

20– 07 – 2024

News: Project Cheetah

- Recently, a **Kenyan delegation visited India to discuss collaboration on wildlife conservation efforts, with a particular emphasis on the ongoing Cheetah Reintroduction Project (Project Cheetah).**
- The delegation presented a draft MoU to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) proposing collaboration.

Asiatic Cheetah

- Asiatic Cheetah is also known as **Iranian or Persian Cheetah.**
- Presently, it is found **only in Iran that too around 40-50 individuals.**
- Its habitat once ranged from **Arabian Peninsula to India, but extirpated** from these area.
- IUCN Status: **Critically Endangered.**
- CITES Status: **Appendix I**
- It is a **smaller Cheetah** compared to that of African Cheetah having a cat-like appearance.

African Cheetah

- IUCN Status: **Vulnerable**
- CITES Status: **Appendix I**
- There are about 6500-7000 individuals present.
- Recently, Supreme Court lifted its 7-year stay on proposal to re-introduce African Cheetah from Namibia to Palpur Kuno Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.
- Once abundant, cheetahs were extinct in India since 1952, due to poaching, habitat destruction & reduction in prey (due to their poaching).
- India, first approached Iran to relocate Asian Cheetahs, but the proposal was declined by Iran as the number of Asiatic Cheetah is too low.

Project Cheetah

- The Phase-1 of the project started in 2022, to restore the population of cheetahs, which were declared extinct in the country in 1952.
- It involves the translocation of cheetahs from South Africa and Namibia to Kuno National Park.
- The project is implemented by the NTCA in collaboration with the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, and Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

- Under Phase-2 of the Project India is considering sourcing cheetahs from Kenya due to similar habitats.
- Cheetahs will be translocated to Kuno National Park and Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary (Madhya Pradesh).

Palpur Kuno Sanctuary

- Palpur Kuno Sanctuary is located in Madhya Pradesh.
- It received the status of National Park in 2018.
- The major flora of the park is dry deciduous forest.
- Main predators in the protected area are Indian Leopard, Jungle cat, Sloth bear, Dhole, Indian Wolf, Golden Jackal, Striped Hyena & Bengal fox.
- Project Lion is announced to protect the Asiatic Lions. Earlier, Palpur Kuno Sanctuary (in Madhya Pradesh) was selected as the first Project Lion Site.
- November 2020 saw the extension of Project Lion Sites to 7. Apart from Palpur Kuno, other sites are Madhav National Park and Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh, Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve and Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan and Jessore-Balaram Ambaji WLS and adjoining landscape in Gujarat.

National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

- National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is constituted under **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (amended in 2006)**.
- It was **established in 2005** December following the recommendations of Tiger Task Force.
- It was an **executive body** and later given statutory status after the amendment of Wildlife Protection Act in 2006.
- NTCA along with **Wildlife Institute of India**, in collaboration with state forest departments **conduct the Tiger Census once in 4 years**.
- It also **conducts the leopard census once in 4 years**.

Composition

- NTCA is headed by **Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**.
- He is **assisted by the Vice – chairperson who is the Minister of State for Environment and Forests**.
- Official members **include representatives from various ministries such as Environment and Forests, Tribal Affairs, Social Justice and Empowerment, as well as from commissions related to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes**.

- Additionally, members from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Wildlife Preservation department are part of the Authority, along with six chief wildlife wardens from Tiger Reserve States on a rotational basis.
- Three Members of Parliament are nominated by the Parliament, and an officer from the Ministry of Law and Justice is also nominated.
- The Ministry of Environment and Forests is responsible for selecting eight non-official experts or professionals with specified qualifications and experience, including at least two from the field of tribal development.
- The Inspector General of Forests in charge of Project Tiger serves as the Member Secretary of the Authority.

Powers and functions

- The Authority is tasked with establishing normative standards and guidelines for tiger conservation within Tiger Reserves, as well as National Parks and Sanctuaries.
- Its responsibilities include providing information on protection measures such as conservation plans, tiger estimation, disease surveillance, mortality surveys, patrolling activities, and reports on any untoward incidents.
- Additionally, it oversees various management aspects related to conservation planning.

The functions and powers of the Authority also include,

- Approving Tiger Conservation Plans prepared by States, setting normative standards for tiger conservation, providing information on various aspects such as protection measures, tiger estimation, and patrolling, addressing human-wildlife conflicts and promoting coexistence with local communities, preparing annual reports for presentation to Parliament, establishing Steering Committees by States, overseeing the preparation of tiger protection and conservation plans by States, safeguarding the agricultural and livelihood interests of people residing in and around Tiger Reserves, and assisting States in establishing tiger conservation foundations to support their development efforts.

Recent Tiger Survey Reports

- More than 80% of the world's wild tigers are in India, and it's crucial to keep track of their numbers.
- Recent tiger census released in 2023 shows that, the number of tigers in India has increased from 2967 in 2019 to 3682 in 2023.
- Highest number of tigers is found in Madhya Pradesh with 785 individuals followed by 563 in Karnataka, 560 in Uttarakhand and 444 in Maharashtra.
- Nearly a quarter of the tigers were reportedly outside protected areas.

- India's tigers are largely concentrated in 53 dedicated tiger reserves spread across 75,796 square km, spanning about 2.3% of India's total land area.
- The reserves with the most number of tigers were the Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand, which reported 260 animals, followed by Bandipur (150), and Nagarhole (141), both in Karnataka.
- Central India, the Shivalik Hills, and the Gangetic plains witnessed increases in tiger population, particularly in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra.
- Certain regions, such as the Western Ghats, experienced localised declines, needing targeted monitoring and conservation efforts.
- Some States, including Mizoram, Nagaland, Jharkhand, Goa, Chhattisgarh, and Arunachal Pradesh, have reported "disquieting trends" with smaller tiger populations.