



MEDIA CONTACT: Susan Yannetti, Cheetah Conservation Fund; susan@cheetah.org or +12027167756

Cheetah Conservation Fund and Namibian government to send eight cheetahs to India for introduction on 17 September



Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) Founder and Executive Director, Dr Laurie Marker, and CCF cheetah specialist teams prepare the cheetahs for the translocation at the CCF Centre in Otjiwarongo, Namibia, on 12 September

Photo credit: Courtesy of Cheetah Conservation Fund

OTJIWARONGO, Namibia (13 September 2022) – Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) staff will travel to India later this week to deliver a very special gift from the Namibian government: eight wild cheetahs. This group of iconic, spotted big cats is making history as the first to be translocated from southern Africa to Asia to create a new meta population, in a place where cheetahs once roamed freely, but were extirpated more than 70 years ago. Namibia, the country that has traditionally had the greatest density of wild cheetah, is donating the first eight individuals as part of a larger, multi-year agreement to help conserve the species through India's [Project Cheetah](#).

Three Namibian male and five female adult cheetahs (all between two to five-and-a-half-years-old) will make the 11-hour, transcontinental journey to India's [Kuno National Park](#) on 16 and 17 September. Each has been vaccinated, fitted with a satellite collar, and kept in isolation at the [CCF Centre in Otjiwarongo](#). The cheetahs were selected based on an assessment of health, wild disposition, hunting skills, and ability to contribute genetics that will result in a strong founder population.

The mission to move the cheetahs will begin the afternoon of Friday, 16 September with the transfer of cats from the CCF Centre to the Hosea Kutako International Airport in Windhoek, Namibia's capital. After a brief ceremony to acknowledge Namibia's donation and the significance of the mission, the cheetahs will be loaded onto a private B747 jet. The plane will fly overnight and land in Jaipur, India, by daybreak. The cheetahs will be transferred from Jaipur to Kuno National Park in the state of Madhya Pradesh by helicopter. There, they will be welcomed into their new home by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who will open the gates to the Kuno sanctuary created for the cheetahs on Saturday, 17 September, a date that also marks his 72nd birthday.

-more-

“Conservation of species requires global cooperation. For more than 12 years, I have consulted with the government of India and their scientists on how to bring cheetahs back to the landscape, and now, it is happening! As a conservationist, I am thrilled, and as CCF’s leader, I am exceptionally proud of the work of our CCF reintroduction team. Without research and dedication to cheetah conservation, this project could not take place”, said Dr Laurie Marker, Founder and Executive Director of CCF. “We are also very fortunate to have supportive colleagues within Namibia’s Erindi Private Game Reserve and the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism”.

A popular species around the world, many people are surprised to learn cheetahs are in peril. One of the oldest of the big cat species, with ancestors tracing back about 8.5 million years, cheetahs were once widely dispersed throughout Asia and Africa in great numbers. Today, they occupy less than nine percent of their historic range, with fewer than 7500 individuals remaining in the wild. Cheetahs are threatened by human-wildlife conflict, illegal wildlife trade, poor sperm quality and lack of genetic diversity, but one of their greatest challenges to survival is the loss of habitat together with loss of prey base. The shrinking of their natural habitat is due to a combination of increasing human populations and climate change impact.

“We are delighted to be working closely with the Government of Namibia to bring cheetahs back to India, and we thank them for their support. Conservation is part of India’s civilizational ethos. Launch of the Cheetah reintroduction plan by Prime Minister of India is a firm expression of the commitment India has to protect its natural heritage, along with the people who are part of these eco-systems. We welcome these first individuals as goodwill ambassadors for conservation and our partnership. This initiative is all the more special as it is being implemented at a time when India is celebrating its 75th Independence anniversary”, said Prashant Agrawal, High Commissioner of India to Namibia.

“The goal of our project is to reverse the tide for cheetahs, to slow, then stop their decline, while at the same time increasing the biodiversity and health of Indian ecosystems. Bringing back a top predator restores historic evolutionary balance, resulting in cascading effects, leading to better management and restoration of wildlife habitat, for the benefit of all species, and will uplift the livelihoods of poor forest dwelling communities”, said Dr Jhala Yadavdradev, Dean of the Wildlife Institute of India and Principal Scientist for Project Cheetah.

The Honourable Peter Katjavivi, Speaker for the National Assembly of Namibia and CCF’s International Patron, adds, “The Cheetah Project with India is something that every Namibian can take pride in. We are helping create a conservation model that can be used by other African nations and former range states around the world to save a species. As a nation, we are helping conserve the feline icon of speed and grace, for the benefit of our planet, earning our title, *Cheetah Capital of the World*”.



Left: Namibian cheetah at Erindi Private Game Reserve in February 2022. Individual cats are fitted with satellite collars so scientists and specialists can monitor their movements and provide support.

