

Project Update: May 2008

Presently, a minimum number of 70 to 100 cheetahs exist throughout the eastern half of Iran (Iranian Cheetah Society 2007), mainly inside 7 verified reserves, including Miandasht Wildlife Refuge. Located in north eastern Iran, Miandasht Wildlife Refuge was once one of the main cheetah habitats in the country with a supporting role for its neighbour reserves, totally forming the north-eastern cheetah population in Iran. On the other hand, due to its strategic situation, Miandasht is at the edge of the cheetah range in Iran and can interact with possible cheetah populations/habitats in Turkmenistan. Meanwhile, the area is surrounded by a number of potential cheetah habitats where once held a number of the species before 1980s. Accordingly, it is critical to ensure the cheetah's long-term survival in Miandasht WR to support the north-eastern cheetah population in the country and possibly, re-colonizing new populations in neighbour habitats in Turkmenistan.

Due to weakened conservation efforts during early 1980s, the cheetah disappeared from most of its range in north-eastern part of the country, limited to a few unconfirmed observations, mainly in Miandasht. At the same time, the cheetah was reported to be extinct since early 1980s from mentioned adjacent countries. In late 2002, the cheetah was officially reported from Miandasht and the ICS started a long-term project to study on the cheetah and to conserve it. During a couple of years between 2003 and 2007, a comprehensive field-based research project was conducted with support of a number of domestic and foreign funding agencies, including Rufford Foundation; resulting in a conservation strategy (the final report is available on www.iraniancheetah.org). In future, we plan to work on increasing people's awareness about the cheetah, reducing herders-cheetah conflicts and empowering game guards for a more effective conservation.