

An overview of Iran's efforts to save endangered species on International Cheetah Day

# Cheetah safe zones yet to be realized

## Social Desk

The Mayamey to Sabzevar road in the Turan region in Iran poses a threat to both passing cars and the critically endangered Asiatic cheetah, resulting in fatalities. Despite a proposed and approved fencing plan to address this issue, no credit has been allocated, and no fencing has been initiated. The cheetah, once widespread across Africa, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, is now critically endangered, with the Asian species facing a direr situation than its African counterpart, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Turan region is home to at least 17 cheetahs, including seven females, two males, and eight cubs, according to the latest report from the Department of the Environment (DoE). Urgent measures are needed to increase their population, and the DoE has taken action in Turan and its surrounding areas to create safe habitats for these felines, particularly in the north, east, and southeast parts of the region. The Pol-e Abrisham (Silk Bridge) area, known for its otter population, holds potential as a secure zone for cheetahs.

Turan National Park, the largest habitat for Iranian cheetahs, stretches across Golestan and Semnan provinces and was designated as a wildlife sanctuary in 1976. It is home to a diverse range of wildlife, including 41 mammal species, 167 bird species, 42 reptile species, and two amphibian species, with the Asian cheetah being the most significant. The decline of cheetah populations extends to both Asian and African cheetahs, primarily due to human activities such as road construction, overhunting of prey species, and habitat destruction from agriculture and mining.

Recognizing the importance of protecting this remarkable species, the United Nations designated December 4th as International Cheetah Day in 2010. Despite the establishment of protected habitats for cheetahs in Africa and Asia,

these territorial animals often wander beyond these areas, particularly in Iran, where a significant number of cheetahs with cubs have been observed outside the Turan habitat. As a result, protective measures are necessary in these regions. The DoE, responsible for safeguarding wildlife species, has taken action, but it is estimated that it will take one to two years for these measures to yield tangible results, according to the deputy of the natural environment at the DoE.

In terms of the fencing project for the Mayamey to Sabzevar road in the Turan region, progress updates have been provided by Hassan Akbari. However, the project has not yet reached the implementation stage, despite efforts by the DoE and follow-ups with the Ministry of Roads. The fencing plan includes a 70-kilometer area with sections designated for illumination and fencing, along with repaired underpasses and water passages to facilitate cheetah movement.

However, no action has been taken in this regard, except for illuminating merely two kilometers of the road for better visibility. Additionally, reducing the speed of drivers in the area is crucial. "Obtaining permission from the Road Transport Commission to implement a speed reduction has caused delays, but a one-year trial period was eventually agreed upon," Akbari said. However, despite the installation of camera mounts, the activation and implementation of average speeds have not occurred as intended. Although progress has been made, it has not yet reached the desired level of effectiveness. Good things have

happened regarding warning signs, awareness, and information, with designed and improved signs in place. However, only a small part of the plan has been implemented and the actions taken so far are not effective in preventing accidents.

Akbari emphasized that the problem of cheetah cannot be solved by addressing the road issues alone, as there are other crucial threats such as insecurity and lack of prey in the surrounding habitats. It is crucial to create suitable safe spaces outside of Turan for the cheetah, but challenges like conflicts, mining activities, and restrictions from the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade hamper the protection efforts.

"A memorandum of understanding has been signed with the private sector to enlist their support in certain areas, but it will take time for these efforts to yield results," Akbari stated. Akbari went on to say, "In the southeast region of Turan, we are implementing a program to increase the prey population for cheetahs, such as deer, rams, and sheep, in collaboration with the private sector. We hope that within the next two years, the prey population will significantly increase." These prey animals will be released into the wild, making the southeast of Turan a safer environment for cheetahs. Part of the cheetah population already migrates in that direction.

"We believe that with continued seriousness in the protection efforts in that area, it will take one to two years for the area to become safe for wolverines," the official said, adding, "We have also initiated measures on the northern

side of Turan. Through a memorandum of understanding with the governorates of North Khorasan and Semnan, as well as the two general environmental departments of these provinces and the private sector, we have deployed at least eight environmental assistants with suitable facilities in the free habitats range in the north of Turan and southwest of Miandasht, specifically in an area known as Pol-e Abrisham."

