

Triennial Report

2021-2023

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Who We Are

Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization that aims to protect the biodiversity of Iran. The Asiatic Cheetah is the flagship species of the ICS and is the only one left in Iran. This sophisticated NGO is dedicated to safeguarding the Iranian big carnivores, which are often in conflict with local communities. It was established in 2001 (registration number 13640) and has been working towards biodiversity conservation for more than two decades now.

Due to a lack of wildlife science on the Iranian species, notably the carnivores, the ICS has focused a significant part of its activities on field surveys and practical solutions. Accordingly, we work closely with rangers and park managers to investigate local solutions considering global experiences. Meanwhile, juveniles and youths were always been the primary educational targets, particularly in local communities, and should be satisfied to co-exist with them.

Our Mission

- Conducting scientific-based research to gain a better understanding of the ecology and status of large carnivores.
- Educating local communities and raising public awareness about the large carnivores and their associated biota in Iran.
- Empowering and equipping rangers to improve their livelihoods.
- Conserving the large carnivores in their natural habitats by engaging the public in the conservation efforts.

COVER PHOTO

In May 2023, camera traps were able to record the first cheetah breeding of 2023 in the Touran National Park. This image shows Khorshid (Talkhab) with her four small cubs drinking water at a watering hole. This female cheetah was only recorded once by cameras last winter. She was born in 2016 and has had three successful births so far, all three generations of which have been recorded by cameras. This is the first time in Iran that we have witnessed three births of a female cheetah.

Honors

As the oldest Iranian NGO still active in wildlife conservation, the ICS has been recognized to receive various well-known awards, such as:

- National Environment Award (2017), Iran
- The overall winner of the research categories and rare species, BBC Wildlife camera-trap competition (2014), UK
- The Outstanding Iranian Champion for Nature (2010), Iran
- Best Documentary, International Fajr Film Festival (2010), Iran
- Future for Nature Award (2009), Netherlands
- Best Wildlife Documentary, Cinema Verite (2009), Iran
- White Rooster Award for Protection of Animals (2007), Iran
- Future Conservationist Award (2006), UK
- National Environment Award (2005), Iran



About this report

This report provides an overview of the activities and projects undertaken by the Iranian Cheetah Society over the three-year period from 2021 to 2023, highlighting key achievements. It concludes with a glimpse into our goals for 2024. Please note that this report offers a summary of our endeavors and does not encompass every activity. For more in-depth information, we invite you to explore our website.




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20th 20 Years of Asiatic Cheetah Conservation

Dear Supporters and Allies,

As we reflect on two decades of unwavering commitment to the conservation of the Asiatic cheetah, I am honored to share the remarkable journey of the Iranian Cheetah Society. Established in 2001 as a non-profit, non-governmental organization, our mission has been to safeguard the future of this invaluable species inhabiting the nature of Iran.

Over the past twenty two years, the Iranian Cheetah Society has grown and evolved, thanks to the dedication of hundreds of individuals who have joined us as experts, volunteers, and supporters. Today, as we entered our third decade, we take pride in being the oldest active wildlife conservation NGO in the country.

Our collaborative efforts with local communities, rangers, and the government have borne fruit, and I am thrilled to announce the significant milestones achieved between 2021 and 2023. These include the recruitment of dedicated rangers, expansion of our population monitoring program, supporting, training, and equipping over 50 rangers in the field, and an extensive search for cheetahs beyond protected areas, bringing us closer to local communities.

This journey has been made possible through the generous support of our sponsors and partners, including Stichting SPOTS, IUCN NL, Ann van Dyke Cheetah Center, Ashia, Ahmad Tea, Elite brand, Parspack, and many others. Your invaluable support has propelled us forward and fueled our progress in protecting the Asiatic cheetahs.

As we anticipate the challenges of 2024, we acknowledge that the conservation landscape has not unfolded as we envisioned. The task of saving a species in a sanctioned, economically challenged, and isolated country like Iran is undoubtedly complex. While other species benefit from simultaneous protection efforts, the Asiatic Cheetah faces unique hurdles.

