

Biopsy Specimens of Asiatic Cheetah Needed

Specimens of skin and blood of the Asiatic cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus venaticus* are urgently required to determine how closely it is related to cheetah in Africa. The Asiatic cheetah once ranged widely from south-west Asia to India, but it is known certainly to survive only in Iran. Apart from stray reports of sightings, there is no information about the current status. It is feared that the already small population is declining because of lack of protection, both of the cheetah itself and of its principal prey species.

Projects have been proposed to reintroduce cheetah in India and some other countries in its former range, where it is now extinct. According to IUCN recommendations, reintroduced animals should be of the original subspecies or the closest relative.

Recent biopsy studies have shown that cheetah in several parts of Africa have a very narrow genetic base and are closely related. Although no biopsies have been carried out of specimens from Asiatic cheetah, these findings have prompted suggestions that African cheetah could legitimately be re-introduced in the former range of *venaticus*. In order to determine the degree of genetic difference between Asiatic and African cheetahs blood and skin specimens are required for biopsies. Researchers visiting Iran are invited to help to obtain specimens.

If you think you can help, contact Daniel Krause, NOAHS Centre, National Zoological Park, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20008.