This is a crucial action in an area where most cheetah sightings have occurred. Despite conflicts with villages, livestock, and mining in the area, the low vegetation and limited livestock numbers make it possible for cheetahs to roam freely. By strengthening protection and restoring the prey population, the region can become a suitable habitat for these endangered species. Akbari also stressed the importance of extending these measures to other regions and involving local communities and the private sector for maximum effectiveness. The environmental further addressed the need to continue purchasing customary rights in specific parts of Turan, which involves acquiring the rights of local herdsmen and relocating their animals outside the area. However, he also highlighted the challenge of limited financial resources, stating that government funding alone is insufficient for effective cheetah conservation.

"Despite efforts to attract assistance through methods like the National Environmental Fund, a comprehensive and efficient plan has yet to be developed," he said.

On a positive note, Akbari assured that the three female cheetahs at the Turan breeding site, Iran, Turan,

and Azar, are in good condition, with no issues anticipated for Iran's ability to become pregnant again in

the future.

"Necessary measures will be taken when the time comes," he said.

## One year old and very well

Azar and Turan, two of the five cheetahs housed at the breeding site in Turan National Park, Shahrud, Semnan Province, were found a year ago and are now safe and sound. Cheetahs reach adulthood at the age of two, and until then, measures must be taken to ensure the well-being of these remarkable gifts of nature.

On December 2, 2022, two newborn cheetah cubs, aged between 18 and 20 days old, were discovered and rescued by a shepherd in the Turan region of Shahrud city, located in the eastern part of Semnan Province.

The country's Department of the Environment (DoE) promptly returned the cubs to the capture site in hopes of finding their mother. However, their efforts were in vain, and due to the cold weather, the cubs were brought to the environmental protection station. After reaching 10 weeks of age and receiving vaccinations to enhance their immunity against respiratory and digestive diseases, as well as transitioning to a carnivorous diet, the two female cheetahs were transferred to the captive breeding center in Turan National Park. This move aimed to ensure their continued growth so that they could be used for breeding, and, subsequently, mitigating the risk of extinction for this valuable species.

The care and breeding of female cheetah cubs Azar and Turan from their early days of birth have contributed to the expertise of local specialists, making them more prepared for the future birth and care of other cheetahs in captivity.

Every Iranian who holds love for their country will undoubtedly appreciate the success of these local experts, feeling delighted and proud of the authority and scientific achievements of Iran.

Bahram Ali Zahiri, head of the DoE office in Semnan Province, recently stated that cheetahs reach maturity in their second year of life, and thus we must wait another year before discussing the fertility of Azar and Turan. Zahiri emphasized that Azar and Turan hold great promise for the dynamics and population growth of cheetahs in Semnan Province. He further added that their current physical condi-

tion is favorable, and they are growing and developing according to established indicators and standards.

Zahiri explained that research has shown cheetahs to be polygynous mammals, reaching maturity between two to three years of age, and retaining reproductive capability until they are eight years old. The Asiatic cheetahs, in particular, exhibit polygynous mating behavior.

Zahiri expressed hope that with the existing infrastructure and the forthcoming "Asiatic Cheetah Growth and Maintenance Document," local specialists will achieve success in breeding cheetahs in captivity.