Despite these challenges, we maintain an unwavering sense of hope. It is disheartening to witness the obstacles in Iran while witnessing reintroduction projects in India and plans to bring African cheetahs to Saudi Arabia. The future of Asiatic cheetahs hinges on international cooperation and investment. Political challenges, coupled with a lack of funds, expertise exchange, and field equipment, pose barriers to the implementation of crucial conservation and survival plans.

To our supporters, your steadfast dedication has been our guiding light. In the face of adversity, we remain resolute, optimistic, and diligent. The Iranian Cheetah Society continues to strive for a brighter future for the cheetahs, and we extend our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support.



Sincerely,
Morteza Pourmirzai
CEO, Iranian Cheetah Society



Iranian Cheetah Society Team

Cheetah Conservation Program

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Asiatic Cheetah Population Monitoring Program



Since 2010, breeding of Asiatic cheetahs has been limited to their habitats in northern Iran, specifically the Touran Biosphere Reserve and the Miandasht Wildlife Refuge. In the mid-2010s, after monitoring cheetah populations in southern habitats, it was determined that breeding was no longer occurring there. Therefore, conservation efforts and monitoring have been focused on the northern habitats, and monitoring of the Touran Biosphere Reserve was planned.

The monitoring in Touran and Miandasht began with camera traps in Touran in 2020. In 2021, camera traps were installed in a larger area of Touran, and monitoring was conducted systematically with 90 camera traps in both Touran and Miandasht regions. In 2022 and 2023, each year with 60 camera traps, both areas were monitored.

Touran covers an area of 1.4 million hectares and includes a national park, a wildlife refuge, and a protected area zones. During the warm season, cameras were focused on the waterholes, when the animals' water needs increase. Additionally, cameras were placed in their routes and marking spots.

Over the three years of research, over 800,000 images were obtained. Only 797 of the images contained cheetahs, all recorded in the Touran Biosphere Reserve. As a result of these efforts, a total of 26 individual cheetahs were recorded, including 7 females, 3 males, and 16 cubs.



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Overcoming the Dangers of a Major Highway

Challenges Faced by Asiatic Cheetahs on the "Death Highway"

Photo by: Jafar Panahpour

The Tehran-Mashhad highway AKA the "Death Highway", connecting two densely populated cities in Iran, has tragically claimed the lives of numerous Asiatic cheetahs due to collisions with vehicles. Over the past 10 years, 13 cheetahs have lost their lives in accidents on the Tehran-Mashhad highway, contributing to the dwindling population of less than 30 Asiatic cheetahs worldwide.

Between 2021 and 2023, three accidents occurred on this highway, resulting in the loss of a female cub, a pregnant mother with three fetuses, and a male cub. After the first incident, society members immediately responded alongside independent volunteers and other groups in the region. For six days, they monitored the mother and her remaining and cub, ensuring their safety. The unidentified mother and the surviving male cub were later captured on our camera traps in the Touran Biosphere Reserve and named "Mahtab (Moonlight)."

A few months later, in March 2023, a known mother cheetah named "Majerad," who had successfully mated after abandoning her lone male cub 18 months earlier, was killed in a road accident along with three fetuses.

During the same summer, another male cheetah cub fell victim to a collision. Concerned about the proximity of the mother and another cub to the road, the society's team engaged in nightly efforts with flashlights to push and force them away from the dangerous area. The rescue operation spanned seven nights until the mother moved away from the accident site.

Subsequently, the society, along with other institutions and independent activists, initiated the "Safe Cheetah Passage" campaign. The campaign aimed to garner public support through crowdfunding for road safety measures and urged the government to implement and approve laws for ensuring the safety of cheetahs.

In this campaign, actions such as fencing along the road margins, installing lighting alongside the road, and improving existing underpasses were considered. The securing of the danger section from Tehran to the Mashhad highway is crucial for the preservation of cheetahs, and if these routes remain unsafe, the task of safeguarding these magnificent creatures becomes an impossible endeavor.



