

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 6 | Issue 1

2023

© 2023 International Journal of Law Management & Humanities

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com/>)

This article is brought to you for “free” and “open access” by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestions or complaints**, kindly contact Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com.

To submit your Manuscript for Publication in the **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript to submission@ijlmh.com.

The Impact and Challenges of Reintroducing the Cheetahs in the Indian Subcontinent

ISHIKA SONI¹ AND PRACHI AGARWAL²

ABSTRACT

In an effort to preserve biodiversity and revitalise ecosystems, translocations or designed reallocations of certain endangered species have become more prevalent. As can be seen in the case of India, which is attempting to bring back a piece of its lost living legacy by conserving the cheetah population. The number of cheetahs in India was so plentiful that the numbers stretched across Jaipur, Lucknow and Mysore. But they went nearly extinct during the mid-19th century in post-independence India. The reason behind their extinction can be attributed to many factors, such as overhunting, desertification or deforestation of their natural habits and even domestication of this particular big cat species. In fact, the famous Mughal emperor Akbar alone was known to have a field full of around a thousand of these spotted big cats.

However, today we are aware of the need for ecological conservation and hence the need to conserve the highly endangered species of cheetahs. This awareness has led to the implementation of a reintroduction plan for cheetahs back into the Indian subcontinent. Careful consideration has been given to every facet of this project, with the IUCN Reintroduction Group preparing its recommendations for conservation practitioners. The action plan for the introduction of the cheetah in India tackles each of them in a realistic and scientific way, despite the fact that it is very unlikely that all of these features would be addressed in real-life settings.

This paper emphasises India's readiness to resume cheetah conservation efforts. It also gives us an insight into the reason behind the extinction of cheetahs and the way ahead as per the plan for the re-introduction of cheetahs. This paper also seeks to analyse the implications after the re-introduction of cheetahs into the Indian subcontinent for different facets of the country, especially tourism, employment and the ecological changes it might spring upon.

Keywords: *Cheetah, Habitat, Ecological, Tourism, Reintroduction.*

¹ Author is a student at NMIMS, Hyderabad, India.

² Author is a student at NMIMS, Hyderabad, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

(A) Brief History

To look back at history at historical records as to why the big cats were driven to extinction, we find climate change, low reproductive rate, hunting, domestication, training, and lastly harmful mutation caused by inbreeding as the driving factors.



Source: Thakor Saheb Chattrasalsinhji of Limbdi

Focusing more on the artificially driven extinction of the species, the earliest record date back to the 12th century when King Someshvara III of Kalyani captured and domesticated them for personal sport. This thus, began an era of hunting wild cats for sports and entertainment purposes, in fact, it was a widely popular trend among the nobility and Indian royal at that time. The captured cheetahs naturally subjected to the inability to breed while held in captivity declined in numbers rapidly. Therefore by the advent of the 18th century, the number of cheetahs was already declining in the country.



The situation was just made worse after the country was colonised under British rule, which instantly classified the species as vermin and went as far as to provide rewards for their capture and death. The cost of an average captured cheetah began from Rs.10, and a trained from Rs 250. This move was apparently a reaction after a British agent was mauled to death by a domesticated cheetah belonging to the king of Vizianagaram at Visakhapatnam, the result of

which was the near extinction of the big cats by the mid-19th century.

The other more naturally inclined cause of their extinction could be attributed to the destruction of the natural habitat; the wide grasslands and desert areas, their low reproductive rate under capture away from the wilderness and lastly inbreeding or breeding with close blood relatives whereby narrowing the gene pool giving birth to mutations because of decreased genetic variability.

Large carnivore reintroductions and reallocations have gained popularity as a means to protect endangered species and revive depleted ecosystems. Overhunting and habitat destruction in India caused the cheetah's extinction in historical times. For moral and environmental concerns, India now has the financial resources to contemplate reestablishing its once-thriving natural heritage. In light of this situation, a gathering of international specialists for consultation was arranged in Gajner in September 2009. At this discussion, participants agreed that a full study of suitable release locations for the cheetah in India should be conducted. The Wildlife Institute of India and the Wildlife Trust of India were tasked with this responsibility by the Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India. Out of 10 examined locations in five central Indian States, Kuno Palpur National Park (KNP) in the State of Madhya Pradesh was ranked as a high priority while contemplating the introduction of the cheetah due to its ideal habitat and enough prey base.

