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## Project Tiger, CAMPA funds used to finance cheetah project: Centre

Barda wildlife sanctuary in Gujarat being developed as a second home for Asiatic lions

By [Rajat Ghai](#)

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Funds from Project Tiger as well as the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management & Planning Authority (CAMPA) were used to finance the project to bring African cheetahs to India, the Union government told Parliament December 19, 2022.

The Centre was asked the details of the cost of transfer and yearly maintenance cost of African Cheetahs and the Great Indian Bustard.

Ashwini Kumar Choubey, minister of state in the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) told the Lok Sabha:

Under the ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger a budgetary provision of Rs. 38.7 crore has been made for five years besides funding support of Rs 29.47 crore under Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) which includes cost of transportation, maintenance and management of African cheetahs and the habitat.

The Centre was also asked whether it had listed other sites for the transfer of African cheetahs and the reasons behind the selection.

Choubey answered that Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary and Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh as well as Shahgarh Bulge, Bhainsrorgarh Wildlife Sanctuary and Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan had been identified as other suitable areas for the cheetah in India.

This was in accordance with the action plan on the introduction of the cheetah in India.

The minister also responded to a query on why cheetahs had been given priority for translocation to Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary instead of Asiatic Lions:

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India vide order dated 15.4.2013 had directed the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to take urgent steps for re-introduction of Asiatic lion from Gir forests to Kuno in accordance with the guidelines issued by IUCN. The Hon'ble Supreme Court, vide order dated 28.01.2020 allowed introduction of African Cheetah into India on an experimental basis and Cheetahs from Namibia were translocated in pursuance of the said directions.

Had the project to bring cheetahs from Africa delayed the arrival of lions from Gir in Gujarat to Kuno?

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**Read [Down To Earth's coverage of cheetah reintroduction in India](#)**

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Choubey did not respond to the question asked but instead repeated the official stance of the government that the lions were to be shifted to newer sites withing Saurashtra.

“(A Committee constituted by the Centre) has recommended a participatory management approach for expanding lion population, greater involvement of communities and awareness and sensitisation programmes, especially in newly occupied territories...” the minister’s statement read.

The MoEF&CC was providing financial assistance to the state of Gujarat for lion conservation activities including for habitat improvement, water management, grassland development and prey augmentation.

“These activities will also facilitate the natural dispersal of lions beyond the Gir landscape,” the statement noted.

The minister added that Barda Wildlife Sanctuary in Saurashtra had been identified and assessed by the Wildlife Institute of India as a potential site for the lions.

“... a population of 40 adult and sub-adult lions can be accommodated in the larger landscape of Barda-Alech hills and coastal forests through natural dispersal,” the reply read.

“This response is filled with inaccuracies and is very, very problematic,” Ravi Chellam, Asiatic lion expert, chief executive of Metastring Foundation and coordinator, Biodiversity Collaborative told *Down To Earth*.

The Barda Wildlife Sanctuary is less than 200 square kilometres in area and too small to host to a viable population of lions.

“Moreover, as a crow flies, it is barely 100 km from Gir forest and hence not geographically isolated from Gir to be able to effectively mitigate conservation risks to the lion population,” Chellam added.

Neema Pathak-Broome, a member of the non-profit Kalpavriksh, spoke to *DTE* about the fact that CAMPA funds had been used to finance the cheetah project.

“CAMPA funds are meant for restoration of forests, particularly the ones that have been diverted for industrial purposes. For the longest time, there have been demands that this money should be given to Gram Sabhas so that they can be financially empowered to restore forests,” Broome said.

She added that indigenous and forest-dwelling communities country-wide were struggling for sustainable finance. Ideally, CAMPA funds should be used to empower them.

“So much focus on one single species does not make sense,” Broome said.