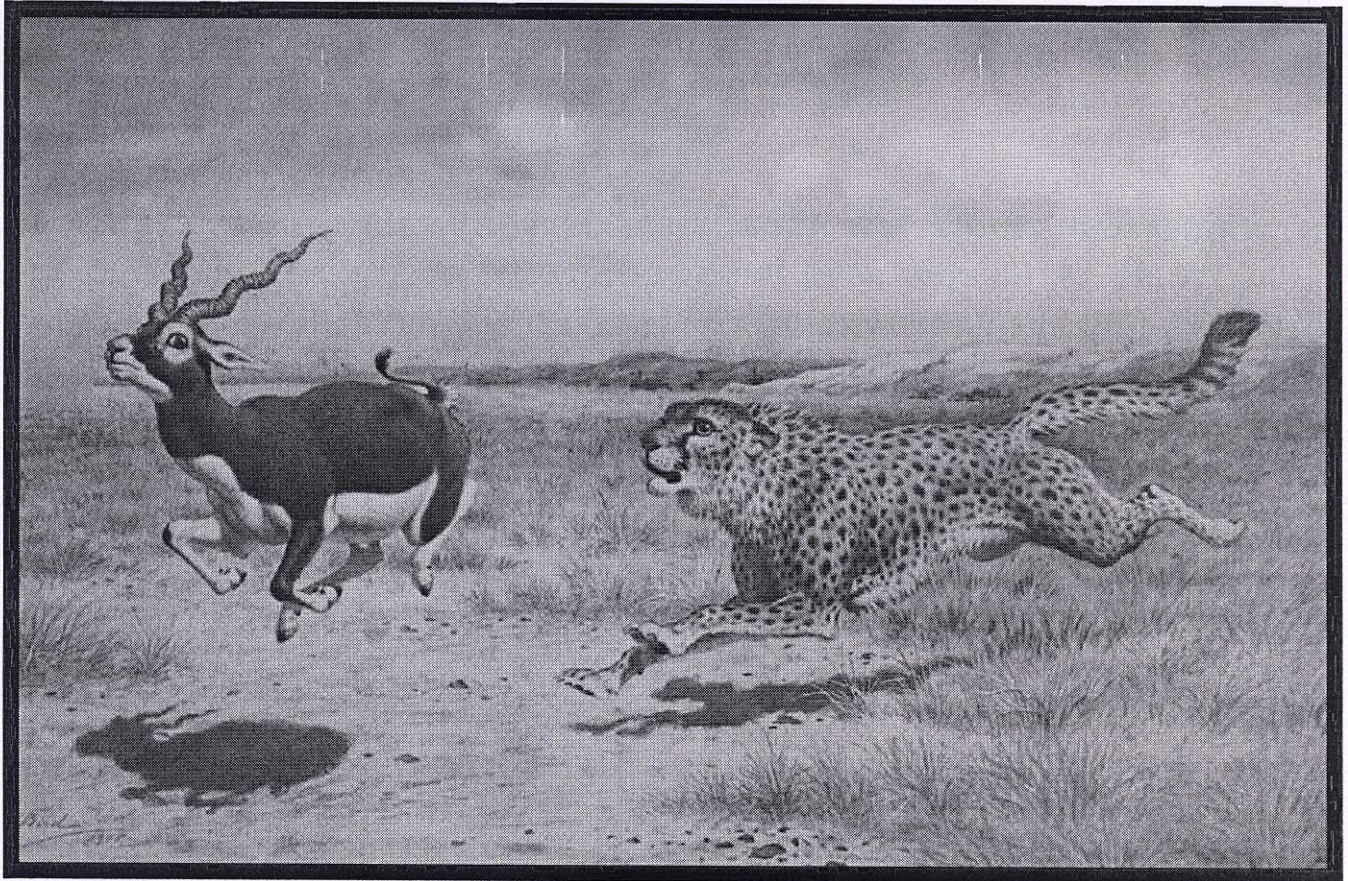


PROJECT CHEETAH



SEPTEMBER 2010



Ministry of Environment and Forests
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

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THE CHEETAH ONCE WANDERED ACROSS BOTH THE ASIAN AND AFRICAN DRYLAND ECOSYSTEMS. TODAY, ALTHOUGH OVER 5000 CHEETAHS STILL SURVIVE IN ISOLATED POPULATIONS IN AFRICA, THERE ARE LESS THAN 80 INDIVIDUALS SURVIVING IN THE ARID REGIONS OF EASTERN IRAN.

