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همایش ملی یوزپلنگ ایرانی

سرگروه یوزپلنگ آسیایی در دست ایرانیان

National Conference of Iranian Cheetah

5 October, 2013 (9-11 AM)

۱۳ مهر ۱۳۹۲ - ساعت ۹ - ۱۱ صبح

بزرگراه حکیم غرب، پارک پردیسان، سالن همایش‌های سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست

The Conference Hall of Department of Environment, Pardisan Park, Hakim Highway

«شیرکت برای عموم آزاد و رایگان است»





Introduction

Iran is home to the last known population of Asiatic cheetah which once roamed across vast ranges of west and south Asian countries. However, despite enforced protection efforts in recent years, no reliable information was available about the subspecies population in the country which made assessment of conservation measures impossible. Presently, the cheetahs are known from more than 15 reserves in Iran, all officially protected by the Department of Environment.

Accordingly, a comprehensive monitoring program was initiated by the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) in partnership with Iran's Department of Environment, Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project and Panthera to understand demographic characteristics of the cheetahs in Iran between 2011 and 2013. Formerly, it was thought that 70 to 100 cheetahs exist in Iran.

Camera traps are reliable tools which are applicable for investigating population of elusive marked cats, such as the cheetahs. However, this technology has been rarely applied to the species due to its elusive nature and low density. In Iran, due to political sanctions, necessary equipment are not easily accessible which prevented a thorough status assessment before due to lack of proper number of camera traps. Thanks to various donors and partners, the monitoring program was initiated recently to fill the gap in knowledge which is essential for improving protection. Accordingly, almost 10 reserves within Iran were covered by means of infra-red camera traps to yield a reliable estimation of the cheetah population.

However, since no basic figure is available about the cheetah population for previous years, it is open for further discussion to judge about population trends of the Asiatic cheetahs in Iran. Meanwhile, there are a number of population-based indicators that are helpful to have a reliable conclusion.