In India, the cheetah is protected by law and has access to enough habitat. The Supreme Court of India has allowed the reintroduction of cheetahs on an experimental basis, provided the dangers that drove them to extinction have been lessened. The Union Minister, the Government of India, and the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh have all given their blessing to the initiative, ensuring a long- term commitment of resources and staff from both levels of government. India wants to establish a founding population of cheetahs based on the availability of sufficient numbers and a continued supply of behaviourally suitable, genetically diverse, healthy cheetahs, without mixing of sub- species within any landscape, as sourcing the critically endangered Asiatic cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*) from Iran would have

detrimental effects on the survival of this sub-species.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REINTRODUCTION PLAN

On the morning of 17th September 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the occasion of his Birthday, released eight cheetahs that were transported on a cargo flight to Gwalior all the way from Namibia. This finally marks the implementation of the reintroduction plan, the discussion of which had been going on for the past decade. The animals were then relocated to their new home, a vast national park in the heart of India where researchers are keeping their fingers crossed for the return of the world's fastest land animal.

On Saturday morning, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi released the big cats back into their new dwellings, where the felines cautiously explored their new environment after escaping their confinement.



The Prime Minister in hopes for a bright future said,

“When the cheetah will run again ... grasslands will be restored, biodiversity will increase and eco-tourism will get a boost”



This line successfully summed up his ambitions for the future of the country and what he expected from the plan.³

As per the plan, for the duration of a month, the first eight cheetahs imported from Namibia were confined or quarantined within the national park to check for any signs of disease or other

infections and to further acclimate them to their new surroundings, following which they were then moved to a larger park enclosure. The barricades are built to keep out larger predators like bears and leopards, and they are stocked with sufficient

prey like spotted deer and antelope.

The eight cheetahs comprising of five females and three males in the 30-66 month age group are named Freddy, Alton, Savannah, Sasha, Obaan, Asha, Cibili, and Saisa.

On 5th November, Kuno National Park in the Sheopur region of Madhya Pradesh released two male cheetahs (Freddie and Elton) into an acclimatisation cage on Saturday after receiving permission from the relevant government, where within 24 hours of their release they hunted their first prey on Indian soil, a spotted deer. As of 6th November, all the cheetahs have been outfitted with radio collars and are being tracked remotely.⁴ Aside from this, each cheetah is backed by a specialised monitoring staff that maintains watch over the area throughout the clock. With the help of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Indian government is reintroducing wild wildlife, including cheetahs, as part of its ambitious Project Cheetah. Wildlife preservation efforts have a long tradition in India. Scientists estimate that 21 cheetahs could live comfortably in the reserve and that if they were to establish territories and reproduce, they could move to the neighbouring grasslands and woodlands that can support another dozen. An additional \$6.3 million, or a total of

\$11.5 million over the course of the project's five years, is estimated and will be covered by state- owned Indian Oil.⁵

Many years have been spent planning the move across continents. Asiatic cheetahs, distantly related to their African counterparts but found only in Asia, were once widely distributed across what is now India and even reached Saudi Arabia. India had wanted to import Asiatic

³ *PM modi tweets video of 2 cheetahs shifted to larger enclosure at Kuno ...* (no date) *Economic Times*. Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/pm-modi-tweets-video-of-2-cheetahs-shifted-to-larger-enclosure-at-kuno-habitat/videoshow/95333411.cms> (Accessed: February 21, 2023).

⁴ https://twitter.com/narendramodi?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1589093032988549120%7Ctwgr%5Ef3460dff2d54d05fe4f756bb896a8955d76cb5e%7Ctwcon%5Es1_

⁵ Al Jazeera (2022) *India welcomes back cheetahs, 70 years after local extinction*, *Wildlife News | Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/17/india-welcomes-back-cheetahs-70-years-after-local-extinction> (Accessed: February 21, 2023).

cheetahs, but the few hundred that remain in Iran are in too precarious of a population to risk moving. Following the success of the first reallocation.

III. DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

(A) Increase Tourism

Kuno-Palpur National Park (KPNP) in Madhya Pradesh is expected to see a rise in tourism as a result of the relocation of cheetahs from Namibia in Africa as part of an intercontinental translocation project. An increase in tourism will lead to an increase in local job prospects. The locals are excitedly anticipating the arrival of the spotted guests from Africa at the national park.

Cheetahs are a new attraction in the nation, it will also create a new circuit around Ranthambore Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan as Sawai Madhopur is nearby. Tourists can now plan a trip going through Rajasthan to look at the tigers and then visit Madhya Pradesh to look at the cheetahs and leopards in their exploration of wildlife. The park's opening will boost tourism and lead to an influx of people in the town. Kuno's success will enhance foot traffic since it's a gateway. Investment in the area would generate jobs and improve locals' lives in the next two years.

