

EMPOWERING LOCAL PEOPLE TO CONSERVE

ASIATIC CHEETAH

IN IRAN

FINAL REPORT

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Conservation of the Asiatic Cheetah Project



PEOPLE'S TRUST
FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES

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Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) is a non-governmental, non-profitable organization devoted to save the biodiversity which is so rich, but disappearing in Iran. Carnivores have essential priority within the ICS activities and various research and conservation projects have been implemented on the species, such as Asiatic cheetah, brown bear, striped hyena, grey wolf, Eurasian lynx, caracal, mustelids and Persian leopard whose more than two third of its wild population occurs in Iran. It has been established in 2001 (registration number 13640) and hopes to celebrate its first decade of biodiversity conservation soon.

To learn more about Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS)
visit: www.wildlife.ir

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Bafq has been always one of the main hotspots for the cheetahs in Iran, but we heard numerous reports of cheetahs being killed by local people, just for one reason: they were afraid of this unknown creature. The most tragic event dates back to 31 August 1994 when a family of cheetahs was seized by feared people. Mother run away and only one cub survived while the rest two were killed. The rescued female was brought to Tehran to be kept in Pardisan Zoo for 9 year, named as Marita.

These events encouraged us to do something for Marita's hometown since ICS establishment in 2001. Therefore, we started educational programs in 2002 until 2009. During this period, Marita always inspired our efforts; so, we would like to dedicate this work to that cheetah, Marita.



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Morteza Eslami

Managing Director, Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS)



Project Summary

With a minimum population of 70 to 100 individuals, the Iranian cheetah is one of the most endangered cats in the world which 10 to 15 animals exist in Bafq Protected Area, central Iran. The main idea to start this project came about when we found that just during the past decade, a total of at least 15 cheetahs have been illegally killed in Bafq Protected Area, surely the highest rate of mortality due to human factors in the country. Preliminary surveys were started since September 2002 to gather more data about the present situation. As drawing the problem tree, it was concluded that except occasional illegal trophy hunting, the animal is usually killed due to unawareness of local people who consider it as a serious threat to their ownership. They usually confuse it with other large predators which are frequent attacker to their livestock and even, sometimes consider it as an enemy to their human being.

Accordingly, attempts have been made to design and launch a project to reduce cheetah mortality due to human parameters. Meanwhile, due to enforced protective efforts in recent years, the cheetah number seems to increase and, on the other hand, increasing growth of human population as well as herding activities has threatened the cheetah's future in the area. Therefore, it is necessary to empower local people through a participatory approach to conserve this creature. Local people never have had an opportunity to participate in conservation of natural resources and biodiversity in Iran and this project can be a significant basic step to involve them in wildlife conservation in the country. In January 2007, a joint project was launched by the Iranian Department of the Environment, the Conservation of the Asiatic Cheetah Project (CACP), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) as the first radio-telemetry survey on Asiatic cheetah and Persian leopard in Bafq Protected Area which this proposed local community-based project can have a complementary role for it.

The present project aims at ensuring the long-term survival of the cheetah and its associated biota through a participatory approach. The main phases of designing, administration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this project have been doing by a local core group, so called the *Local Coordination Team* in this project composed of local and national relevant people/organizations. The project addresses different social target groups from the city of Bafq and 5 main villages around the Reserve, such as students, teachers, villagers, herders, hunters, decision-makers and common people through educational workshops, festivals, art & sport matches, mass media, TV, religious & national ceremonies, seminars, field visit, educational materials (including booklet, book, poster, brochure, website), etc with cooperation of local GOs, NGOs and industries. The project is practically launched after finalizing its logical framework and defining objectively verifiable indicators to enable the local coordination team to evaluate during and after the project. A number of domestic organizations/companies have promised to support this project, mainly in fields of equipments, living expenses, and a proportion of publication costs.

Ultimately, it is hopefully expected that a conservation strategy would be developed with cooperation of the project's stakeholders and empowered local partners can follow to save the cheetah. Meanwhile, cheetah mortality and observation reports will be monitored for a couple of more years after the official end of the project to evaluate the real long-term impact of the project on Bafq's cheetah population.



