



appears incorrect to me. This constituted an unintended occurrence, and the cubs could easily have perished. Fortunately, they remained together and succeeded in hunting. In essence, we were fortunate. Subsequently, if one wishes to evaluate the matter from scientific and conservation-oriented perspectives, one must investigate the circumstances that occasioned their separation from their mother and then determine whether additional protective measures or assistance have become necessary.

**What measures have proven beneficial and efficacious for rescuing the Iranian cheetah?**

At present, cheetahs confront the danger of roadway collisions resulting from vehicular impacts. We already know that, regarding cheetah conservation, the same measures as before are still being implemented, albeit at an exceedingly slow pace. For example, roadside fencing is not being completed with the requisite expediency, and the procurement of equipment is likewise not proceeding with the necessary swiftness.

The Department of Environment also administers a project entitled the "Captive Cheetah Breeding Program," which has now persisted for more than 10 years since its inception. A cheetah cub named Pirouz constituted the latest achievement and outcome of this project in 2023, yet that outcome — namely, Pirouz — perished during the same year. That cub represented the final product of a project upon which billions of tomans had been expended.

For the implementation of that project, a healthy adult female cheetah was removed from the wild, captured near Miandasht, and transferred into the breeding enclosure. We have even received reports indicating that another wild cheetah was also confined within the enclosure for a period of time. Nevertheless, none of these measures has produced any tangible outcome. Admittedly, this captive-breeding program still continues, yet it has generated no results whatsoever, nor has any information concerning its progress been disclosed. Ordinarily, by May, we should have witnessed another cheetah birth. Instead, several years have elapsed, and, subsequent to Pirouz, no outcome has materialized and no development has occurred. Meanwhile, the project's funding has not been discontinued, and its specialists continue their work, yet no tangible result exists.

**Under these circumstances, may we conclude that the captive cheetah project has now failed and ought not to continue?**

Two issues exist. Whenever the population becomes exceedingly small, we must maintain a supplementary captive population, so that, should our wild population

encounter any adversity, or, for example, should one of the cheetah cubs that has become separated from its mother sustain an injury and consequently become incapable of hunting, it may be maintained within the supplementary captive population. The essential issue is that, under these circumstances, we must assist every individual cheetah in transmitting its genetic material to the succeeding generation, whether in the wild or in captivity.

However, transporting cheetahs from the wild into captivity at the present time, while achieving no reproductive success whatsoever, is by no means desirable. At present, we possess four females and one male in captivity, none of which has produced any accomplishment subsequent to Pirouz, and, regrettably, they are advancing in age and consequently forfeiting their reproductive capacity because, if females fail to reproduce within the first two or three years after attaining sexual maturity — that is, within one or two years following maturity — the probability of successful reproduction declines suddenly.



At present, we have Azar, Touran, and another female cheetah named Mahour; all of which have already attained that stage of life and have not yet reproduced. The fourth female cheetah, named Delbar, is now exceedingly aged and no longer possesses reproductive capability.

**Please explain the latest demographic estimates concerning the Asiatic cheetah population, the trajectory of its continued survival, and its remaining regions and habitats within Iran.**

At present, the majority of the cheetah population inhabits eastern Semnan Province and southern North Khorasan Province, namely, the Touran region and Miandasht. Their habitat in Yazd Province has disappeared. The latest estimate that we produced, and that we may still legitimately announce, is fewer than 30 individuals. Throughout these 13 years, cameras have been deployed across 12 distinct regions to document cheetah numbers. The cumulative outcome of studies conducted over a 13-year interval

The photo shows the Asiatic cheetah named Helia and some of her cubs in Iran. IRNA

is that, after 13 years, we now possess 30 cheetahs. That constitutes the most recent conclusion upon which we may legitimately predicate any assertion.

Regrettably, throughout these 13 years and continuing until the present, the trend has been one of reduction because our initial estimate indicated a population of fewer than 70 individuals. Gradually, however, we entirely forfeited the southern habitat, and we likewise forfeited our western habitat, namely Kavir National Park. Throughout the entire period during which research and monitoring were conducted, these habitats disappeared, and the remaining habitats have now become confined to the Touran region and Miandasht. Regrettably, during this interval, we even experienced one occasion upon which Miandasht lost its entire cheetah population. Nevertheless, owing to Helia and her cubs, after six years during which the cheetah had become extinct

Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) specialist team prepare an African cheetah for the translocation to India at the CCF centre in Otjiwarongo, Namibia, on September 12, 2022. CHEETAH CONSERVATION FUND

there, cheetahs once again inhabit the area. Overall, however, the trajectory remains unpromising. Precisely for that reason, I maintain that merely recruiting, for example, eight auxiliary personnel exerts no influence whatsoever upon the destiny of the cheetah.

