

Iranian Cheetah Society

2018 ANNUAL REPORT





WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS REPORT

The following report contains the progress report of activities and projects accomplished by Iranian Cheetah Society in 2018. It also covers the activities that were undertaken in late 2017 but have not yet been reported in previous documents. At the end, you will be informed about our goals for 2019. This report does not cover every activity and reports only on our highlights. Therefore we encourage you to visit our website for more details.

[Website](#) 



- Our Mission** 4
- Board Chair’s Note** 5
- Conservation Programs** 6
- Asiatic Cheetah** 8
 - Monitoring the Cheetahs in Miandasht wildlife Refuge 10
 - Safeguarding Asiatic Cheetah’s habitat 11
 - Employing rangers in the cheetah habitats 12
 - Water for Cheetahs 13
 - Ex-situ conservation of Asiatic cheetah 14
 - The National Cheetah Day 15
- Rangers Program** 16
 - Equipment purchases 18
 - 4th Yahya Award 19
- Persian Leopard** 20
 - Conservation corridors for linking ‘source’ and ‘sink’ leopard populations in the Iranian Caucasus 22
- Workshops**..... 23
- Publications** 26



OUR MISSION

Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization established to save the Asiatic Cheetah in its only remaining habitat, in Iran. The ICS is a sophisticated NGO devoted to saving the Iranian “Big Five” carnivores which are often in conflict with local communities. ICS was established in 2001 (registration number 13640).

Missions

- Investigation to find more on the ecology and status of large carnivores through an ecosystem-based approach;
- Public awareness about the Iranian large carnivores and their associated biota through education mainly at the local communities;
- Reducing human-large carnivores conflicts via implementing socio-economic plans;
- Conserving the large carnivores in their natural habitats, particularly through public participation.

BOARD CHAIR'S NOTE



Firstly, it is my profound pleasure to announce that Iranian Cheetah Society enters into its 18th year of activities. And with this, comes a long history and much gained experience which we use to move forward with our mission. I think we all agree that we need reliable organizations in the field of nature conservation to achieve great results, from local activists to multinational organizations. During recent years, ICS has acted as a focal point to not only fulfill various projects but also to facilitate knowledge and information sharing with different parties.

We are working hard to find the best answers for Asiatic Cheetah conservation challenges in addition to the captive breeding program to support a population. We strongly believe that we need to share the ideas, information, and knowledge with others, inside or outside the country, to find mutual solutions to work together. Undoubtedly great results are achievable through local and international synergy, and we are therefore open to any joint cooperation across the globe.

Finally, a very special word of thanks to our funding partners as well as our outstanding colleagues and specialists at ICS who are our key resource. We must continue to work together to find and implement solutions to conserve wildlife for future generations.