(B) Infrastructure Development

A rise in tourism will be definitely followed by a development in infrastructure. A large number of tourists will need a place to stay, preferably closer to their destination, the Kuno National park.

Royal family member Rishiraj Singh Palpur, discussed a project with the PTI to build a resort in the area to accommodate the rising tourism, increase job prospects for the locals and build some infrastructure in the area. The resort would contain 14 rooms, a swimming pool, a restaurant, and other facilities. It is set to be built on a plot of land in Morawan that is around 6 bighas in size (about two acres). He said that it was around 15 kilometres from the park's main entrance from the attraction. He thinks the Sheopur region and surrounding areas would benefit from more tourism if the park's cheetah population was larger.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the MP Tourism Board has approved plans to build a hotel in Sheopur. According to owner Manoj Sarraf his resort and hotel, now under construction on the Sheopur-Sawai Madhopur Road, will have 35 guest rooms, a conference

centre, a fitness centre, and other facilities.⁶

According to tourism industry experts, 5 lakh people visit Ranthambore every year and there are more than 300 major and small hotels, but Sheopur in Madhya Pradesh is a comparatively new field where investors are watching to build their companies. The development of hotels and resort infrastructures is already taking place in the area, plans have been approved and are already in motion. Project Cheetah's success will lead to new hotels, resorts, and associated sectors. People would invest when they see the initiative succeeding and the number of large cats rising. The area has become immensely desirable due to the cheetah appeal, and the prices of land are estimated to rise as per demand, especially for land located closer to the park.

(C) Transportation Facilities

The high influx of tourists will also give rise to a need for available transport services like cabs, taxis, buses and auto-rickshaws. As tourists are not familiar with the area, they will seek the help of a local to navigate around and this job can be perfectly performed by the locals who can act as tour guides and also provide transportation services, taking the tourists around the place and introducing to them the area.

Most people tend to look online for information about a new place, followed by asking their cab driver who is adept at traversing through the locality. These people can introduce the tourist to the best eateries, small markets and sites to see in the town.

The broader methods of transportation will also see development in the next decades, as the number of tourist increase. The railway lines, airports and public transportation services will improve rapidly. Digitalisation and cashless payments by UPI and mobile transactions will also increase.

(D) Home-Stays & Hostels

The influx of tourists can also give an opportunity to the locals residing in the area to provide homestay and hostel facilities to these tourists. Many tourists and adventurers with a preference for solo or group trips opt for cheaper and affordable stays and most also wish to enjoy the genuine tradition and culture in the place and hence select the option for homestays or hostel accommodations. In fact, recently this trend has gained a lot of popularity among the young generation. The locals can explore this opportunity and earn profits by merely renting

⁶ *Guest Cheetahs in Kuno National Park Can Promote Tourism in MP* (no date) *Indian Holiday Trip*. Available at: <https://www.indianholidaytrip.com/news/travel-events/guest-cheetahs-in-madhya-pradesh-s-kuno-national-park-can-promote-tourism-in-state> (Accessed: February 21, 2023).

out space in their homes to tourists for a few days. There are many online websites that they can make use of to advertise their homes and contact potential customers. A mutual cultural exchange will be supported through this initiative.

(E) Restaurants & Local cuisine

Tourists belonging to different cultures, traditions and ethnicity will naturally be curious about the customs and traditions of the local population. A desire to try the local cuisine will be eminent, thus there is an opportunity for the local cuisine set-ups to be more popular than the typical continental food of the hotels and resorts. Many tourists have a fooding and Instagramming streak as their traits so local customs, food and dining will excite the audience.

(F) Local Markets & Merchandise

Most people seek to collect souvenirs from places they visit, this can popularise the local markets and merchandise centred on the Kuno wildlife century among all the tourists. Handmade goods and trinkets can also be sold pretty well among an interested audience.

This has been proven to be true as can be seen in many tourist destinations all over the world.

(G) Job Creation

The main boon however that the locals will get from this addition is numerous job opportunities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that India's experience proved that economic growth and environmental protection are inextricably linked. He continued by saying that the national park will gain prominence on the international animal map thanks to the cheetah reintroduction project, which would boost economic development and create jobs via tourism. Many residents of the surrounding villages of Morawan, Sesaipura, Tiktoli, Adwada, Hathedi, and Chakrana share this enthusiasm.

All these industries that can flourish will inevitably require the input of the locals and thus create many opportunities for blue-collar jobs in form of infrastructure building and then white-collar jobs by setting these ideas into motion.

