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Cover: A lone free ranging Namibian male cheetah exploring his new surroundings in KNP by Y.V. Jhala

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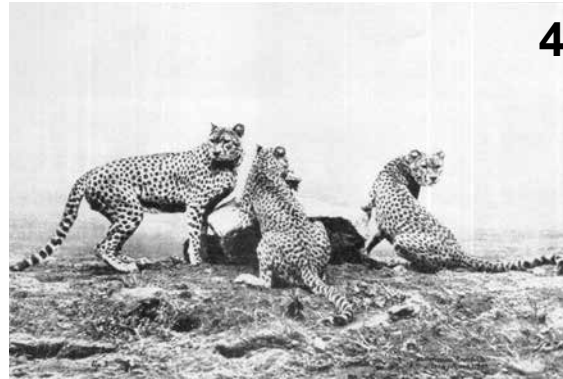
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FEATURES

Chasing the Cheetah through Indian history



Why Cheetahs were reintroduced to India and what lies ahead



Historic references to the cheetah's presence abound in Indian literature. However, for millennia, cheetahs were removed from the wild, and by the time the British arrived, the cheetah was already on the brink of extinction. According to **Divyabhanusinh**, a small first step has been taken in the Cheetah project to restore the only animal that became extinct after India's independence. The journey is long and fraught with pitfalls. It is too early to declare the project a success or failure – only time will tell.

The human-caused sixth mass extinction crisis can only be addressed by humans themselves.

Yadvendra dev V. Jhala explains that restoring lost elements of ecosystems through reintroductions is crucial. Despite sincere efforts, Indian conservationists have struggled to elevate species like the great Indian bustard to flagship status for conservation policy for neglected ecosystems. The cheetah, having attracted attention at the highest levels in India, holds the promise of translating this attention into resource allocation for restoring crucial ecosystems for biodiversity.

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Editorial...

In June BNHS lost two long-time supporters and friends – Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh, a regular contributor to *Hornbill* and an exceptionally talented wildlife scientist and conservation naturalist, and Dr G.V. Reddy a visionary Forest Officer dedicated to wildlife conservation. Our regular writer, Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh, is no longer with us. *Hornbill* pays homage to the departed souls and treasures their contributions.

The monsoon might have caused problems in some cities, but it brought new life to landscapes that received rain in July. Gamini, a female cheetah in Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh, must be delighted for her six cubs that were born in March. The monsoon breeze must be relaxing for them and their mother. Cheetahs usually give birth to four or five cubs, so six is exceptional. The cheetah project in Madhya Pradesh has been in the media for various reasons, and *Hornbill* readers likely have many questions.

I initially remained silent on this project because several lesser-known species, like the great Indian bustard (GIB) and the lesser and bengal florican, are on the verge of extinction and receive little attention. Why should we spend resources on a species that has already gone extinct in India? However, some believe that the cheetah reintroduction will focus the government's attention on India's grassland habitats. If so, it will benefit grasslands and grassland species, including our birds. Hence, we decided to invite cheetah experts to share their viewpoints in *Hornbill*.