**For the purpose of ensuring the continuation of the cheetah lineage in Iran, another proposal had also been advanced, namely, importing several cheetahs from Africa. Does that proposal remain under consideration?**

No action whatsoever has been undertaken in that regard. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is an excellent proposal because, if we intend to prevent the extinction of our cheetah, we must undertake every conceivable measure. At present, no simple solution exists for preserving the cheetah



lineage, and we must possess the fortitude to adopt difficult decisions. One such difficult solution consists of maintaining a genetically mixed cheetah population; such a population is preferable to possessing no cheetahs whatsoever. Certainly, all of us would prefer to preserve a genetically pure Asiatic cheetah because it survives exclusively in Iran. Occasionally, however, no alternative remains. Before reaching that juncture, we have, for several years, consistently maintained that comprehensive genetic studies must be conducted upon our cheetahs. Such investigations require considerable financial resources, resources that only the Department of Environment can provide, and only that organization possesses the legal authority to authorize their execution.

**For what purpose should genetic studies be conducted?**

Whenever one intends to undertake an activity concerning, for example, cheetah conservation, one must first establish its scientific foundation. In other words, I must ascertain the genetic status of our cheetahs. If, for example, I import two male cheetahs and two female cheetahs from Africa, will I possess sufficient genetic diversity to preserve the health of my population throughout the next 10 years, or will I not? Alternatively, is the situation considerably more catastrophic than that, thereby necessitating the importation of a substantially larger population, or even annual importations?

The answer to every one of those questions resides within the genetic study. In other words, whenever one intends to resolve a problem, one must first ascertain its magnitude, and only thereafter undertake its resolution. Consequently, for the cheetah, a genetic study is more indispensable than daily sustenance. We have articulated this necessity for several years, yet it has received no attention because genetic investigations require genetic samples, and, from a legal standpoint, only the Department of Environment may conduct such procedures.

I believe that the Department of Environment must awaken to reality without delay and, rather than

An Asiatic cheetah lies dead next to the road after being hit by a car in Iran. VORTEX



At present, no simple solution exists for preserving the cheetah lineage, and we must possess the fortitude to adopt difficult decisions. One such difficult solution consists of maintaining a genetically mixed cheetah population; such a population is preferable to possessing no cheetahs whatsoever. Certainly, all of us would prefer to preserve a genetically pure Asiatic cheetah because it survives exclusively in Iran. Occasionally, however, no alternative remains.

A home kit of the Iranian men's national football team for the 2026 World Cup is revealed in an event in Tehran, Iran. Local manufacturer Majid has once again brought back the Asiatic cheetah print. X



merely attempting to suppress criticism through the publication of favorable news, generate authentic achievements and permit independent, nongovernmental individuals and supporting institutions to contribute their expertise and assistance. Otherwise, if it merely endeavors to soothe public opinion through favorable publicity, the ultimate consequence will be an immensely tragic announcement: the extinction of the Asiatic cheetah. At that moment, the Department will confront that very public opinion in complete isolation.

**For several years, the image of the Asiatic cheetah has appeared upon the uniforms of Iran's national athletes during multiple FIFA World Cups and international competitions in support of the species. In your opinion, has this initiative been beneficial for the cheetah?**

It has been extraordinarily efficacious, both within Iran and internationally. In my opinion, it has constituted an immensely significant contribution to the cheetah. The presence of the cheetah upon the national team's jersey has enhanced public awareness and familiarity with the species and has increased public affection for it. Nevertheless, we may assert that this influence has contributed to conservation only if it results in the attraction of financial support, an increase in the number of sponsors supporting the cheetah, greater governmental dedication of time and financial resources, and heightened public and institutional attention. Unfortunately, although this initiative has profoundly influenced both the Iranian public and the international community, it has not exerted a comparable influence upon the government, the policymaking apparatus, or the acquisition of financial support and international assistance for the Asiatic cheetah conservation project.

To secure such financial assistance, one must also resolve the issue of sanctions, and that objective requires lobbying and sustained effort. It is not impossible, but it is arduous, and the government must undertake that responsibility. Meanwhile, the project for restoring the cheetah population in Iran and augmenting its numbers represents an exceptional opportunity to generate foreign-currency revenue for the country, create employment within local communities, and thereby mitigate rural-to-urban migration. Consequently, the continuation of the initiative featuring the cheetah upon the uniforms of the national athletes is commendable because awareness-raising is invariably beneficial from our perspective. Likewise, preserving our national symbols and giving them the respect that they deserve is invariably a very fine undertaking.