INDIA WAS ONCE HOME TO MANY CHEETAHS, BUT THE LAST OF THEM WAS KILLED IN 1947 AND THE CHEETAH WAS DECLARED EXTINCT IN INDIA IN 1952. IT IS THE ONLY LARGE MAMMAL TO HAVE BEEN DECLARED EXTINCT IN OUR COUNTRY IN RECORDED HISTORY.

REINTRODUCING THIS BEAUTIFUL ANIMAL WILL ENSURE THE RESTORATION OF OUR NATURAL HERITAGE. MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT WILL CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS THE CONSERVATION OF THE DRYLAND (GRASSLAND, SCRUBLAND AND OPEN FOREST) ECOSYSTEMS THAT THE CHEETAH INHABITS.

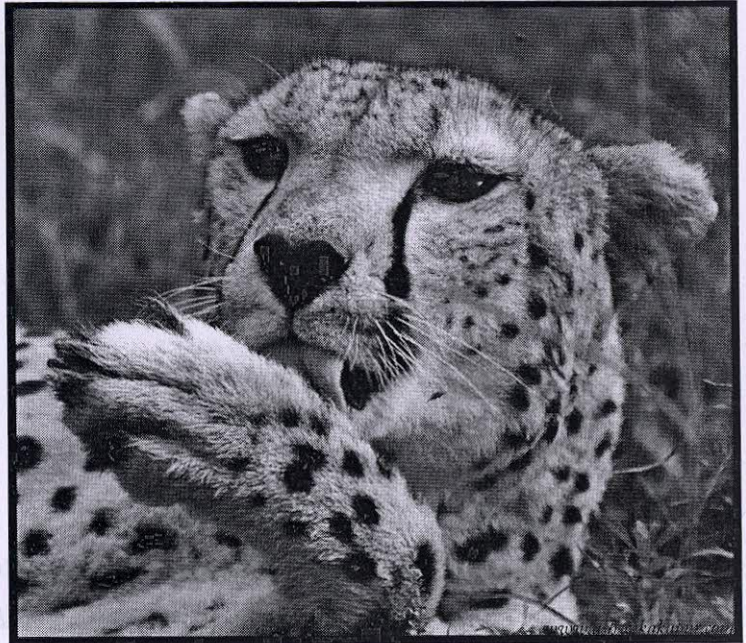
THANKS TO PROJECT CHEETAH, THE CHEETAH MAY WELL ROAM THE PLAINS OF INDIA AGAIN.



WHAT IS A CHEETAH?

A cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) is a big cat like the leopard, and is a member of the family Felidae. As a sprinter capable of reaching speeds of 30 m/s, it is the fastest land animal and specialises in running down its prey.

