

World's Only Known Captive Asiatic Cheetah Dies

The only known captive Asiatic cheetah in the world died in Pardisan Park, Tehran, on 23 December 2004. According to Pardisan authorities, the female, named Marita, died from respira-

tory collapse, despite the efforts of veterinarians. She was nine years old.

Marita, born in spring 1994, was captured when she and her two sisters, accompanied by their mother, came near

the city of Bafq on 31 August 1994. The family was captured by local people. The mother ran away, and Marita's two sisters were killed. Marita was taken to Tehran and kept by the Department of Environment.

Her capture could have led to a captive breeding programme, but there was concern that taking a male from the critically endangered wild cheetah population, thought to be fewer than 60 scattered specimens, could be damaged.

In recent years, public interest in saving Iran's cheetah's has grown, and Marita became a symbol, drawing many people to her large enclosure in Pardisan. She will be mounted in the Department of Environment's Museum in Tehran to remain a symbol of Iran's threatened cheetahs, the only known survivors of the sub-species, which once ranged through south-west Asia and to the Indian sub-continent.

In the past two years, phototrap cameras deployed in known cheetah range around the vast desert of eastern Iran, have produced images confirming the existence of wild cheetahs, and of breeding.



Photo: Peter Jackson