
2. Cheetah Translocation Project

Why in News?

- India's ambitious Cheetah Translocation Project has recently facing a new set of challenges as two cheetahs have died, bringing the number of cheetahs left in the project to 18 out of the initial 20.

Highlights

- Uday, a six-year-old male cheetah, died on April 23, 2023, in Kuno National Park, and Sasha, a five-year-old female cheetah, died on March 27, 2023, in the same park.
- Therefore, the government is now considering alternative conservation models, such as the South African model of conserving cheetahs in fenced reserves.
- The project anticipated a high mortality rate, and its short-term goal was to achieve a 50% survival rate for the first year, which is 10 out of 20 cheetahs.
- However, experts pointed out that the project had overestimated Kuno National Park's carrying capacity for cheetahs, and this added pressure on the project staff to look for alternative sites.
- A South African study found that predation was the biggest killer, accounting for 53.2% of cheetah mortality. Lions, leopards, hyenas, and jackals were primarily responsible.
- Cheetahs suffer very high cub mortality – up to 90% in protected areas – mainly due to predation.
- In Africa, the lion is the chief predator of cheetahs; in India, where lions are absent (except in Gujarat), leopards are likely to slip into that role in potential cheetah landscapes.
- Other causes of mortality can be holding camps, immobilization/transit, tracking devices, and other wildlife killing cheetah (cubs) including warthogs, baboons, snakes, elephants, crocodiles, vultures, zebras, and even ostriches.