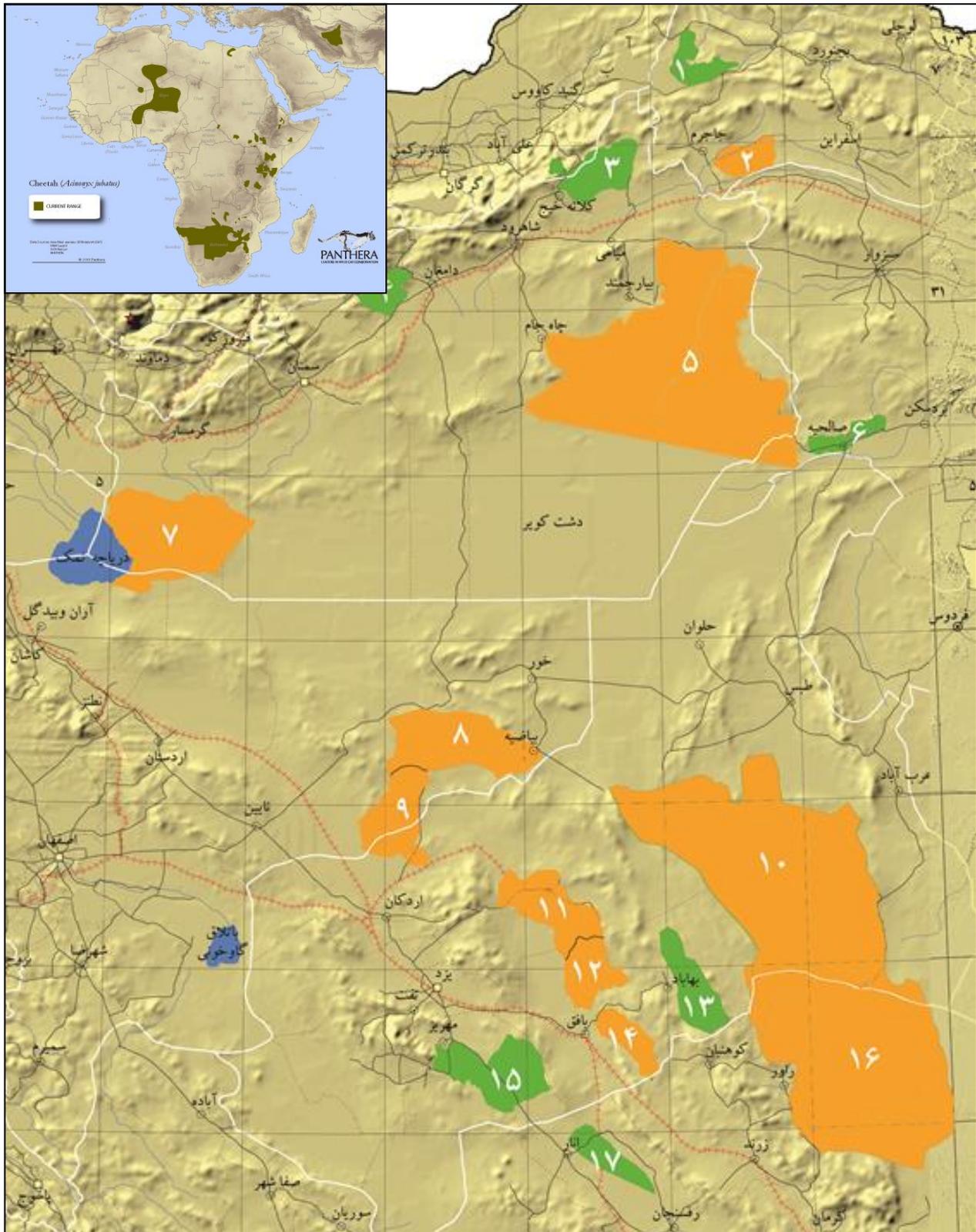


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Presently, the cheetahs are confirmed from 17 reserves across the country, all within eastern half of Iran. Recently, orange colored areas have been surveyed using camera traps through collaboration between ICS, DoE, CACP and Panthera while Touran Biosphere Reserve was investigated by Persian Wildlife Foundation/DoE/CACP and Panthera.



Nowadays, around 100 game guards are protecting the cheetah range in Iran (Table 1), thanks to tremendous efforts of the Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project (CACP), DoE and Iran UNDP which tried to double number of working game guards during past decade. They are all hired by the DoE, have insurance and are equipped with 4WD vehicle and motorbike. In the meantime, each game guard is responsible to protect around 640 km² of the landscape, indicating that more forces are needed. Furthermore, almost 35% of the game guards are suffering from lack of job security which is quite influential for their motivation and efficiency. Recently, with continuous attempts of the CACP and DoE, some of the game guards were granted a higher level of job security and financial incentives, but still a great proportion is left to deal.

Table 1: Status of anti-poaching game guards within the cheetah range in Iran

Province	Cheetah Range Area (km ²)	Number of Cheetah Guardians	Cheetah Range per each Cheetah Guardian (km ²)
Yazd	9,740	24	405
Semnan	21,005	44	477
Esfahan	4,000	6	666
Kerman	13,577	5	2,715
North Khorasan	844	7	120
South Khorasan	15,170	11	1,379
Razavi Khorasan	667	4	1,668
Total	65,000	101	643

On the other hand, various cheetah reserves are now threatened by a variety of development plans, including Bafq Protected Area in central country (below images). ICS continuous monitoring efforts since 2011 in Bafq has revealed that in contrast to 5 different leopards and one cheetah individual photo-trapped in camera trap stations before construction of the road, recent months data indicate that only a single leopard (right image) has been present in the same area. Public and media campaigns to stop the road have not been successful so far.





Steps towards Conservation

Based on continuous field surveys, the ICS concluded that there is no comprehensive perspective among the country's managers and experts about the fragile demographic status of the Asiatic cheetahs, i.e. critically small population, increased human-caused mortality and decreased reproduction. Therefore, relevant authorities do not confront properly development plans within main cheetah reserves so there are widespread habitat destruction efforts in different reserves, such as roads, mines and railways. A decreased commitment and increased disappointment were seen in conservation efforts across the country to secure the cheetah range.