Explorers of Hope

In search for Asiatic Cheetahs Beyond the Protected Areas

The “Explorers of Hope” project was established to investigate the areas beyond the protected areas borders where evidence of cheetah presence has been recorded by locals. In the year 2020, the team focused on examining the regions of Khorasan Razavi province, where reports of cheetah presence existed in the past. Continuing the investigations in the year 2021, the expert team examined the Joghātāy district in Khorasan Razavi. During this field trip, a field visit was conducted to identify potential corridors for cheetah movement between the two habitats of Miandasht and Touran. Interviews with farmers and livestock owners in the area were also conducted to record cheetah observation reports.

In 2023, the Explorers of Hope had several trips to the surrounding areas of Touran, especially the Touran- Miandasht corridor, to assess reports and conditions. During this time, the north, east, and south of Touran were examined, and reports from local residents were recorded. The registration of this information, especially in conditions where satellite collar installation permits for cheetah tracking are not granted in Iran, is crucial for the analysis of cheetahs’ behavior and movements. This project will continue its periodic reports and trips, and it is anticipated that in 2024, they will engage in more activities for the education and improvement of protection in these important habitats. Conservation activities will be planned and implemented for the protection of these vital habitats. The costs of this project are generally covered by donations from supporters of the society, which are collected on the website. These contributions greatly help in the sustainability and continuation of these journeys.



PROJECT SPONSOR



Leopard Program

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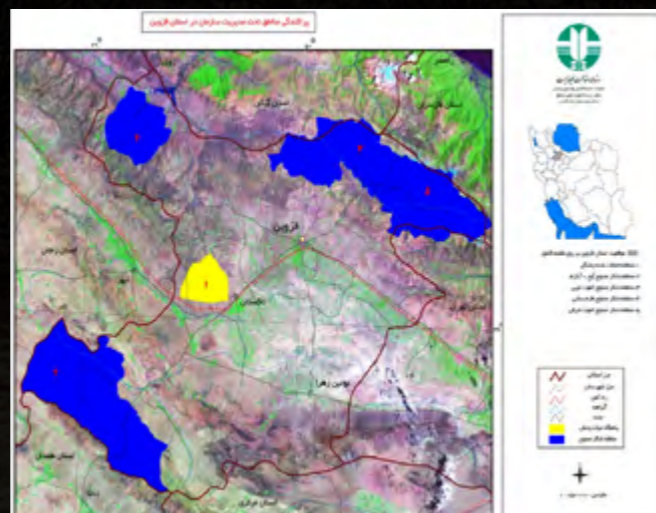


Identifying Human Leopard conflicts in Tarom Region

Project to Examine Conflicts between Leopards and Humans in Qazvin Province

In 2021, we collaborated with the Department of Environmental in Qazvin province on a project to examine conflicts between Persian Leopards and humans in the Tarom-e Sofla region. The first part of this study, which focused on identifying solutions to reduce conflicts between wildlife and humans, was conducted as a master's thesis by one of our interns. The study provided management methods in the Tarom-e Sofla region, which has an area of 48,220 hectares and is located in the Southern Caucasus Region. Tarom is an important habitat for the Persian leopard, and the population of this species in the region is noteworthy. The area is also home to other key species such as wild goats, brown bears, and lynx. However, due to human settlements, agricultural lands, and orchards of local communities within the protected area, significant conflicts exist between the local people and wildlife in the region.

PROJECT SPONSOR



The first part of the study revealed that, contrary to the assumption that leopards, bears, and wolves cause the most financial damage to people, in this area, wild boars cause the most damage to agricultural lands and farmers. The study proposed solutions to reduce damage and conflicts with wildlife, which, if implemented, can reduce dissatisfaction among locals and contribute to the conservation of coexisting species. Although the project began with a focus on improving Persian leopard conservation in the area, the study found that people are supportive of leopard conservation. Thus, the second part of the research will focus on implementing practical experiments to reduce conflicts, subject to securing the necessary funding in the future. Additionally, the team is hopeful to start a population estimation project in the area to have a better understanding of leopards, while simultaneously helping locals to resolve conflicts with other wildlife.



Persian Leopard Workshop

DoE held a workshop in Alborz Province with the aim of increasing capacity for the conservation of the Persian Leopard and its habitats, attended by 60 representatives from the DoE, provincial offices of DoE, and NGOs.