Introduction

With an area of more than 1,648,000 square kilometers, Islamic Republic of Iran is located in Middle East, Western Asia. The country possesses a network of less than 200 reserves, including National Park, Natural Monument, Wildlife Refuge and Protected Area, serving to conserve various aspects of the Iranian rich biodiversity (Darvishsefat 2006). The Iranian Department of the Environment (DoE) is the main governmental organization in charge of biodiversity conservation in the country.

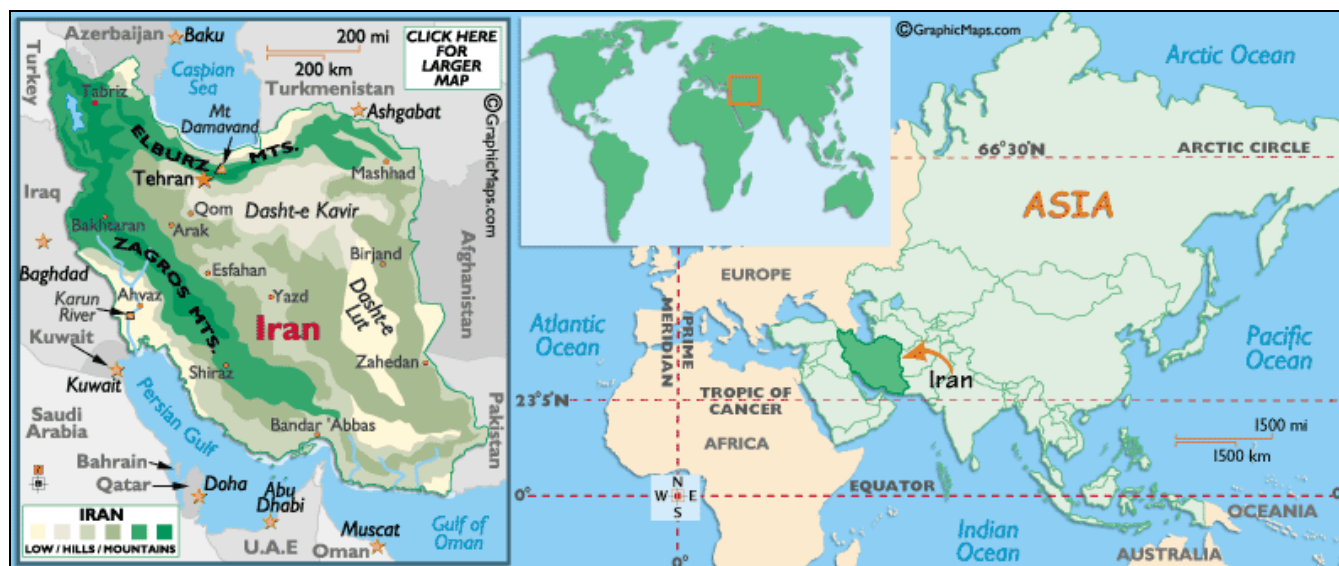


Figure 1. Location of Iran. Source: www.worldatlas.com

Once distributed from the Indian subcontinent through Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Iran to the Arabian Peninsula and Syria, the Asiatic cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*) is now one of the most endangered members of the family Felidae in the world and a flagship species for conservation measures in Iran. The last physical evidence of the cheetah in India was of three shot in 1947 by the ruler of the then Korea state. Since then, the cheetah rapidly disappeared from most of its range (Nowell & Jackson 1996). Over the past 20 years, Iran has been the last stronghold for the Asiatic cheetah, known in Iran as *Yuz*, although there have been occasional reports of cheetahs across the border in Pakistan (Farhadinia 2004). The cheetah has been listed as “Vulnerable” in 2006 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, but the Asiatic cheetah is “Critically Endangered” and is legally hunting prohibited in the country.

