

Saving the Last Population of Asiatic Cheetah in Iran



BACKGROUND

The Asiatic cheetah, often called the Iranian cheetah, is a subspecies of the cheetah, native to Iran. Historically, the Asiatic cheetah was widely distributed throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, but due to habitat loss, hunting, and other human activities, its population has sharply declined over the past century. Today, the Asiatic cheetah is critically endangered, with fewer than 50 individuals remaining in the wild. Conservation efforts are underway to protect and restore the species, including captive breeding programs and habitat restoration initiatives. Despite these efforts, the future of the Asiatic cheetah remains uncertain, and continued conservation efforts will be necessary to ensure their survival.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

With **only about 40 individuals left** in Iran, the Asiatic cheetah is in danger of going extinct. Once common throughout this country, this species' range has significantly decreased by habitat degradation and poaching. The Asiatic cheetah also suffers from diseases and environmental factors because of their limited population size. Since this subspecies is genetically distinct from the African subspecies, the threat of extinction is greater, and the loss of this population cannot be reversed. Therefore, immediate conservation actions are required to preserve the remaining individuals before its too late.



**SLOW
DOWN**

THE ROAD OF DEATH

Sadly, one of the major threats to the Asiatic cheetah in Iran is death on the roads. As their habitat becomes more fragmented and human populations grow, the cheetahs are forced to cross busy roads in search of food. This brings the risk of death due to being hit by vehicles. In recent years, there have been several reports of cheetahs being killed on the roads, highlighting the urgent need for measures to reduce the impact of roads on this critically endangered species.

SHEEP HERDS

The presence of sheep herds poses a significant threat to the survival of the Asiatic cheetah in Iran. As their grazing affects the vegetation on cheetahs range, causing the scarcity of prey. Also, the danger of herding dogs wandering around is one of the primary reasons forcing cheetahs to move and cross the road.

LOW GENETIC DIVERSITY

Due to their small population size and isolation, inbreeding has become a common occurrence among Asiatic cheetahs. As a result, they may become less genetically diverse, which increases their vulnerability to diseases and reduces their capacity to adjust to changing variables in their environment.

Why Should We Care?

- The Asiatic cheetah plays a crucial role in **maintaining a healthy, balanced ecosystem**. By controlling the numbers of their prey, which include hares and gazelles. This **prevents the over-consumption of vegetation** and ensures the survival of other species in the region. In addition, the presence of cheetahs indicates a healthy habitat with sufficient prey and suitable conditions for their survival. Protecting the Asiatic cheetah and their habitat not only ensures their survival but also **contributes to the conservation of the entire ecosystem**.
- The Asiatic cheetah **holds great cultural significance** in the region where it is found. The Iranian, consider cheetah to be **a symbol of strength, speed, and elegance**, to the point that they once appeared on the original kits of Iran's national soccer team . They had also been **featured in Persian art, literature, and folklore** for centuries. and their hunting skills have been praised in poetry and stories. The Asiatic cheetah is not only **a part of the natural heritage** of the region but also an important cultural icon that represents the country's rich history and traditions

What Can DTA Do?

DTA can work with local groups to develop strategies for reducing human-wildlife conflict, such as using non-lethal methods to stop cheetahs from preying on livestock.

In addition to working locally, DTA can also advocate for international protection programs for the Asiatic cheetah. This could involve working with other conservation organizations to develop global strategies for protecting Asiatic cheetahs.

But most importantly, DTA can help fill the gap of public involvement in conservation efforts to protect Asiatic cheetah by initiating a campaign to raise public awareness about the population of cheetahs in Iran and the dangers they are facing today.

In collaboration with local groups, DTA can bring this pressing issue to public's attention and ask for action from people who are willing to help save a national icon.

Proposed Action Items

- Provide educational material for general public
- Help with developing conservation strategies and outreach programs
- Help with the scientific research
- Initiate a social media public awareness campaign
- Train local groups to engage in conservation efforts
- Support and collaborate with local organizations
- Work with media outlets to raise awareness about the Asiatic cheetah
- Advocate for international cooperation to save Asiatic cheetahs in Iran