(H) Invite Investment

Due to Project Cheetah, land prices in Karahal, Madhya Pradesh, are currently several lakhs per bigha. This area is a hot site for investment projects and many businessmen are eyeing this area. Due to the arrival of cheetahs, this area is set to bloom in the next decade and therefore holds a lot of opportunities to make money. Investments will be abundant at this time and are expected to increase state revenue through local tax. An increase in foreign investment is also possible which will again add to the revenue of the country.

Higher gains will yield higher benefits and also improve the skills and education of the locals in this area.

IV. CHALLENGES ARISING: EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED

(A) Shrinking Habitat

A common concern that ecologists share as a consequence of the introduction of cheetahs into the ecological system is how their addition would affect existing predators like tigers, hyenas and others that are already competing for prey in these grasslands. In addition, the attitude of the local animals towards these foreign species amidst the local population of wildlife also leaves a lot to be seen and taken into consideration.

Valmik Thapar, an Indian naturalist and specialist on large cats, has called the idea "fatally flawed" since India does not have enough suitable habitat or wild prey to support a large population of cheetahs. He argues that "The Serengeti cheetahs are having a hard time even in the greatest cheetah area so what is the use in bringing them to India unless you want them in captive enclosures?"

The cheetahs will spend three months in cages where they will be regularly fed but it is predicted that problems would arise three months after release when they are left to hunt forest deer and maybe come into leopards and hyenas.

Others say the government's primary job should be to safeguard the species that still naturally exist on the subcontinent, especially those found in its vanishing grasslands.

Wildlife researcher Abi Tamim Vanak has said that the cheetah project has been "touted as a major chance" for protecting India's threatened savanna ecosystems, but the project's organisers have not yet proposed a concrete strategy for conserving these biomes beyond the protected areas. A cheetah's habitat will dwindle as a result of this. "The government has gone with the traditional 'fortress' conservation model," he adds, referring to the contentious concept that conservation is best done by constructing separate zones for people and animals. Authorities are bringing cheetahs "into what will only remain glorified safari parks in the foreseeable future."⁷

(B) Area Limitations

Ideally, given their solitary lifestyle and range of activities, an area of 3,800 square miles

⁷ *Responsible or reckless? India brings back the long-lost cheetah.* (2022) *The Christian Science Monitor*. The Christian Science Monitor. Available at: <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2022/0926/Responsible-or-reckless-India-brings-back-the-long-lost-cheetah> (Accessed: February 21, 2023).

should be provided for them to survive and procreate, but due to the limitations of the Kuno National Park, this would not be possible.

Some portions of the interior fence are reportedly less than 2 metres in height and need to be strengthened, while other parts of the fence are reportedly unsecured.

"If the cheetah leaps on it, it will bend and the cheetah may get over it," said Eli Waker, a conservation biologist and cheetah expert with CCF". They need to line the fence with pebbles to prevent the boars from digging under it to get access. The interior barrier is 11 kilometres long, but only a tiny piece of it has been electrified thus far.

Area and appropriate measures for the housing of these wild cats are still subpar and need constant improvements. As the population of these cats are expected to increase in the next few years, a lacking infrastructure will pose a restriction on their survival.

(C) Political Strife & Influence

As the decision to bring the cheetahs to India was an agenda prominently supported by the central government, the BJP, it has resulted in the involvement of these innocent bystanders in the political fight among parties.

On Monday 3rd October, Nana Patole, president of the Maharashtra Congress, alleged that the Central government "deliberately" sent cheetahs to India to assure the spread of Lumpy Skin Disease and injure farmers. The Cheetahs were also imported from Nigeria, where the lumpy virus has been rife for some years. Patole told reporters that the central government was responsible for the farmers' losses on purpose.⁸

This might not seem like a very obvious challenge at first glance but it could lead to bad publicity among the common population and lead the farmers to blame the cheetahs for their losses, in turn, birthing hate and rejection of these species.

(D) Indifferent Generation

As most of the current population of the country was not even born when cheetahs went extinct in the Indian subcontinent, they seem to have an indifferent approach to the problem. Lives were ongoing without their presence and shall continue to do so. Since India has had a hunting prohibition in place since 1972, most Indians alive today likely have no idea what happened to the cheetah. As a result, many people argue, "Why should I care?" Even more so

⁸ Centre 'deliberately' brought cheetahs to spread lumpy virus in India ... (no date) *Economic Times*. Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/centre-deliberately-brought-cheetahs-to-spread-lumpy-virus-in-india-and-hurt-farmers-congress-nana-patole/videoshow/94624586.cms> (Accessed: February 21, 2023).

since there does not seem to be any catastrophic ecological imbalance as a result of their extinction. The cheetah's extinction is regrettable for numerous reasons, not the least of which is that the animal never targeted people for predation.