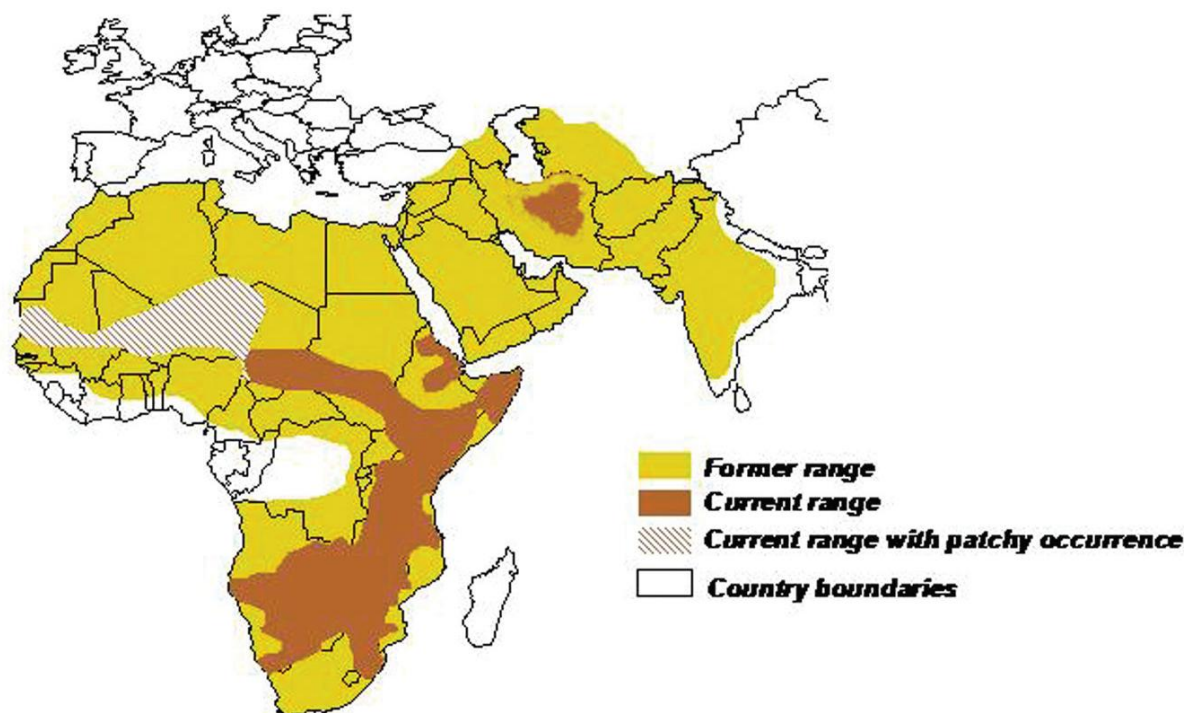


Figure 2. Distribution of cheetah in the world

Before World War II, the cheetah population was estimated to be around 400, ranging in almost all of the steppes and desert areas of the eastern half of the country and some western terrains near the Iraqi border (Harrington 1971), but the advent of the jeep after the war marked the beginning of a decrease of this animal, largely through slaughter of their essential prey species, the gazelle (Lay 1967). As a result, the cheetah population declined greatly in number. In 1956, the former Iranian Game Council declared the gazelle as protected by law and the cheetah too, in 1959. The gazelle population recovered in many areas and so did the cheetah. Cheetah sightings increased in different localities, particularly inside the gazelle habitats, revealing a remarkable resurgence of its population and the efficacy of conservational measures. In the late 1970s, the cheetah population was estimated to be 200-300 for the whole of the country (Firouz 1976), while some other experts believing it as an over-estimation noted an approximate number of 100, including 30 cheetahs for Khosh Yeilagh area (Joslin 1984), where cheetah sighting was so common (e.g. in two cases in 1970 and 1973, 13 and 9 animals were seen just during a couple of hours). The cheetah range appeared to include all the desert areas of the eastern half of the country which consists of vast expanses of largely unpopulated terrains.

In 1979, the country witnessed a revolution, which interrupted wildlife conservation for a few years. So many areas were occupied by livestock and the flat plains and steppes became the field of manoeuvre for armed 4WD vehicles and motorbikes chasing desert species, such as Persian gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*, Jebeer gazelle *Gazella bennettii*, onager *Equus hemionus onager*, and also the cheetah. The cheetah disappeared from many of its former ranges and was limited to some remote areas with a reliable prey population and relative safety, including Bafq in central Iran.