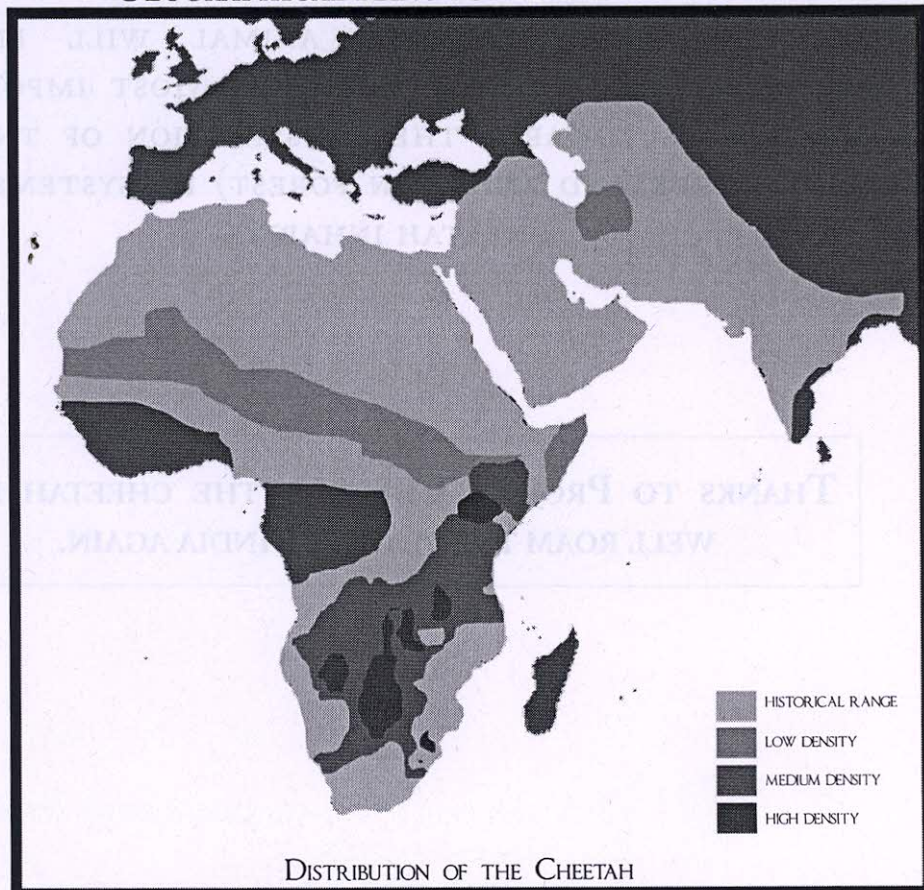
In the African plains, the cheetah hunts and eats animals such as antelope, wild pigs and hares while in Iran, the chief prey is gazelle. Research indicates that the cheetah avoids livestock populations.



WHERE DOES IT LIVE?

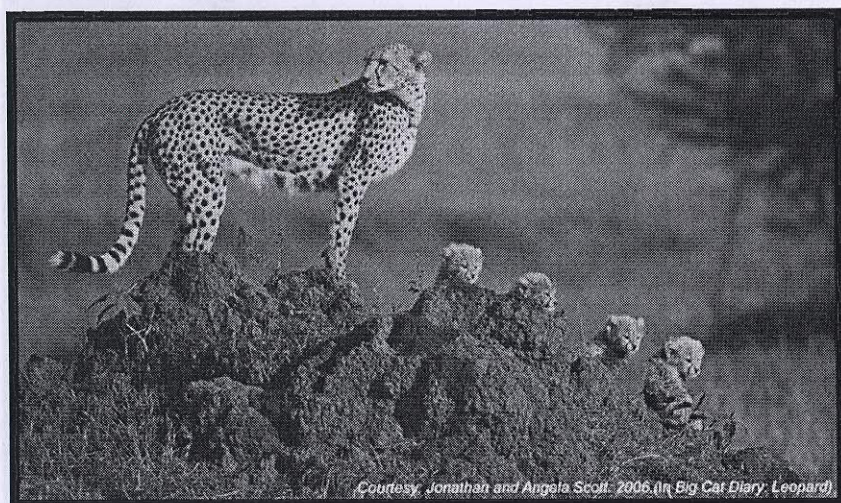
Today, the cheetah is found only in the arid regions of eastern Iran in Asia, and in Africa, it is found in isolated populations in grasslands, scrublands and open forests across the continent, especially in the countries of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE OF THE CHEETAH



WHY REINTRODUCE THE CHEETAH TO INDIA?