The challenge that the indifferent attitude of this generation leads to is the callous treatment towards this dying species. They must be made aware of the importance of this initiative not only from a scientific approach but also in terms of pride and nationalistic sentiments before these wild cats only live in pages of history.

(E) Tracking and Rearing

After releasing cheetahs, officers, doctors and concerned persons would want to keep tabs on them in real-time using GPS data, therefore they have requested that the forest guard's rest house be upgraded with a new network. Depending on how the cheetahs respond to the workers who will be monitoring them, the amount of time they spend in the boma before being released into the national park will vary. The truck can easily go around all eight felines and if the cheetahs get hungry or escape, team members must be able to approach them safely. Because of this, we can't be sure how long the cats will wait in the boma before venturing into the park.⁹

Therefore a need for a cheetah-monitoring crew specialised in tracking technology arises. There are special conditions required to store the feed for the animals, therefore a safe place to store meat also needs to be formed as the solar panel array currently powering the fridge is insufficient to keep meat cold on overcast days. There also has to be a fix for the water supply problems, for the proper rearing of these cats.

(F) Co-Existence Dilemma

Kuno-Palpur was selected as the new habitat for this endangered species in India because of its vast grasslands. These grasslands were originally developed by removing human dwellings and re-wilding previously cultivated areas to provide a place for the Asiatic lions, who are threatened. Once common in India and the Middle East, these lions now number over 700 in Gir Forest, a national park in Gujarat. The search for a supplementary home for these giant cats was spurred by fears that a disease outbreak or poaching pandemic may wipe out the

⁹ *Infighting and infrastructure glitches at Kuno National Park ahead of Cheetahs' shift* (no date) *The Economic Times*. Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/infighting-and-infrastructure-glitches-at-kuno-national-park-ahead-of-cheetahs-shift/articleshow/94728143.cms> (Accessed: February 21, 2023).

whole species. This inquiry identified Kuno-Palpur 30 years ago.¹⁰

The translocation of the lions was given a six-month deadline by the Supreme court in 2016 due to delays and at the same time, an application to reintroduce cheetahs was denied, stating it would be incongruous to favour a non-native subspecies (African cheetahs) over a native one (Asiatic lions). In early 2020, the court reversed itself, allowing cheetah reintroduction. Certain experts questioned the conclusion's science. The cheetah can cross 1,000 square kilometres in a year, therefore it has a huge home range. In India's tiny parks, there is less area for mobility. Some fear the region, which is great for cheetahs and lions, might become a dry, scrubby forest where tigers would thrive.

Tigers are also spreading to Kuno-Palpur from a nearby Rajasthan reserve. This suggests a wildlife corridor connecting the two sanctuaries, which is important for conservation in India. In addition, Kuno-Palpur houses several leopards and there is no proof that cheetahs, lions, tigers, and leopards can coexist harmoniously. This has never happened before, therefore there's no precedence.

The cheetah proposal appears more like a vanity project than a conservation priority; it might lead to conflicts within the species and between humans and other animals.

V. CONCLUSION

Cheetahs coming back to India is not only a move to reinvigorate the grasslands and anew the ecological balance but is also a matter of national pride and sentiment. The move will bring numerous opportunities for the people not only in the locality of the national park but in the country as a whole by boosting the economy through tourism and creating jobs. But the challenges and problems that this move is associated with also need to be considered. Most of these challenges will solve on their own but some of them that do not seem like a major inconvenience at first have a chance to grow in some of the most serious issues that this move will face.

The major issue with raising cheetahs in enclosed parks and providing them with feed and all essentials is that the purpose of bringing back these wild cats will eventually be lost. Wild animals need to maintain their freedom of wilderness, hunt and mate which contradicts raising them in these parks which has been criticised as a capitalistic move hidden behind the agenda of protection.

¹⁰ Evans, S. (2020) *Why India's plan to reintroduce cheetahs may run into problems*, *Phys.org*. *Phys.org*. Available at: <https://phys.org/news/2020-12-india-reintroduce-cheetahs-problems.html> (Accessed: February 21, 2023).

The further progress of this plan is yet to be observed. We will have better reception for more cheetahs should they come after our experience with these first eight. This situation is the first of its kind in the country, thus there is no precedent to follow. This paper only sums up some of the most evident opportunities and challenges that this move presents at present and can be affected by any change in prospects in the future.
