



Robert Bateman *

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Until fairly recently the Asiatic cheetah was found from the Middle East, north into southern Kazakhstan and southeast into India. Today, it has been wiped out from its entire Asiatic range, except for a small and critically endangered population in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is thought there are around 60-100 of these last Asiatic cheetahs, all of which live in the remote, central plateau of Iran.

Between 2001 and 2007, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) assisted the Iran Department of Environment by implementing emergency measures to help save the cheetah. These measures include: the protection of cheetahs and their prey from hunters; scientific planning of protected areas; an increase in staff and equipment for these areas; and the control of livestock and overgrazing in the reserves.

Additionally, WCS has implemented surveys in the principal known cheetah Areas, not

* Image Courtesy of Robert Bateman

only to determine the distribution and abundance of the Asiatic cheetah, but also its prey (gazelle, wild goat, urial, hare). This work has also surveyed other large carnivores – such as the leopard, wolf, and striped hyena. Moreover, WCS has been responsible for training government personnel in conducting advanced surveys of these key wildlife species in the central plateau region.

Currently there are five official Cheetah reserves with a combined area of almost 42,000 square kilometres (16,216 square miles). A further four areas have been identified for development in Phase 2 of the project.

In the first phase thirty-two new park guards were added to the personnel responsible for protection of the priority areas. Their critical role has been to prevent the killing of Cheetahs, and in this they have been largely successful. Extensive education/outreach efforts to inform local people of the rarity of the beasts, and that they are strictly protected, has contributed to this success.

Since 2007 WCS has been working in partnership with Panthera to provide the technical assistance necessary to help return the cheetah to its rightful place as the apex predator of southwest Asia's plains.