- Just as the tiger is the flagship species of the forest, the cheetah is the flagship species of the grasslands, scrublands and open forests. Therefore, with the reintroduction of the cheetah, these dryland ecosystems of India will have a chance to return to their natural state.
- Being a top carnivore, the cheetah is a major evolutionary force that shapes ecosystem functions and enhances species diversity.
- The cheetah is part of our heritage :-
 - It is the only large mammal that has been declared extinct in India in recent history.
 - It is extensively mentioned in Indian literature, with the word '*cheetah*' itself originating from the Sanskrit word '*chitraka*' which means 'speckled one'.
 - Indian rulers, especially the Mughals, kept cheetahs as pets and used them for hunting. Emperor Akbar, for example, maintained a stable of over one thousand cheetahs.

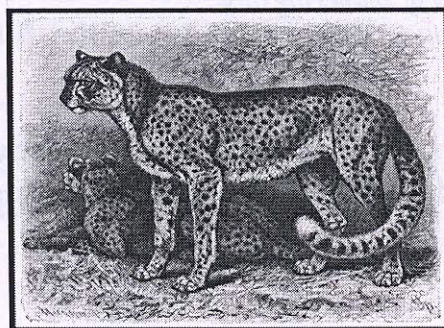


"I hunted for two or three days in those desert plains...and hunted with cheetahs many antelopes."

-Emperor Jahangir,
The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri

WILL THE CHEETAH BE PRONE TO POACHING?

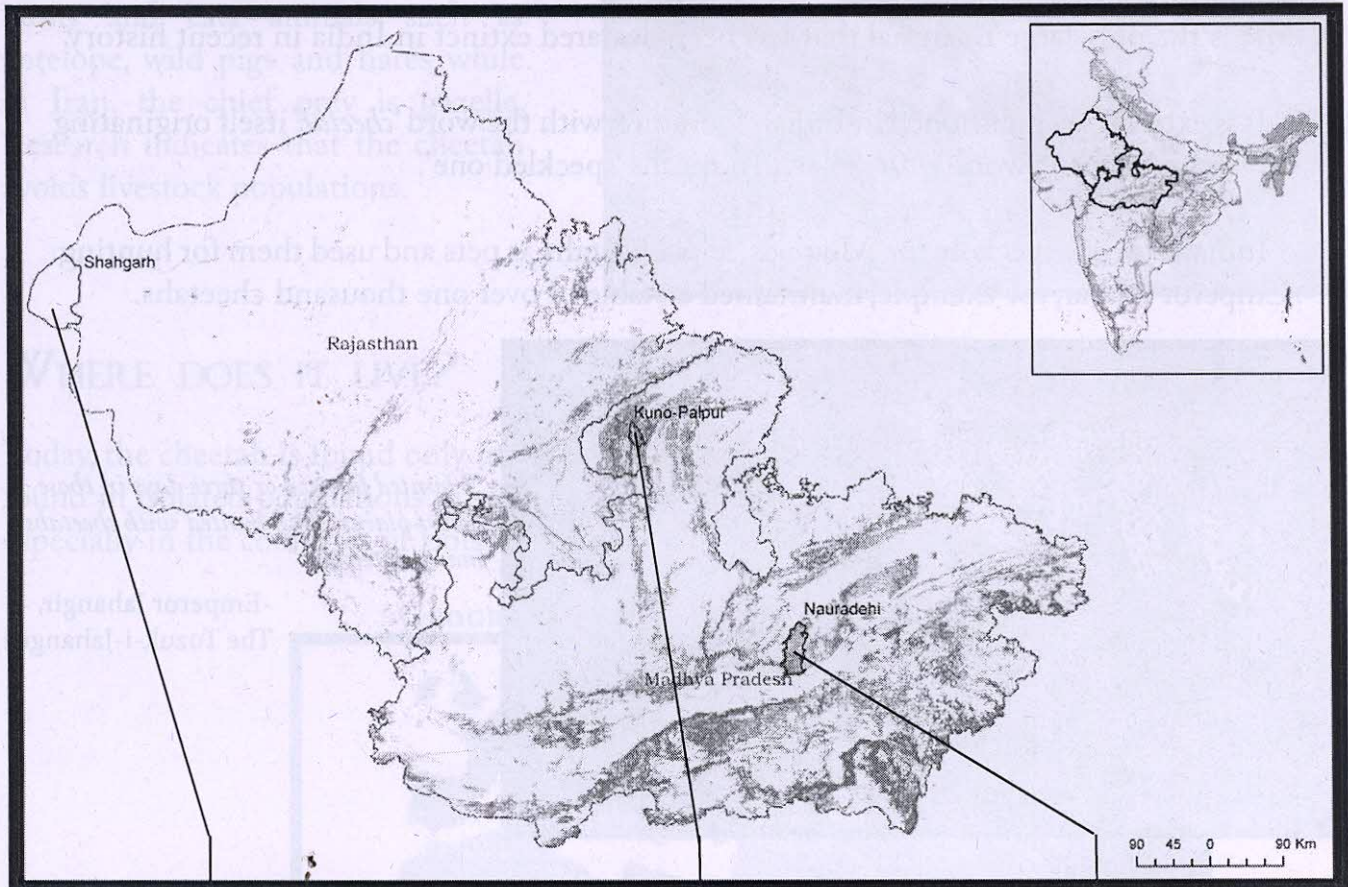
While the cheetah has a soft coat of fur with a unique spotted pattern which makes it a target for some poachers, there is no demand for the cheetah's body parts like there is for the tiger's. Thus, unlike the tiger, the cheetah does not have a huge price on its head and poaching is much less of a threat.