ICS BOARD CHAIR
Behnam Ehsanbakhsh

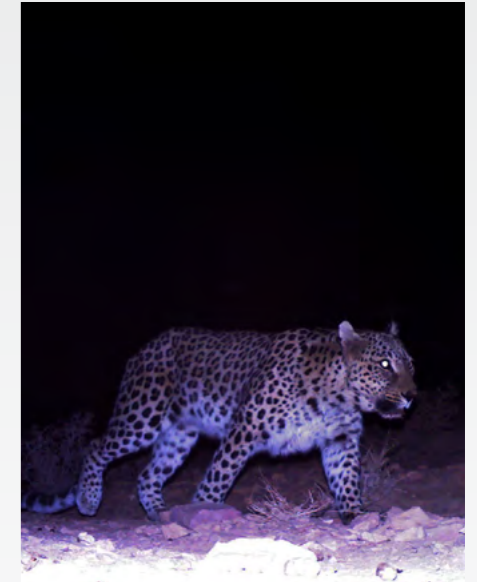
CONSERVATION PROGRAMS



ASIATIC
CHEETAH



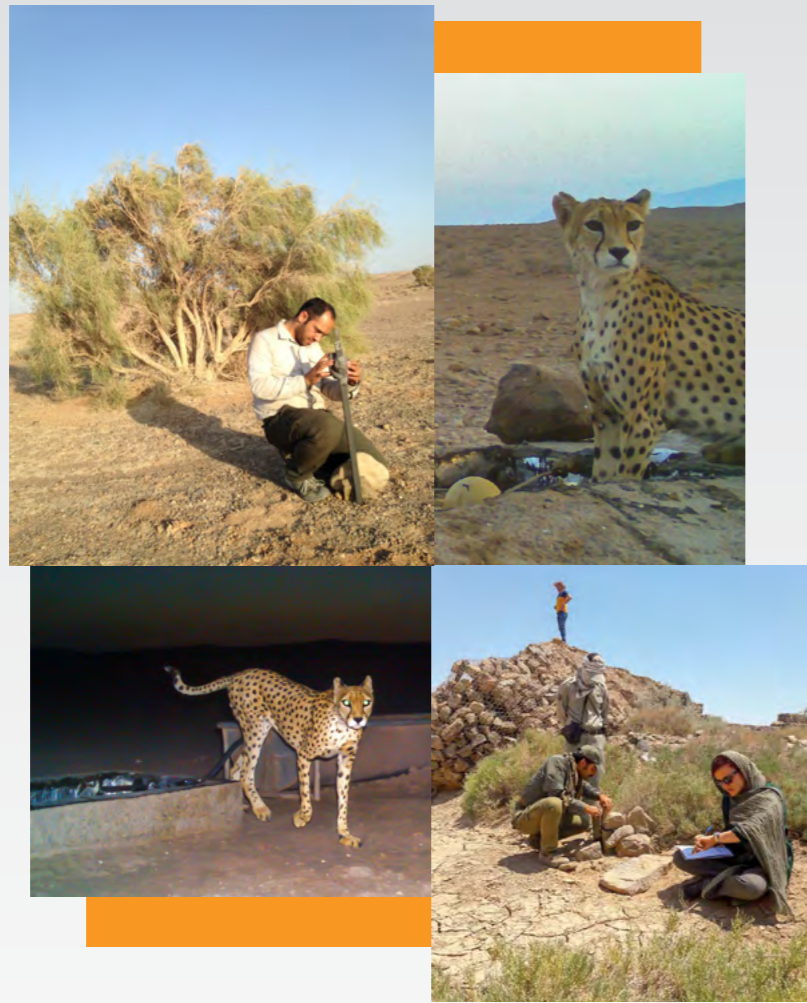
RANGERS
PROGRAM



PERSIAN
LEOPARD

ASIATIC CHEETAH

The Iranian Cheetah Society began its major activities to conserve the Cheetah in the central desert of Iran in 2005. Since then various projects and programs had been running in this area such as providing water for the desert wildlife, hiring rangers and providing equipment for them, educating local people and raising their awareness about wildlife. However, the ICS' major program over the last seven years is the Cheetah population monitoring program using camera traps and citizen science. The central desert in Iran has remarkable biodiversity with several unique species with significant conservation value. Miandasht Wildlife Refuge in North Khorasan Province is a key site for Asiatic Cheetah conservation in Iran, where Cheetah reproduction has been confirmed by our survey team. The area is 840 KM² wide with only eight rangers to protect it, while the herds and guard dogs' presence drives the Cheetahs' population to a risky status. ICS started working in Miandasht in 2004, and since then, the area has become the ICS pilot site for long-term ecological study and conservation programs for Asiatic Cheetahs. Unfortunately, the dominant male of the area died in a road accident in October 2018 which further highlights the significant issue of human-wildlife conflict in the area.



Monitoring the Cheetahs in Miandasht wildlife Refuge

The research team began population monitoring of Cheetahs in 2011 and have surveyed the reserve over the years using camera-traps. Our monitoring led us to the identification of Miandasht as one of the last remaining two sites with confirmed occurrence of reproducing Cheetahs (i.e. female Cheetahs with cubs) since 2012.

Our team surveyed Miandasht for the fourth time in 2017 and detected only one Cheetah, known to us as the dominant male in this reserve. Unfortunately, we lost this 6-8 years old Cheetah in a road accident last November.

Project Donor



Safeguarding Asiatic Cheetah's habitat

In 2014, ICS launched a project to improve the conservation status of Asiatic Cheetahs by developing a cash-land compensation package for voluntarily relocating local livestock herders from key reserves. This project was initially funded by the National Committee of IUCN in the Netherlands with a goal to move livestock herders outside Touran National Park in Semnan Province. Due to unexpected abiotic factors that interfered with the project activities, ICS and IUCN NL jointly decided to relocate the project to Miandasht Wildlife Refuge in North Khorasan Province, another key Cheetah reserve with an ecologically functional subpopulation. Our project in Miandasht relies on the close cooperation of local herders and legal authorities, as the socio-economic aspects of such a relocation must be carefully considered. As a result, achieving the project's goals demands significantly more time and resources.