Right: CCF Veterinarian Dr Ana Basto (left), CCF cheetah specialist Lea Petersen (centre) and a member of Erindi Private Game Reserve’s staff (right) prepare to transfer a Namibian cheetah from Erindi to the CCF Centre in August 2022.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Cheetah Conservation Fund

Editor's Notes:

- The concept for Project Cheetah began taking shape more than 12 years ago, with scientists in India meeting in 2009 for the first time. A few months later, along with other members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Cat Specialist Group, Veterinary Specialist Group and Reintroduction Specialist Group, CCF Drs Laurie Marker, Bruce Brewer and Stephen J. O'Brien, then CCF Chairman, travelled to India to attend a series of meetings. In 2011, Dr Marker returned to conduct site visits with members of India's regional wildlife and forestry departments to determine habitat suitability, prey base and the presence of natural predators. She delivered recommendations based on her findings to India's wildlife authorities.
- Assessments for 10 sites in India were conducted between 2010 and 2012. From the potential sites evaluated, Kuno National Park in the state of Madhya Pradesh was deemed ready for receiving cheetah with the least amount of intervention.
- Cheetahs require vast home range territory, as they live in low densities. While the current carrying capacity for Kuno National Park is a maximum of 21 cheetahs, it can be further enhanced by including the remaining part of the Kuno Wildlife Division (1,280 sq. km) through prey restoration. Once restored, the larger landscape can hold approximately 36 cheetahs.
- As per the [order of the Supreme Court of India](#) in January 2020, cheetah reintroduction in India is to be implemented by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEF&CC), under the guidance, direction and supervision of the Committee of Experts chaired by Dr MK Ranjitsinh. A well-known figure in India conservation, Dr Ranjitsinh proposed and subsequently drafted the Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, has been twice the Director of Wildlife Protection of India; the Forest Secretary of the State of Madhya Pradesh, in which capacity he established the Kuno Sanctuary where the first reintroduction of cheetah is to occur, and has had a long and distinguished career in India's government and in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). He was the original proposer of the reintroduction of cheetah in India in 1972 and has been the main motivator of the proposal ever since. Dr MK Ranjitsinh was appointed by the MoEF as Chairman of the Task Force for the Reintroduction of the Cheetah in 2009.
- In January 2022, the government of India published [Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India](#), a 310-page document that details the project and serves as a guideline for administrators.
- In February 2022, Dr Jhala Yadvendradev, Dean of the Wildlife Institute of India and Principal Scientist for the Project Cheetah, and High Commissioner of India to Namibia Prashant Agrawal visited the CCF Centre in Namibia along with Dr Amit Mallick, Inspector General, National Tiger Conservation Authority; Rakesh Jagenia, Deputy Inspector General-Wildlife & Supreme Court-appointed member on the Cheetah Introduction Committee from the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC); Ashok Barnwal, Secretary Forest and Environment, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh; and Alok Kumar, Chief Wildlife Warden and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, to begin the process of identifying the cheetahs for the reintroduction.
- In May 2022, project field officers from India travelled to the CCF Centre in Namibia for training. In June 2022, Dr Laurie Marker conducted a site inspection of Kuno National Park and met with Indian government officials to talk about logistics for translocation.

- On 20 July 2022, the High Commission of India steered intergovernmental negotiations that led India and Namibia to sign [a historic Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#) on Wildlife Conservation and Sustainable Biodiversity Utilization in New Dehli at the ministerial level. Under the MoU, India will share her expertise in patrolling, population estimation, surveillance and monitoring, and will support Namibian candidates in training at Wildlife Institute of India.
- In August 2022, CCF Cheetah Specialists Eli Walker and Barthelemy Balli travelled to India to inspect the Kuno site and help prepare Kuno park staff for the cats' arrival. CCF team members delivering the cats to India include Dr Laurie Marker, CCF veterinarian Dr Ana Basto, and Cheetah Specialists Eli Walker and Barthelemy Balli. The two men will remain at Kuno indefinitely to assist management and staff with the cheetahs through a period of acclimation.
- CCF has rehabilitated and released more than 650 cheetahs over the past 20 years in Namibia. This project marks the first time in CCF history that any of these animals have been translocated to another continent.
- Only 23 countries today have wild cheetah populations, and they exist in only 31 to 36 known populations. Four populations have more than 1,000 individuals. Twenty-two populations have less than 100 individuals. Of these, 18 have 20-100 individuals, and the other four are under 20 individuals.
- The B747-412 aircraft that is taking the cheetahs to India is owned by Aquiline Int'l Corp. Ltd. from the United Arab Emirates and sourced by [Action Aviation](#), a large aircraft brokerage company. The logistics of the flight were personally managed by Captain Hamish Harding, Chairman of Action Aviation, a friend of Dr Laurie Marker and a fellow member of The Explorers Club. The flight has been designated as a "Flagged Expedition" and will carry Explorers Club Flag number 118 on board.



Left: *Eight special crates that will help transport the cheetahs to India arrive at the CCF Centre in Otjiwarongo*

Photo credit: Courtesy of Cheetah Conservation Fund

Right: *The UAE B747-412 passenger jumbo jet that will carry the eight cheetahs to India on 16-17 September*

Photo credit: Courtesy of Action Aviation

About CCF

Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) is the global leader in research and conservation of cheetahs and dedicated to saving the cheetah in the wild. CCF has created a set of integrated programmes based on its research to address threats to the cheetah and its ecosystem. Founded in 1990, CCF is an international non-profit organisation headquartered in Namibia with a field base in Somaliland. For more information, please visit www.cheetah.org
Interviews, additional photos, video and fact sheets are available upon request.

Please contact Susan Yannetti @+12027167756 or susan@cheetah.org for assistance.

Donations to support CCF's conservation projects can be made online at <https://cheetah.org/donate/>

#