



to be investigated whether the problem lies in his diet or veterinary issues.

We currently have two other male cheetahs identified in the wild, one of which is named Faraz. Another cheetah was spotted in the Touran Protected Area, located in the Shahroud county, but no images of it have been recorded for some time, and it may have perished. When the breeding program in captivity takes such a risk by removing one-third of the males from the wild, and has

not achieved any results so far, it indicates that the conservation program needs to be pursued more carefully and transparently.

What, in your opinion, is the best course of action to conserve the cheetah population?

The Department of Environment needs to realize that the conservation program for cheetahs is different from that of other animals, such as the urial sheep, because we are dealing with a carnivore

species that is rapidly approaching extinction. This requires not only a conservation program but also a rescue program. We need to conduct genetic sampling of all available cheetahs, both in captivity and in the wild, to determine their genetic diversity and understand the genetic relationship between them. If the genetic distance between them is significant, the future will be brighter. However, if they have become inbred, their genetic similarity has increased and they have suffered from inbreeding depression. This often occurs in small animal populations, where cheetahs with a family relationship mate with each other, increasing their likelihood of disease and reducing their tolerance to environmental stress, ultimately leading to the disappearance of the cheetah population because we have reached a point where cheetahs can no longer live long lives.

If we have reached this stage, the task becomes even more daunting. We hope that if the Department of Environment collaborates with us, we can initiate a research project with the University of Gorgan to estimate the genetic similarity of cheetahs. From a scientific and international

standards perspective, when the population size of a species falls below 30, it reaches a critical genetic threshold, and such a species cannot survive in the long term in the wild. If our six-month study reveals high genetic similarity, our only option will be to introduce cheetahs from Africa and inject new genes into the population to preserve the Iranian cheetah, even if it means compromising its purity. Although the cheetahs may not retain 100% Iranian purity, we can still preserve the Iranian cheetah with 50% purity, and we know that our cheetahs will be stronger. This approach is better than allowing the Iranian cheetah to become extinct and then, like India and Saudi Arabia, being forced to import African cheetahs that have no compatibility with Iran's climate and conditions, and cannot be considered as Iranian or Asian cheetahs.

Finally, assuming the current trend continues, how many more years can we hope to preserve the Iranian cheetah?

This depends on the genetic study, but based on the evidence available to us today, I doubt that the Iranian cheetah will survive in the next 10 years.



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