On the other hand, the game guards who are the key players in anti-poaching are experiencing bad days due to financial constraints. Also, they witness that the habitats they are protecting are deteriorated by development plans, mostly approved by high-ranked authorities, resulting in non-motivated game guards which decreased their functionality. This is supported by the ICS recent findings that human-caused mortality of the cheetahs in Iran has been doubled in 2010s comparing with 2000s, indicating less efficiency of anti-poaching programs.

In the meantime, while livestock depredation has been already known for the cheetahs, recent cases in different parts of the country increased concern that the cheetahs could be killed by herders. While an organized compensation program has been established by the Iran DoE for carnivore depredation, financial constraints due to bank embargo and international sanctions left no fund to allocate for this purpose. Accordingly, a number of depredation cases on livestock by the cheetahs that were not compensated made communities frustrated about the DoE's compensation program.

During 2010s, at least five cheetahs have been poached in Iran, twice more than 2000s
(© Semnan DoE)



Accordingly, in order to promote cheetah conservation in Iran, it was decided to organize a national conference in order to:

1. Share scientific findings of three years of continuous field work with relevant stakeholders and to motivate conservation agencies to enhance their support;
2. Attract the country's public attention toward cheetah conservation;
3. Restore country's commitment to safeguard the critically endangered Asiatic cheetah in the new government;
4. Motivate key actors for cheetah conservation, i.e. game guards through acknowledging their effective efforts to safe guards the cheetahs from most of the cheetah range;
5. Acknowledge and compensate suffered herders who lost animals due to the cheetahs.



The conference on Iranian cheetah was held at Iran's Department of Environment's International Conferences Hall in Tehran on Saturday 5 October 2013. Attended by the country's vice president and head of DoE Dr Masoumeh Ebtekar as well as many national and regional authorities and experts, the conference was organized by the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) in partnership with Iran DoE and Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project.

Morteza Eslami, ICS CEO presented a short speech on last demographic status of the cheetahs across the country, based on three years of national cheetah monitoring efforts conducted by the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) and Iran DoE with cooperation of Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project and Panthera. Accordingly, the country's cheetah population was concluded to be 40 to 70 individuals, fewer than what already was declared. In the meantime, he alarmed conservation agencies about increasing rate of human-caused mortalities of the cheetahs in Iran, doubled during 2010s comparing to 2000s. He also added that "around one third of cheetah range game guards do not have proper job security which needs essential attention from the DoE". "Bafq road, overgrazing in Touran and iron mines in Abbas Abad and Naybandan are the main threats to the cheetahs within these ranges which together with their fragile status, indicate necessity for more conservation investment.



Afterward, Dr Ahmad Keykha, Iran DoE's Deputy had a talk that the DoE should involve people more actively because present constraints do not let a substantial sustainable conservation outcome to achieve. "Iran DoE is always thankful to game guards who are frontiers in saving the cheetahs and I am happy that today we have a great ceremony to acknowledge them". Keykha added: "NGOs and media are essential for nature protection and they are invited for more cooperation."

Then, Hومان Jowkar, National Manager for Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project (CACP) presented recent progress in developing a new phase for cheetah conservation efforts led by the country's government which is to be done with close partnership of communities around some pilot sites. He mentioned that trophy hunting, sustainable livestock husbandry and ecotourism will be approaches that in new phase of the CACP will be assessed. He mentioned that presently there is reliable wealth of knowledge about the cheetahs in Iran which can be helpful for conservation.





Finally, Dr Masoumeh Ebtekar, the new DoE head gave the final lecture. After thanking the ICS for organizing the ceremony, she added “the Iranian Cheetah Society is an outstanding model for conservation NGOs in Iran which despite various obstacles and limitations has remained an active player in the field of cheetah conservation with a truthfully passion and scientific perspective”. She also mentioned that “NGOs are key partners for nature protection across the world and I am sure that a better future would be provided for them in coming years to be more influential.”