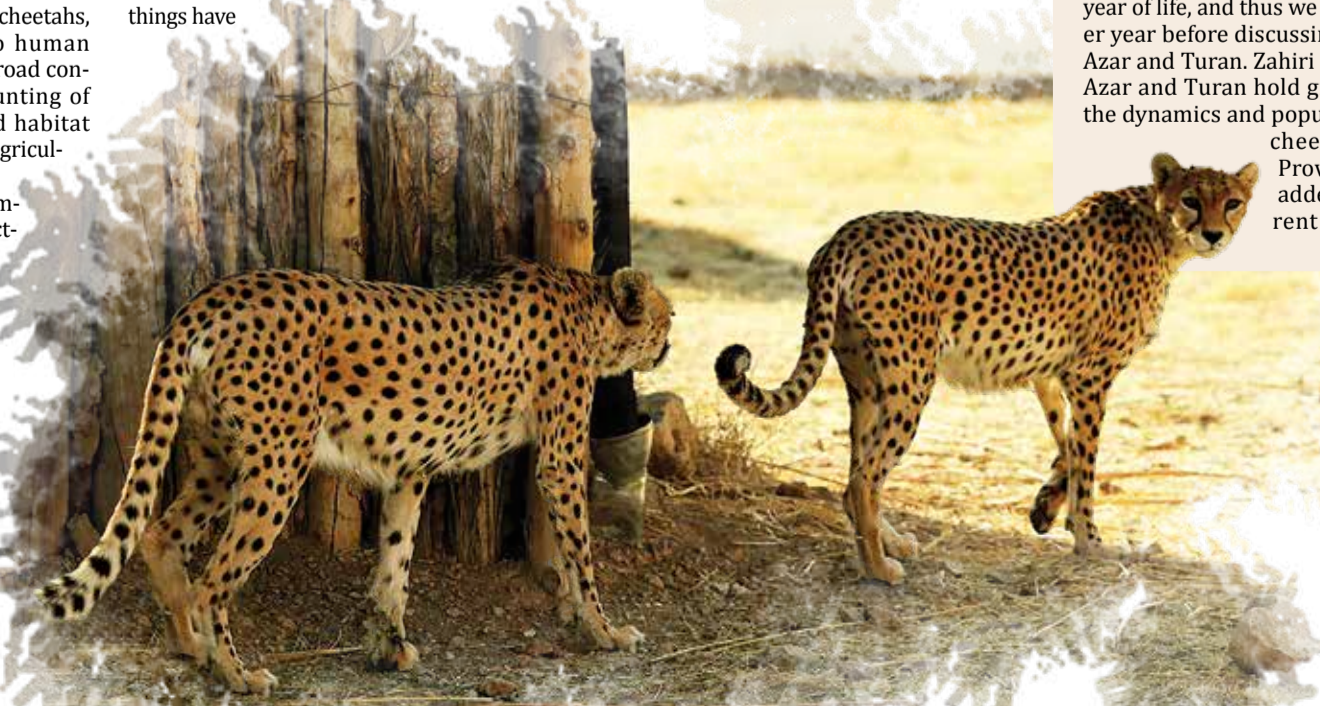
Addressing speculations regarding the establishment of a second Asiatic cheetah breeding site in Iran, Zahiri stated that if the captive breeding of cheetahs in Turan National Park proves successful, the DoE will decide on the creation of another site by relocating Azar and Turan.

According to reports, the Iranian cheetah is listed as an endangered species by the International Union for the Protection of the Environment. Once widespread across Asia around 2,000 years ago, cheetahs now exclusively inhabit desert areas in Iran.

Since the 1970s, Iran has been recognized as the sole habitat of the Asiatic cheetah, earning it the name Iranian cheetah.

At present, Iran, particularly parts of Semnan Province, serves as the safe haven for the Asiatic cheetah. Local experts are working tirelessly to change the fate of these cheetahs, protecting them from the brink of extinction through captive breeding and enhancing the security of Turan National Park.

During a visit to Semnan Province in the spring of 1402, the Vice President and the Head of the country's DoE emphasized the necessity of establishing an international reproduction site as a hub for the life and movement of cheetahs and zebras. The potential of Semnan Province in establishing an international cheetah reproduction site within the protected area of Turan, based on the province's capacity, was underlined during that visit.



### Saipa Wheel Manufacturing Company – Tender for Transformer

Saipa Wheel Manufacturing Company intends to purchase a 500A transformer for IDEAL welding machine. Interested companies are requested to offer their quote based on the specifications mentioned in the attached files on our website. Please receive the tender form and send your PI to commercial2@kswco.com by December 10 2023.

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