WHERE COULD THE CHEETAH BE REINTRODUCED?

Currently, wildlife experts have identified three regions which have the potential to support cheetah populations. The Nauradehi and Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuaries in Madhya Pradesh and the Shahgarh Landscape in Rajasthan have been declared potentially suitable for the reintroduction of the cheetah.

PROPOSED REINTRODUCTION SITES IN MADHYA PRADESH AND RAJASTHAN



Since the Shahgarh Landscape is fenced along the border region, the addition of more fencing will ensure adequate protection for the cheetah population.

The Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh has the potential to hold populations of the tiger, the leopard, the Asiatic lion as well as the cheetah, which are four of India's big cats.

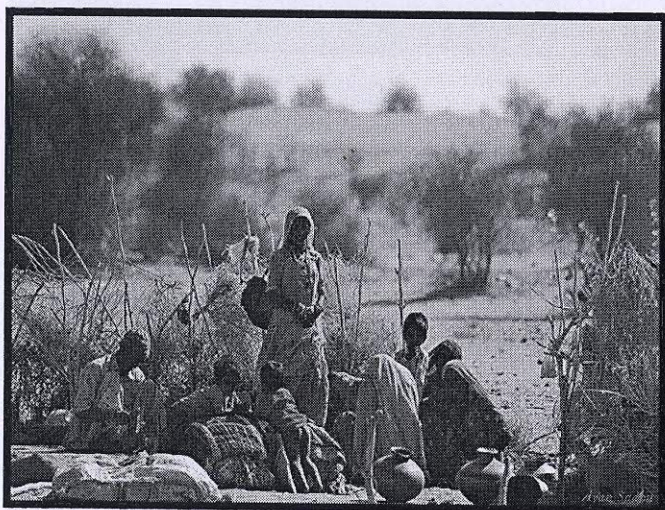
The Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary (1197km²) is part of a much larger forested landscape (5500km²) which can host the cheetah.

With proper management, these three landscapes will be able to accommodate over one hundred individual cheetahs.



WHO WILL BE AFFECTED?

To prevent human - wildlife conflict and to ensure the ethical implementation of Project Cheetah, human settlements that may be affected will be given generous and adequate compensation for their role in this national initiative. 80 seasonally used human settlements in the Shahgarh Landscape and 23 settlements in Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary may be relocated with the consent and cooperation of the inhabitants.