Dr Ebtekar said “it is essential to revise cheetah conservation efforts in the country in order to apply lessons learned for future achievements and all NGOs are invited to share their expertise and experience not for the cheetahs, but to revise the country’s National Environment Document to be finalized for the Iranian president.” Journalists were also excited due to Ebtekar’s present that “no journalist and media actor would be sentenced due to criticism to the DoE and all are welcomed to share their concern”.

Finally, she invited all regional, national and international organizations to join forces to safeguard the Asiatic cheetahs in Iran through a combination of different approaches.



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In the meantime, before Dr Ebtekar speech, the ICS Theater Team opened its latest product, “Cheetah Video Music” composed of song, drama and animation produced to educate public, from kids to elders which was welcomed by the audience. Iran DoE’s head, Dr Masoumeh Ebtekar strongly recommended to the DoE Public Relations Bureau to lobby with the Iran National TV in order to broadcast the cheetah video music through national TV channels. [The Cheetah Video Music is available online to watch and share.](#)



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Furthermore, the ICS Theater Team implemented its other product, namely as “I am still alive” which tried to feature three main threats to the cheetahs in Iran, such as poaching, overgrazing and roads using song and drama for the audience. The theater has evolved through three years of implementation in more than 15 communities around the cheetahs reserves across the entire animal’s range in the country and has been known as an innovative educational approach for rural areas.





During the conference, the following groups/corporations were acknowledged due to supporting the cheetah conservation in 2013:

- Supporting media: Salamat Radio Channel due to featuring the cheetahs regularly;
- Supporting journalist: Asadollah Aflaki from Hamshahri newspaper due to featuring the cheetah events, particularly Bafq road;
- Alireza Kavianirad was also acknowledged due to his recent production namely as "Iranian Cheetah Animation" for the national TV;
- Hasan Taftian, the country national champion in running was introduced as the "Cheetah Ambassador";
- Also Iran Khodro Corporation, the largest car manufacturer in the Middle East and its relevant companies were acknowledged for their generous support to organize the event;
- Last but not least, Saman Golriz who afforded all game guards prizes was highly applauded by the audience when receiving his statue. He is a famous TV showman chef that is deeply involved in the ICS fundraising efforts.



Iran Khodro advertisement for its cheetah conservation efforts: Industrial Thunder supports Nature Thunder (Thunder is a commercial brand for one of produced cars by Iran Khodro)

تندر صنعت، حامر تندر طبیعت



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Outstanding Game Guards, i.e. `Cheetah Guardians`

In collaboration with DoE and CACP, the ICS selected 18 top game guards from 12 reserves, judged based on their efficiency in anti-poaching and involvement in camera trapping-based population surveys to be acknowledged in the ceremony as below:

1. Vahid Amirian, Abbas Abad Wildlife Refuge
2. Mohammadreza Halvani, Abbas Abad Wildlife Refuge
3. Saeed Shafyan, Dorouneh Protected Area
4. Ahmad Safarzadeh, Miandasht Wildlife Refuge
5. Hasan Pourrezvan, Miandasht Wildlife Refuge
6. Amir Mehrparvar, Kavir National Park
7. Reza Dahrehsobh, Kavir National Park
8. Bijan Zolfagharian, Touran National Park
9. Mohammadreza Sabbaghgilan, Khoshyeilagh Wildlife Refuge
10. Yousef Esmaili, Darband Wildlife Refuge
11. Javad Arkian, Darband Wildlife Refuge
12. Asghar Khajeh, Bafq Protected Area
13. Mohsen Rashidi, Siahkouh National Park
14. Javad Shokouhi, Siahkouh National Park
15. Mohamadreza Abedi, Dare Anjir Wildlife Refuge
16. Reza Khanizadeh, Dare Anjir Wildlife Refuge
17. Mahdi Khabgah, Kalmant Protected Area
18. Shirdel Sharafi, Naybandan Wildlife Refuge



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Herders who lost their animals to the cheetahs were also presented a financial prize as below:

- Bahram Nezhadravari, Darband Wildlife Refuge
- Mojtaba Ilkhani, Dorouneh Protected Area



The latter herder in Dorouneh Protected Area witnessed a cheetah on his livestock, but he did not let other people to disturb the animal and informed the game guards. Upon visiting the site, the cheetah was photographed by the game guards, confirming the cheetah presence in the area after three decades of the last official records (Photos © Saeed Shafyan).