In this workshop, officers from all provinces with Persian leopard habitats were present and discussed the conservation of the leopard, solutions, and shortcomings in its protection. In this three-day workshop, the ICS's experts, alongside other invited facilitators, participated to document the topics and information of the experts as workshop facilitators. The information gathered in this workshop will be used by the DoE as baseline data for creating a conservation program for the Persian leopard across the country.





Habitat Conservation Program

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Keeping the Rangers on Patrol

The rangers' vehicles, such as cars and motorcycles, are crucial for their job and patrolling in the areas. Unfortunately, due to sanctions, the Department of Environment (DoE) has not been able to renew the patrolling cars for more than a decade and new motorcycles are not good enough. While the DoE has a dedicated budget for vehicle maintenance, the payment process is often bureaucratic and time-consuming, which causes inconvenience for the rangers to pay costs by themselves, who do not have high incomes. To avoid delays in reimbursement, ICS has always strives to repair the rangers' vehicles as soon as possible with our budget. In the past three years, ICS has repaired seven patrol cars and three motorcycles for the rangers of Touran and Miandasht.



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Beyond Field Work

Navigating Conservation Policy and advocacy

Conservation efforts are not just limited to fieldwork and remote areas. In fact, advocacy and policy-making are equally important parts of conservation efforts. The Iranian Cheetah Society participates in various meetings with the Department of Environment in Tehran and provincial offices every year to provide advice in decision-making and policy-making. As an NGO, we aim to share new knowledge and methods to address problems and issues that exist in the regions and conservation at a landscape level.

In the past three years, we have addressed issues such as improving and following up on the solution of problems in the captive breeding project, preventing the Ministry of Industry and Mines from allocating new mines in Touran, and securing the Tehran-Mashhad highway(The Death highway). We do not have direct participation in the captive breeding project, but we made suggestions to improve the welfare of cheetahs, especially cubs, with the help of the Ann van Dyk Cheetah Centre as a South African Institute based on the request of the Department of Environment. We have also taken steps to secure the road and cancel new mining licenses in Touran.



Water for Cheetahs Project

Fighting Climate change

Over the past decade, the consequences of climate change have intensified, leading to the need for better water resource management. The Iranian Cheetah Society has been taking action, including installing wind pumps, hiring water rangers, and purchasing water supply equipment, to address this issue. ICS has allocated budgets for this purpose, with the help of its supporters, for the past three years. These efforts are particularly necessary due to consecutive droughts in desert areas where cheetahs live. To support the survival of these animals, we have repaired the water supply vehicle in Miandasht, provided equipment for drawing water from wells, tools, and equipment for transferring water and filling artificial water sources, and equipment for maintenance of wind pumps inside the habitat.

PROJECT SPONSOR



New Water Trough Design

Innovative Design for Enhanced Wildlife Accessibility and Safety

Camera trap records and our direct observations on the water trough indicate problems in wildlife using the water inside the trough. Many chicks drown, and small species such as rabbits, hedgehogs, and rodents cannot safely access water due to the high walls of the currently built trough by the DoE. Also, camera traps in troughs with very high walls did not capture images of the mentioned species or even sometimes bigger animals, impacting their proper distribution in the habitat. Additionally, the concrete or metal structures of these troughs significantly contribute to visual unattractiveness and out of harmony with nature.

Therefore this reason, our team, in consultation with an architect, and a fountain builder, reviewed existing resources worldwide, and consulting with the head of the Miandasht Wildlife Refuge manager, undertook the design of a trough with the following criteria:

- Minimum evaporation, especially in the summer of desert
- Easy and safe access for small-sized species and birds to the water
- Visual beauty and use of non-harmful materials

A camera trap installed on the first trough built according to these criteria is an indication of the success of this project, as a hare was recorded on this spot for the first time ever after a short time.

A complete report of this study will be published in the future for public information.



