behind reintroduction and related challenges.**

### **What is India's Rationale behind Reintroduction of Cheetah?**

- **Biological Objectives:** To re-establish the ecosystem function role of the cheetah in representative areas of its former range and contribute to the global effort towards the **conservation of the cheetah** as a species.
  - Bringing the Cheetah back **will make India the only country with five species of big cats: tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard and cheetah**.
- **Enhancing Livelihood Options:** Cheetah reintroduction will boost and **enhance living conditions of the local communities in and around the landscapes** where the cheetah is likely to be introduced **through increased revenues from ecotourism and associated activities**.
- **Climate Change Mitigation:** It will **enhance India's capacity to sequester carbon through ecosystem restoration activities in cheetah conservation areas** and thereby contribute towards the global **climate change** mitigation goals.

### **What Caused the Extinction of Cheetahs in India?**



- The cheetah in India has been recorded in history from before the **Common Era**. Records of cheetahs being captured go back to the **1550s**.
- **Reduced levels of genetic heterogeneity** due to a historical genetic bottleneck resulting in **high infant mortality in the wild** and its **reduced ability to breed in captivity were some of the major factors for extinction**.
- **Sport hunting**: The **consistent and widespread capture of cheetahs from the wild** (both male and female) over centuries.
  - **From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards**, detailed accounts of its interaction with human beings are available as it was recorded by the **Mughals** and other kingdoms in the **Deccan**.
- **Bounty killings**: The **British** added to the woes of the species by **declaring a bounty for killing it in 1871**.
  - The final phase of its extinction coincided with British colonial rule.
- It is recorded that the **last cheetahs were shot in India in 1947**, and officially **declared extinct in 1952**.

### **What are the Other Reintroduction Programmes Across the Globe?**

- **Bisalpur Rewilding Project in 2018**: The project brought back over **150 of the endangered Indian antelope**, apart from several other species of fauna and flora in and around the Jodhpur area.
- **Gaur (Indian Bison)** : An African-based safari company was at the forefront of the **translocation of 19 gaur at Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh**.
  - Over a decade, the gaur herd numbered **more than 70**.
- **American Bison**: Due to excessive hunting and slaughter for the fur trade, the **American Bison population** came down to as few as 750 animals in the 1890s.
  - Through conservation initiatives, re-introduction and population management the **population has rebounded to around 350,000**.



- **Gray Wolves:** Reintroduction of gray wolves at Yellowstone over 21 years ago, helped successfully reverse the degraded ecosystem at the American national park.

## What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Post-Release Monitoring:** There needs to be a proper strategy of monitoring with veterinary supervision and scientific evaluation of extent of adaptation.
  - **Tracking teams must be organized** to keep an eye on the cheetahs and other carnivores released into the wild.
- **Awareness Campaign:** To spread awareness among local people and sensitize the youth, various outreach & awareness programs should be conducted to familiarize the locals with the reintroduction plan.
  - **Chintu Cheetah**, the official mascot to spread awareness for the Cheetah introduction program is a progressive step in this direction.
- **Priority List Management:** There should be a proper mechanism to formulate the priority list for evaluation and implementation of policies for conserving different wildlife animals.
  - The Cheetah Introduction plan is missing in our **National Wildlife Action Plan** including the current plan for the period 2017-2031, while the translocation of lions has been a national priority since the 1950s.
  - Equal attention should be given to safeguard native species and their habitat.
- **Proper Rehabilitation Mechanism:** There is need to devise proper rehabilitation policy including a proper communication between administrative officers and locals to ensure their safety and satisfaction.