At the beginning of 2018, the ICS team re-started negotiations with local decision-makers and volunteer livestock herders grazing key rangelands inside Miandasht. The meetings will be continued to develop a strategic conservation plan for the Asiatic Cheetah population in Miandasht. Simultaneously, the project received additional financial support from the Association Française des Parcs Zoologiques (AFdPZ), which enabled ICS to launch a pilot project to evaluate other methods that may decrease the effect of traditional pastoralism on Cheetahs in Miandasht. Specifically, our team has focused on methods to reduce the negative impact of herding dogs. Management of free-ranging dogs, introducing Cheetah-friendly guarding dogs, and training herders are the next steps for this project.

Project Donors





Employing rangers in the Cheetah habitats

Due to the critical status of Cheetahs in Miandasht Wildlife Refuge and the inadequate number of rangers there, ICS decided to recruit two rangers for six months to improve the law enforcement of the area. The ICS-recruited rangers will patrol the reserve during the breeding season in addition to controlling and recording herds and guard dog entry and exit in the area. A fundraising campaign succeeded to collect the salary needed for this project in two weeks. Also, a motorcycle has been purchased for patrolling. Our team aims to continue employing the rangers for another six months if we received enough funds.

Project Donors



Water for Cheetahs

ICS launched the “Water for Cheetahs” campaign in 2015 to support the provision of water for wildlife during warm seasons in Miandasht Wildlife Refuge, North Khorasan Province. Miandasht is home to one of the last viable populations of Cheetah in Iran. When ICS launched this campaign in 2015, local rangers were spending the majority of their working hours supplying water for artificial water holes in the reserve, which negatively impacted on their anti-poaching patrolling efforts of the reserve. Thanks to our donors, we have been able to recruit another local ranger to help the rangers in the water provision for wildlife for four years. Due to the area’s drought and the conditions, ICS will try to continue the project during over the coming years.

Project Donors





Ex-situ conservation of Asiatic Cheetah

During the recent months, ICS tried to encourage the Department of Environment and other Iranian conservationists to come together and make a group decision about the future of Asiatic Cheetah. For the first step, we tried to facilitate the connecting of international experts and called on Iranian stakeholders to join the plan. The two main strategies to reach the target are captive breeding and semi-captive breeding methods. One of the first steps were inviting Vincent van der Merwe, a Cheetah expert from Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) in South Africa to visit the main habitats and hold a workshop to present the experiences of semi-captive conservation in South Africa and to engage the local officers on this strategy. For the next step, DoE has invited international experts and Iranian conservation stakeholders to come together in February and to finally decide on the future path for Asiatic Cheetah conservation.



Project Partner



Project Donor



The National Cheetah Day

Twelve years ago, the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) proposed August 31st as the “National Asiatic Cheetah Day” in Iran to encourage the conservation of the last remaining population of Asiatic Cheetahs. The National Asiatic Cheetah Day is now endorsed and celebrated by Iran Department of the Environment, Conservation of the Asiatic Cheetah Project and several Iranian NGOs every year. In honor of the Asiatic Cheetah Day, ICS released “Save Our Asiatic Cheetah” – a short video by Majid Sarhaddi, an Iranian filmmaker and friend of ICS. This year ICS scientists joined a campaign to raise awareness of the critical status of the Asiatic Cheetah in the Iranian media. In a series of articles published in Etemaad, a leading Farsi-language daily newspaper, ICS scientists discussed the challenges and potential solutions to recover the Asiatic Cheetah population. Recently, Iran Department of the Environment declared that, together with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), it is working on the draft of the third phase of the Conservation of the Asiatic Cheetah Project considering the measures proposed by national and international collaborators.

Watch Video 



A person wearing a brown jacket and a helmet is riding a blue and white motorcycle on a dirt path. The path winds through a vast, arid landscape with rolling hills and sparse, dry vegetation. The ground is dark and rocky, and the sky is clear. The overall scene is one of a rugged, natural environment.

RANGERS PROGRAM

Increasing motivation and promoting conservation efforts of the wildlife ranger have always been a priority for the Iranian Cheetah Society. Therefore, a Ranger Program was started in 2014 to support them across the country. More than 50 rangers from all over the country, especially Cheetah habitats were involved in the program and nearly 400,000,000 IRR was allocated for the activities during the first year.



