

12 CHEETAHS FROM SOUTH AFRICA TO ARRIVE IN INDIA BY FEBRUARY-END

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January 27, 2023 09:13 pm | Updated 10:38 pm IST - New Delhi

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India and South Africa have finally signed a long-pending agreement to translocate 12 cheetahs to India, the Environment Ministry said in a statement on Friday.

The cheetahs will be transported to India by February-end and reintroduced at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, where eight such cats were brought from Namibia in September last year under a similar agreement.

The initial batch of cheetahs from South Africa will be followed by transport of batches of 12 annually for the next “eight to 10 years”, the Ministry added.

“A batch of animals has been under quarantine and ready to travel. A team from India will go to South Africa, choose the animals to be brought and accompany them. In India, our enclosures to host the animals are ready,” S.P. Yadav, Director, National Tiger Conservation Authority and a key government official involved with the cheetah translocation project, told *The Hindu*.

“The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Reintroduction of Cheetah to India facilitates cooperation between the parties to establish a viable and secure cheetah population in India; promotes conservation and ensures that expertise is shared and exchanged, and capacity built, to promote cheetah conservation. This includes human-wildlife conflict resolution, capture and translocation of wildlife and community participation in conservation in the two countries,” the Ministry said.

“In terms of the MoU, the countries will collaborate and exchange best practices in large carnivore conservation through the transfer of technology, training of professionals in management, policy, and science, and to establish a bilateral custodianship arrangement for cheetah translocated between the two countries,” it added.

The cheetahs from South Africa were expected to arrive in India last year but were delayed as a final deal had been held up, *The Hindu* reported in August.

In December, the *Press Trust of India* reported that a dozen cheetahs quarantined in South Africa for more than four months “had lost their fitness” in their wait to be flown to the Kuno

National Park.

Eight cheetahs, including five females, were flown from Windhoek, Namibia to Gwalior, followed by a helicopter ride to the grasslands of Kuno Palpur last September. They were released into dedicated enclosures by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In the following months, five of the cheetahs began hunting on their own and have largely adapted to the local environment. One of the cheetahs, however, has been nursing a kidney ailment but is recovering, Mr. Yadav said.

The Namibian cheetahs were flown in on a commercial aircraft from Windhoek to Gwalior. The South African cheetahs may be flown in on an Air Force plane, a person familiar with the operation, who declined to be identified, said. "The process of having them adapt to India will be similar to what was followed for the Namibian animals," the person added.

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