Old Trough



New Designed Trough

New Ranger Stations

Participation in the Construction and Equipping of New Ranger Stations

The Touran Biosphere Reserve is a vast area covering 1.4 million hectares. In the past, the reserve only had four ranger stations, which made it challenging for the rangers to cover the extensive area during their patrols. Over the last four years, two new ranger stations have been built in the reserve by DoE and help of locals. One was constructed and equipped in the Touran Wildlife Refuge zone in 2019 and 2020, and the construction of another station in the Touran Protected Area began in mid-2022, which completed in 2023. ICS, with the help of its supporters, has provided aid in constructing and equipping these two ranger stations. This aid has been provided to contribute to the region's conservation and reduce the pressure on the rangers. The increase in the number of ranger stations has been considered a necessity for better conservation of the cheetah habitat, and ICS has always been looking for opportunities to help the DoE build new stations in the Cheetah habitat.



Jamil Station Under Construction



Ahmadabad Station Completed in 2023

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Rangers Program

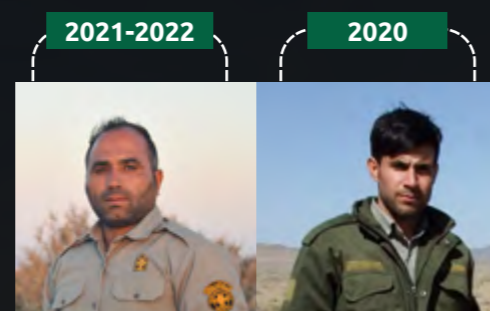
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More Rangers for Cheetahs

Employment of Additional Rangers in Cheetah Habitat

Following the successful experience of employing a local “Water Ranger” to help supply water for the wildlife in Miandasht, two full-time rangers were hired in 2020 to work in the vast Touran Biosphere Reserve, which covers 1.4 million hectares. Due to the shortage of personnel, it has been difficult for rangers to patrol all of the areas, particularly in the National Park zone. This has had a detrimental effect on wildlife conservation in the area. These rangers are capable of performing all of the tasks required of park rangers. The employment of these two new rangers by ICS has contributed significantly to the preservation and enhancement of protective capabilities in the most crucial habitat of the cheetah.



Ensuring the Health and Safety of Rangers

Over the past three years, the “Rangers Program” has prioritized the health and safety of park rangers. Various initiatives have been undertaken in this regard from 2021 to 2023. One such initiative involved the procurement of water purification devices for two active ranger bases in the Miandasht Wildlife Refuge. Prior to this, drinking water for rangers was transported to the bases by tankers and stored in designated sources for long periods. The situation of the water supply from tankers and the duration of water storage had a significant impact on the quality of water consumed by rangers. Sometimes, the low quality of water, due to the presence of salts and sediments, led to the occurrence of kidney-related diseases. This issue was largely addressed by installing water purification devices by ICS. Another initiative was the purchase of six safety equipment for rangers working at heights. They are sometimes required to climb up to repair wind pumps installed above water sources. Since the height is considerable, the risk of falling is a constant threat. By using these safety equipment, the likelihood of such accidents is reduced.

Drinking tea is a widespread tradition in Iran, especially for locals in remote areas. Ensuring the provision of high-quality tea has also been an activity that the ICS has undertaken with the help of Ahmad tea company in the past three years. Tea packages are allocated monthly for both the Touran and Miandasht regions and are delivered to the respective areas. Providing high-quality tea is more an act of morale support which is also important for us. Furthermore, significant improvements in nutritional intake have occurred over the past three years. Measures such as increasing the protein intake for rangers by providing red meat and making available food items used as rations during the patrols have been undertaken with the assistance of ICS’s sponsors and Elite Company in Iran. Rangers don’t receive high quality and enough food materials from DoE, and they sometimes have to bring materials from their home which will affect their family livelihood, or consume canned food most of the time which is not healthy in the long-term. So, we decided to provide more fresh and healthy foods for them.