Equipment purchase

Rangers usually spend their working time in the some of the most difficult conditions. The protected areas and National Parks are mostly locatd in the mountains or in rural areas where having appropriate equipment is critical. According to its mission, the Iranian Cheetah Society regularly tries to establish the area's needs by consulting the local experts and seeks to supply them through the support of sponsors and donors. The list has included storm masks, Motorcycle goggles, Gortex gloves, and rechargeable flashlights.

Project Donor



Established by the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) in 2014 through a generous donation by an Iranian artist couple, Mojtaba Ramzi and Paridokht Moshkzad, the Yahya Prize recognizes Iranian rangers who have made outstanding efforts to protect Iran's wildlife and natural environment. Delegates from the Iranian Department of Environment and several Iranian NGOs and individual environmentalists and nature lovers attended the event. The 4th Yahya Prize ceremony were held in late December 2017. This year the Award honored three rangers: 1) Gholamreza Mohammadzadeh from Gilan Province; 2) Mohsen Dalir from Razavi Khorasan Province; and 3) Modasser Teymouri from Razavi Khorasan Province. The winners received their prizes from the Award committee, who selected the honored rangers through an intensive three-month selection process. Additionally, the Award acknowledged the family of an Iranian ranger who was killed by opium smugglers in Yazd Province in November 2017.



Project Donors





**PERSIAN
LEOPARD**



Conservation corridors for linking 'source' and 'sink' leopard populations in the Iranian Caucasus

Iran is a leopard stronghold in the Caucasus and conservationists believe that any effort to restore the Caucasus leopard will fail unless connectivity with the Iranian population is maintained. However, even the Iranian leopard population is threatened by anthropogenic habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. Wildlife corridors can help restore ecological processes and minimize genetic isolation, so to offset fragmentation problems. In 2015, ICS launched a project to explore suitable leopard corridors between two very important wildlife areas of the Iranian Caucasus: the Western Alborz and Talysh Mountains. By filling the knowledge gap about connectivity of leopards on this landscape, this project aimed to evaluate opportunities for linking the Iranian leopard population to those living in the adjacent Armenia and Azerbaijan. Through working simultaneously with government organizations and local communities during the last two years, ICS researchers identified areas of high conservation value for the leopard and co-occurring large carnivores and ungulates, and proposed them to Iran Department of the Environment to secure the remaining leopard habitats by designing corridor reserves and protected areas. In the meantime, by involving local people in identification and protection of leopard corridors we stressed a crucial long-term strategy for the conservation of this landscape. The second phase of this project will be focused on two pilot sites among the priority areas identified.

Project Donors



WORKSHOPS



"Carnivore Tracking and Camera-Trapping" workshop held for rangers of Asiatic Cheetah habitats



"Participatory Approaches and Methods in Conservational projects" workshop held for environmental NGOs



PUBLICATIONS

Transboundary leopard movement between Azerbaijan and Iran in the Southern Caucasus



Read More

Time to get real about the Asiatic Cheetah conservation



Read More

Assessing global patterns in mammalian carnivore occupancy and richness by integrating local camera trap surveys



Read More

Ecological correlates of the spatial co-occurrence of sympatric mammalian carnivores worldwide



Read More

2018

WE ARE SO GRATEFUL TO OUR PARTNERS IN



Special Thanks to: Leila Ghasemzade, Mohammad Gaeini, Hamid Zohrabi, Majid Kharazi Moghadam, Mehrasa Mehrdadi, Mehdi Pourkasra, Hamidreza Mirzade, Ali amarloo, Masoud Borbor, Fatemeh Babakhani, Khashayar Hajiseyedjavadi, Asghar Motahari, Yashar Jafari, Laura Craddock, Ehsan Moqanaki, Vincent Van Der Merwe, Simone Eckhardt, Mahsa Mowla, Hooman Shahvari

TO THE FUTURE

PERSIAN LEOPARD

In recent years we have done research in the southern Caucasus area with the support of World Land Trust. In 2019 this project will be continued in one of the identified hotspots. With the basic monitoring of environmental conditions and further observation, we will be able to choose our core area for leopard long term conservation programme.

ASIATIC CHEETAH

Projects such as water provision, monitoring, livestock management, etc, shall continue. We shall endeavor to continue the rangers employment project which has already been funded for 6 months. Plannings for long-term management of water and carrying capacity of the area shall be made.

Brown Bear

We shall start a study on the human-Brown Bear conflict in the southern Caucasus. The chosen study area is a habitat shared between Persian Leopard and Brown Bear in Hyrcanian forests of Northern Iran, Gilan province. The *Ursus arctos syriacus* known as a vulnerable subspecies in Iran.



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