

EIGHT AFRICAN CHEETAHS TO LAND IN JAIPUR ON FRIDAY

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Big journey:An India-bound African Cheetah undergoing health exam by an international team of experts .File photo

Later this week, eight cheetahs from Namibia will depart from the capital Windhoek in a chartered flight and land in Jaipur on Friday. From here they will be transported in a helicopter and, after a 40-minute journey to the Kuno National Park (KNP) will be released on September 17 into a dedicated, 'quarantine' enclosure under the watch of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, officials from the Union Environment Ministry said on Monday.

September 17 is Mr. Modi's birthday and the release of the cheetahs are timed to mark the celebrations, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Chauhan, said last month.

The cheetahs will initially be in quarantine enclosures for about a month and then moved to 6-square kilometre, 'predator-proof,' holding facilities that will also host live prey. It will be a few months before the cheetahs are released into the wild. All the animals will be radio collared and their movements tracked via GPS. Based on current prey estimates, the Kuno National Park can support up to 20 cheetahs and with restoration, protection and management this number can go up to 40 individuals, officials estimate.

Animals present in Kuno that can be potential prey include chital, sambar, nilgai, wild pig, chowsingha, langur, peafowl, hare and feral cattle. Close to 748 square km of forest landscape is available to the cheetahs in the park. This is part of the plan to help the animals acclimatise to Indian conditions. However, a local obstacle to the cheetah was that the current enclosures in Kuno-Palpur had five leopards all of whom needed to be relocated as it was inadvisable to have the two species coexist during the cheetah's acclimatisation.

Over time, says the action plan by the Centre, cheetah and leopard populations will be able to coexist.

India has also finalised an agreement with South Africa to source the animals but this is yet to be signed.

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