PROJECT SPONSORS



Essential Gears for Rangers

Providing Rangers with the Right tools

Rangers require appropriate, safe, and sufficient equipment such as good vehicles to ensure the quality of work and their well-being. These tools undergo wear and tear quickly due to their continuous use in harsh conditions, and consumables are used up fast. Therefore, it is crucial to renew or repair these tools throughout the year. ICS makes every effort in this regard and prioritizes the purchase of equipment for rangers each year after consulting with them and park managers. Over the past three years, ICS has purchased and donated demanded equipment such as Gerber knives, waist bags for use on motorcycles, zoomable rechargeable flashlights, stormproof, waterproof & windproof match kits, fire starters, and more to over 50 rangers in Miandasht and Touran regions.



Empowering Rangers

A Glimpse into Our Workshop for Rangers

Rangers play a crucial role in the success of wildlife conservation and researches conducted in protected areas. That is why they are always considered members of the research team in our activities. Just like team members they need to be trained and informed of the research results, rangers also need to be kept updated. For this reason, every year after extensive camera trapping activities during the warm season, we organize a workshop to share the results with the rangers of the Touran and Miandasht habitats.

After conducting the workshop and acknowledging the rangers, Miandasht rangers, accompanied by the National Park manager of Touran, went on a tour to visit the national park, recognized as the primary and only breeding Protected Area for cheetahs. They visited marking locations and cheetah tracks to identify their traces and imprints more quickly and accurately in case cheetahs return to Miandasht. We explained to their newly employed rangers how to find marking spots and cheetah tracks on the site. As the last known cheetah in Miandasht was killed in a road accident 5 years ago, some of the new rangers don't know how to find and track cheetahs using their footprints and marking spots.



Presenting results to the rangers helps them understand what's happening in their area, which enables them to conduct patrols and protection with better awareness and more purposefully. Additionally, these workshops facilitate information exchange and fruitful discussions for cheetah conservation actors. In 2023, for the first time, we invited Miandasht Rangers to participate in a joint workshop with Touran rangers. In this workshop, rangers from the two main cheetah habitats in Iran engaged in discussions and conversations based on the results obtained from the camera traps. During the workshop, we compiled a list of actions currently needed for cheetah conservation with help of rangers and park managers.



Publications

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Sharing Knowledge

Education, Outreach and Public Participation for Wildlife Conservation in Iran

In 2021, we published a book called “What We Learned: Education, Outreach and Public Participation for Wildlife Conservation in Iran”. The book contains insights and lessons learned by the Iranian Cheetah Society from our various activities with people between 2002 and 2016.

The book is divided into three main chapters - “Design and Planning”, “Implementation”, and “Monitoring and Evaluation” - which each focus on different solutions for advancing wildlife conservation in Iran. Additionally, there are two appendices containing a summary of the Iranian Cheetah Society’s projects and the sources used in the book, as well as a glossary at the end.

Our aim in writing this book was to present methods of “working with people” for wildlife conservation in Iran, with a focus on the Iranian Cheetah Society’s experiences. We see this book as a guide that can help us communicate our understanding of the concepts and methods used in our projects to the wider audience. We believe that this book can serve as a preliminary guide for designing, implementing, and evaluating educational, outreach, and public participation activities for wildlife conservation in Iran.

The digital version of the book is available for free download in Persian on the Iranian Cheetah Society’s website.



Publisher





2021 2023

WE ARE SO GRATEFUL TO OUR PARTNERS DURING



SPECIAL THANKS TO

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OUR INVALUABLE DONORS

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GET INVOLVED

Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) is a registered non-profit NGO. With less than 40 Asiatic Cheetahs left in the wild, your contributions of any amount will directly benefit critically endangered Asiatic Cheetahs.



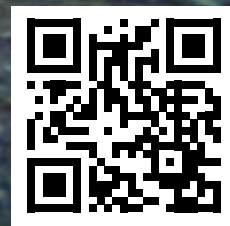
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THE FUTURE

As we look forward to the year 2024, we anticipate that it will pose significant challenges for the conservation of Asiatic Cheetahs. Despite our best efforts, the current conservation landscape has not unfolded as we had envisioned. Our team of dedicated conservationists is working tirelessly to preserve the dwindling population of these magnificent creatures, but the road ahead seems arduous and fraught with difficulties. However, we refuse to give up. We hold onto an unwavering sense of hope, knowing that we must continue our efforts to save these magnificent animals.



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