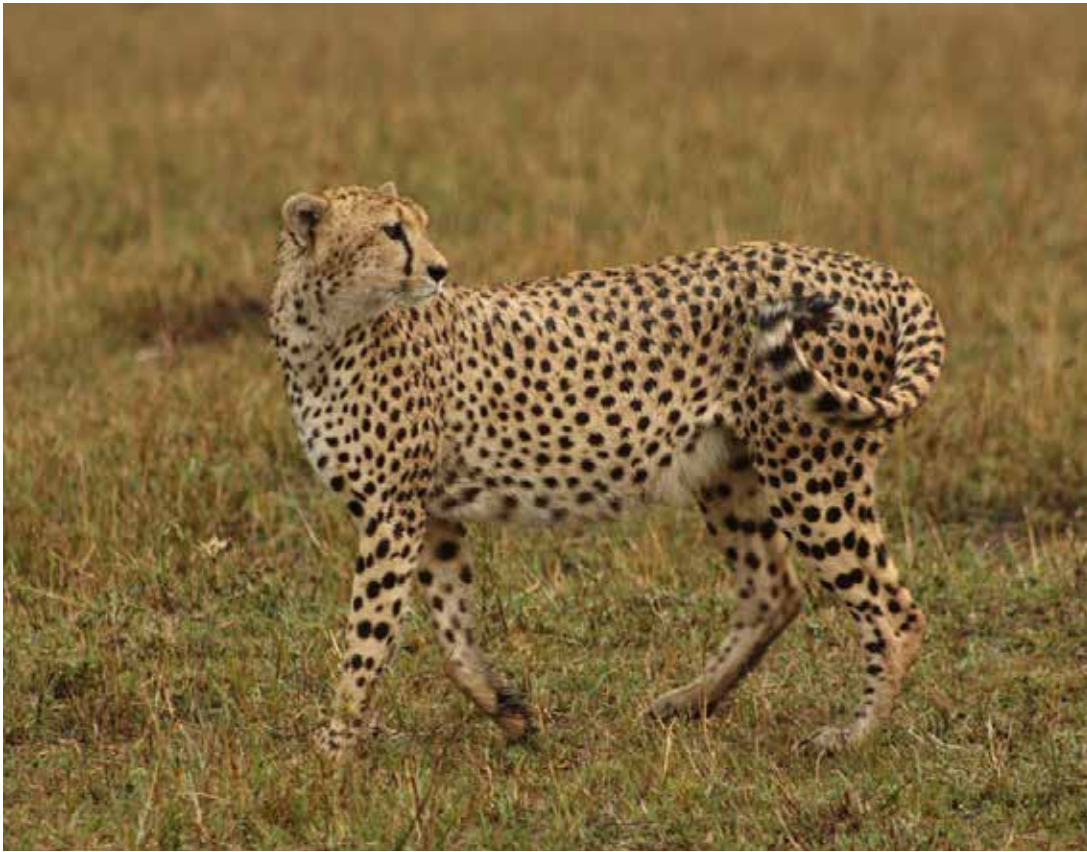
Who better than Dr Divyabhanusinh to speak and write about cheetahs? His passion and deep understanding make him a valuable contributor. He visited Hornbill House, and I invited him to participate in the debate. He could not refuse because of his love for me and BNHS. We also approached Dr Y.V. Jhala from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), who led the initial team for the cheetah project. BNHS and Dr Jhala have a strong bond, as he became a BNHS life member during his schooling in Mumbai, and BNHS sponsored his Ph.D. I believe this issue of *Hornbill* will be worth preserving and sharing widely.

In the special feature, Dr Divyabhanusinh writes about the history of cheetahs in India, and Dr Y.V. Jhala reflects on one year of the Cheetah Reintroduction Programme.

Former BNHS Director Dr Asad R. Rahmani reviews two books, MORE THAN JUST FOOTNOTES and WOMEN IN THE WILD. I am sure you will want to buy them after reading his reviews.

You will find interesting information on the recent sighting of a blue and white flycatcher by Sachin Pawar and a Jerdon's baza by Vijaya Bharat in Reader's Space.





ASIF N. KHAN

Since the December 2023 issue, we have included a page from the diary of a BNHS scientist. BNHS researchers and scientists are known for their hard work, which is rarely acknowledged. Young conservation biologist Manan Singh is currently involved in a Vulture Release Programme in the Vidarbha landscape of Maharashtra. He has been with BNHS since 2020 and previously worked on the Vulture Safe Zone Programme in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana. You will get an idea of vulture conservation work from his diary entry on a day in Pench Tiger Reserve.

For the past year, I have been sharing my conservation notes, focusing on urgent conservation concerns. We need to make the scientific community and decision-makers aware of how to create Vulture Safe Zones for wild and captive bred vultures. I am exploring the safety of these zones in India and how to make India safe for Jatayu.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue!

Kishor Rithe