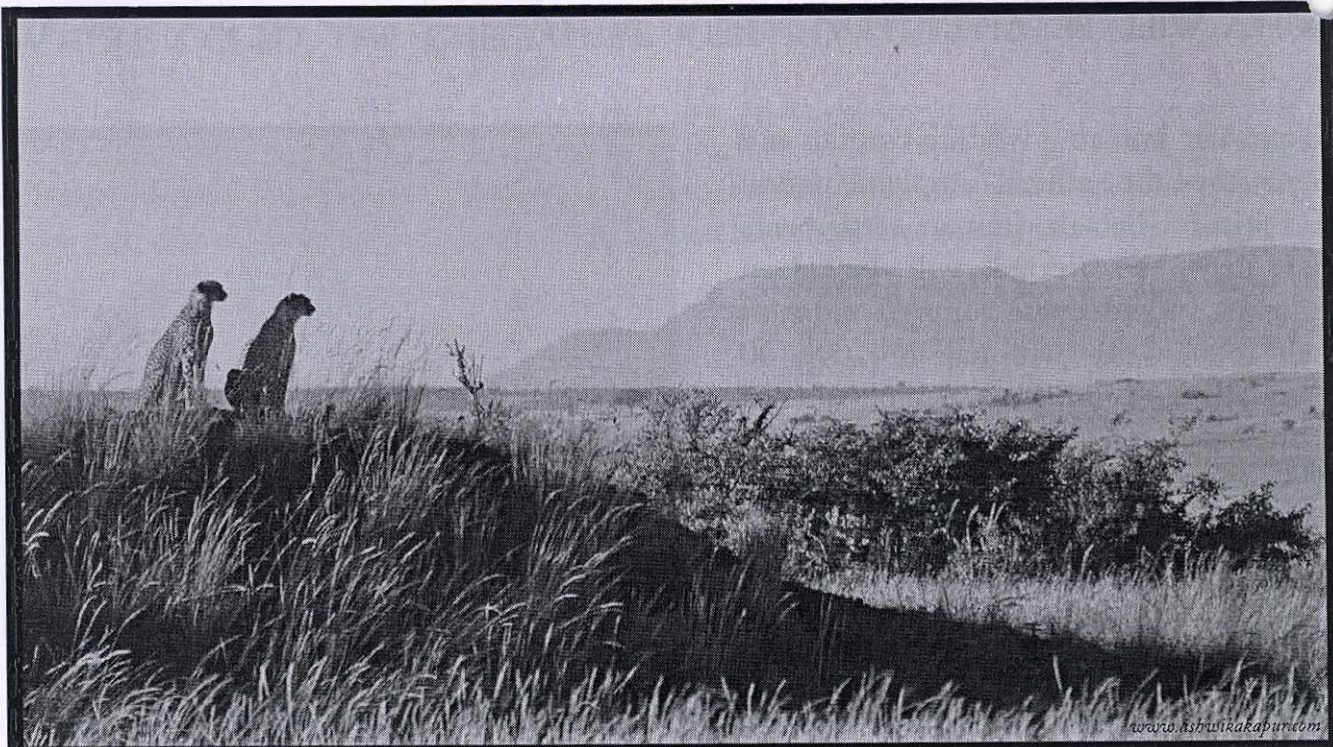


Currently, these local communities have no access to modern amenities such as medical access, transportation, markets, schools, and occasionally even to electricity. Dacoits threaten some areas, while in others conflict with wildlife threatens livelihoods. Aiding them in their endeavour to develop alternative livelihoods will contribute to the success of Project Cheetah, and will need to be an integral part of the project.

WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP?

- A task force for Project Cheetah is being created which will continue its assessments regarding the reintroduction of the cheetah.
- Further scientific surveys will be conducted in the designated project sites to provide a detailed report on their suitability as cheetah habitat, and road maps for their ecorestoration will be developed.
- Discussions and negotiations with countries which currently host cheetah populations will be carried out to obtain suitable cheetah individuals for Project Cheetah.





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Cover Painting by Harrington Bird, 1905, courtesy of Dr. M. K. Ranjitsinh