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Final group photo of game guards, herders with DoE managers and Dr Ebtekar



Outcomes:

1. Almost 20% of the cheetah range game guards were acknowledged and motivated by the DoE head. Besides presenting financial prizes (equal to 30% to 50% of their monthly salary), they received an acknowledgement letter signed by Dr Ebtekar which will be registered in their files to increase the base of their monthly salary;
2. Livestock depredation by the cheetahs which have been always neglected was highlighted among the DoE high ranked managers. In the meantime, supporting herders can share the message among their communities that how much the cheetahs are important;
3. The new Iranian government announced its commitment to safeguard the cheetahs in Iran and proper media coverage was provided. Also, the DoE strongly committed to halt/stop development plans within the cheetah habitats;
4. Three years of field work on demographic status of the Asiatic cheetahs in Iran was shared with media, managers, game guards and experts, so it is expected that there is a basic understanding about the fragile state of the cheetahs in Iran based on new analyzed new;
5. Bafq Road, a destructive path through heart of Bafq Protected Area, a promising cheetah and leopard habitat in central Iran was highlighted again during the ceremony. Being asked by journalists at the end of the conference, Dr Ebtekar replied "I will do my best to stop the road".



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At the end of the ceremony, large group of the ICS volunteers who did their best during past two months to organize the event were joined by game guards and DoE managers in a group photo to acknowledge their passion for supporting cheetah conservation efforts in Iran



ICS Future Perspectiveness

As a milestone for Iran's cheetah conservation, the conference can be a triggering event for stakeholders to revise their efforts and plans and to join together to spread the word.

In the meantime, camera traps are difficult to be applied for the cheetahs which range vast areas and occur in extremely low density. Accordingly, as the next step, the ICS plans to introduce molecular scatology as an effective method for population investigation of the cheetahs in the country. Sampling has been initiated within a number of pilot sites.

On the other hand, together with 18 game guards who received financial incentives during the cheetah ceremony, the ICS had provided substantial prizes for another 20 game guards working in four different reserves in central country in August 2013 and it is planned to cover at least 75% of the country's Cheetah Guardians through our incentive-based programs by the end of 2013. Afterwards, equipment provision will be started in order to keep them motivated and passionate to save the cheetahs.

Communities are essential to receive cheetah knowledge and the ICS has developed and implemented a variety of educational plans within different reserves for people. The ICS will extend its efficacy within main cheetah hotspots, particularly those who are located along probable corridors between multiple reserves to make sure creation of a safe path. Formerly, many cheetah reserves' communities had received relevant education by different conservation groups, mostly with support of UNDP/GEF/Small Grants Program. As a result, a drastic decline was seen in human-induced mortality of the cheetahs during 2000s. However, recent increase of cheetah mortalities teaches that conservation education should never be stopped!

The present apparent decreasing population trend of the Asiatic cheetah has placed the subspecies among the most critically endangered cats of the world. Therefore, a comprehensive program is needed to protect the Asiatic cheetahs in the country.

Since establishment in 2001, the ICS has produced and distributed more than 50 kinds of educational materials for different social target groups, including the latest one, i.e. the Cheetah Infographics (right image).

یوزپلنگ آسیایی
Asiatic Cheetah
Asiacyonx jubatus venaticus

تاریخچه
 ۵ کیلوستر همبند است با ببر و گربه سیاه.
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 خط سیاه رنگ کشیده شده از گوشه چشم تا کنار دهان، نور نور سفید را جذب و باعث دیده بهتر می شود.

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To be Continued ...



The only cheetah family confirmed in 2012 in Iran

Miandasht Wildlife Refuge, northeastern Iran

(© ICS/DoE/CACP/Panthera)

The Iranian Cheetah Society is a pioneering wildlife conservation non-governmental organization in Iran, devoted to safeguard carnivores and their habitats since 2001. To learn more about the ICS and its ongoing efforts, visit : WWW.WILDLIFE.IR.