

## Cheetah in India [Latest Update]

Cheetahs in India went extinct long back in 1952 due to too much reckless hunting activities. They are back in the news as the decade-long plan to reintroduce the big cat in India sees some activities yet again. After the plan hit another roadblock in December 2021 due to the CoVID19 pandemic and subsequent travel restrictions in Namibia, the concerned officials had to return to India.

Recently, The Indian government has established an 11-member high-level steering committee. The step is taken in the wake of the death of cheetah cubs born to a translocated Namibian cheetah at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh in March 2023.

The topic has a high chance of being asked as an [Environment Questions in IAS Prelims](#).

### Center Sets Up Panel to Monitor Cheetah Project

#### Committee's Purpose:

- The primary objective of the high-level committee is to review and monitor the progress of the cheetah reintroduction program in India and to advise the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department and the National Tiger Conservation Authority.
- Chaired by Rajesh Gopal, Secretary General of the Global Tiger Forum, the committee comprises experts from various fields, including former forest officials and wildlife conservationists.
- Their role includes the opening of the cheetah habitat for eco-tourism, suggesting regulations in this regard, and to suggest ways to involve the local community in the project activities.
- The committee's formation indicates the government's commitment to addressing these challenges and ensuring the long-term viability of the cheetah reintroduction program.

**Expert Consultation and International Collaboration:** In addition to the committee members, a panel of international cheetah experts such as from South Africa and Namibia, will provide global expertise and best practices in cheetah conservation.

#### Concerns Arise Over Cheetahs in Kuno National Park:

- The recent deaths of cheetahs in Kuno National Park have raised significant concerns among experts.
- The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department had expressed the need for an "alternative" location for cheetahs, instead of Kuno, as they highlighted the lack of space and logistical support in the national park.

- The Supreme Court has also weighed in on the matter, recommending the relocation of cheetahs to other sanctuaries due to the aforementioned challenges at Kuno National Park.
- Vincent van der Merwe, a renowned South African wildlife expert, has further expressed apprehensions about the reintroduction program.
- He foresees a potential increase in mortality as cheetahs attempt to establish territories and potentially encounter leopards and tigers in Kuno National Park.
- He proposed the idea of fencing the cheetah habitats to curb their "extreme ranging behavior" and reduce potential conflicts with other predators. This suggestion aims to protect the cheetahs and minimize risks associated with their reintroduction.

**Conclusion:**

- The developments surrounding the cheetah reintroduction program highlight the importance of careful evaluation and management of habitat suitability, as well as addressing other challenges.
- The government and relevant authorities must take into account expert recommendations and consider alternative sites, if necessary, to secure the long-term success of the cheetah reintroduction program.
- It is crucial to strike a balance between conservation efforts and addressing concerns to create a sustainable and thriving environment for these creatures.

## Cheetah Physical Features

Following are some details about Cheetah you should know from the UPSC perspective:

- The cheetah is the fastest land animal, which has the fastest running speed record of 93 and 98 km/h (58 and 61 mph).
- It is considered to be a big cat and belongs to the Felidae family.
- They have a small rounded head, a lightly built body, and a roundly spotted coat.
- They have long thin limbs and long tails.

### African Cheetah vs Asiatic Cheetah

**African Cheetah**

Scientific Name: **Acinonyx Jubatus**

**Asiatic Cheetah**

Scientific Name: **Acinonyx Jubatus Venaticu**

Found all over the African continent in numbers. Found only in Iran with less than 100 individuals.

Slightly larger than the Asiatic counterpart; Slightly smaller than the African Cheetahs.

They have slightly brownish and gold spots thicker than the Asiatic Cheetahs. They have pale yellowish fawn coloured skin under their body, specifically on the belly.

They have much more prominent spots on their face as compared to their Asian counterparts. They have much less prominent spots and lines.

African Cheetahs are much larger in size. Asiatic Cheetahs have a very small population listed as Vulnerable in the (IUCN) Red Data Book. African Cheetahs are listed as critically endangered species in the IUCN Red Data Book. [List of Threatened Species.](#)

Listed in Appendix 1 of the CITES list, which contains migratory species considered to be at risk of extinction.

African Cheetahs have a much diverse prey base that spans the whole African continent. Asiatic Cheetahs have a much smaller prey base. African cousins. They prey only on small and medium-sized animals.

## Re-introduction of Cheetahs in India

- Although the project is a decade long, it is slowly picking up pace after the Supreme Court in January 2020 allowed the Union Government of India to go ahead with the plan.
- Although the original intention was to bring Asiatic Cheetah to India from Iran, but due to recent developments in the international relations between the two countries, the plan changed to introduce African Cheetah instead.
- Union Ministry of Environment had in the 19th meeting of the National Tiger Conservation Authority released “Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India”.
- National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has now decided to bring 50 African Cheetah from Namibia within the next 5 years.
  - 10-12 young Cheetah will be introduced in the first year as founder stocks.
  - Kuno Palpur National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh is the first site to host these cheetahs.
  - They’ll be imported from Namibia and/or South Africa with the assistance from Ministry of External Affairs.
  - A radio collar with an inbuilt satellite GPS will be put on each of these Cheetahs.

- Cheetah is listed in **Schedule 2** of the [Wild Life \(Protection\) Act 1972](#), even though it was extinct long back before this law was even framed.

## Recent Developments

- There is no deadline for the Cheetah Task Force to do the relocation of the Cheetah.
  - The relocation activities will start as soon as the Government of India and the Government of South Africa and/or Namibia finalise the deal.
- Kuno Palpur National Park is on the verge to complete the necessary infrastructure projects for the Cheetahs.
  - Fencing is being done to keep the predators away from the new guests.
  - Culverts will be installed to ensure adequate water supply to this area.
  - Surveillance cameras have also been installed to monitor the activities and surroundings of these Cheetahs.
  - The landscape is being altered to remove any obstructions lying in the Cheetah's way of prey.
  - Invasive species such as thorny bushes have been removed and palatable grasses such as themeda grass and marble grass as well as a few wild legumes have been introduced to the area.
- An idea is being considered to introduce more Chitals from the Narsingharh Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh to this area for the Cheetah to prey upon.