Today the Asiatic cheetah is one of the most endangered felids in the world. Its population is estimated to be around 70 to 100 restricted to the main desert areas around Dasht-e-Kavir at the eastern half of the country.

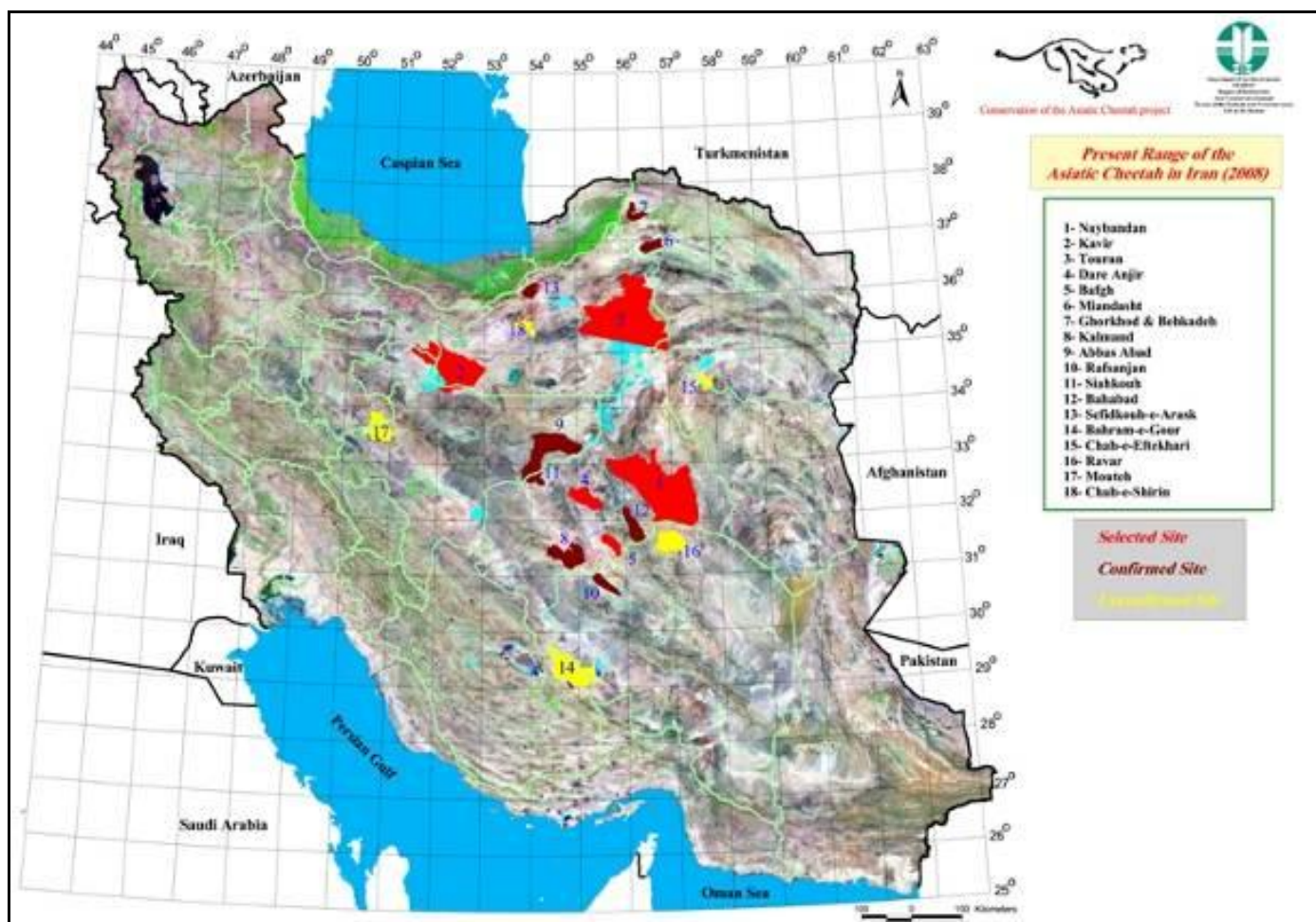


Figure 3. Present range of the Asiatic cheetah in Iran

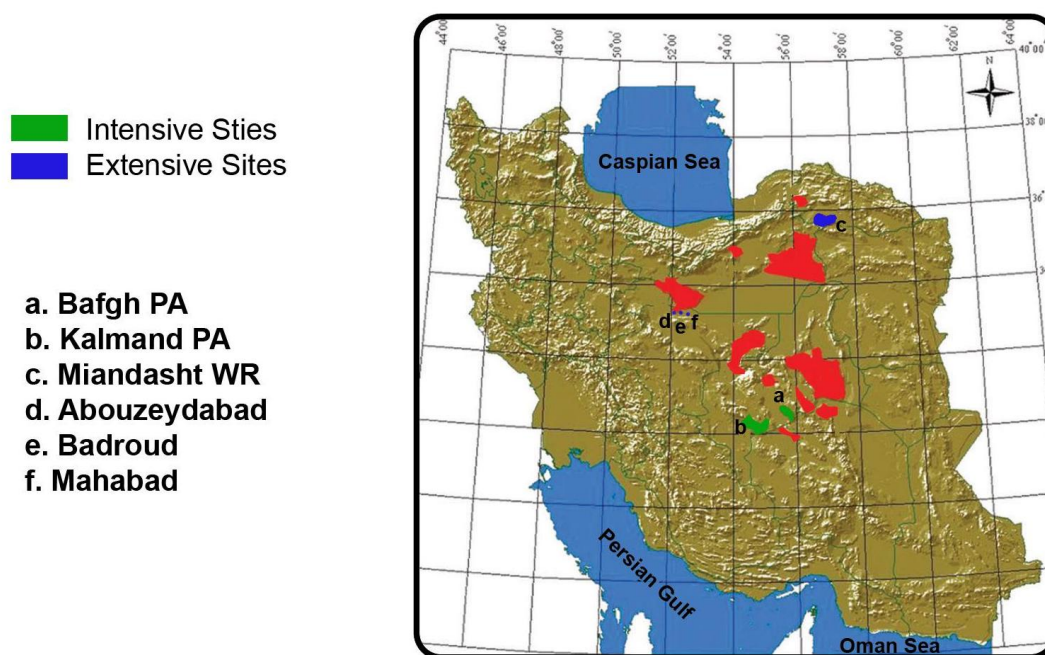


Figure 4. ICS educational sites to save the cheetah in Iran (2002-2010)



Why the Asiatic Cheetah in Bafq?

With the highest density of the Asiatic cheetah in the world, Bafq Protected Area is surrounded by 4 areas where all are supposed to be potentially a cheetah habitat. With respect to its small area and reproduction of the resident cheetah population particularly as a result of enforced conservation efforts in recent years, there is growing trend in the animals' dispersal from the area into surrounding potential habitats. However, due to high density of human settlement, at least 2 cheetahs are annually killed, mainly due to unawareness of local people who usually confuse it with other large carnivores. In other words, Bafq had surely the highest rate of mortality due to human factors in the country.

On the other hand, prey depletion due to poaching is a concern as well in the area. However, the area possesses a high base of ungulate prey species for the cheetahs and other predators and almost nobody lives on poaching and selling the ungulate meat. Also, the Iranian Department of the Environment (DOE) considers an annual quota of less than 10 animals to issue hunting permissions. On the other hand, a total of more than 20 herds of livestock (with average size of around 300 heads of livestock) graze outside the areas where the cheetahs and their main preys live. On the basis of our investigations, the cheetah rarely attacks on livestock, but it is frequently reported by local people as guilty in charge and lethal control actions are usually applied. This is also a main concern for Bafq's other endangered species, including Persian leopard, caracal, etc.

Accordingly, the present project sought some ways to empower local people to know these creatures which they usually encounter, reduce the present conflict in order to have a neutral interaction with decreased mortality for cheetahs. On the other hand, it is hopefully aimed that as a result of educational programs, poaching of the cheetah would be diminished and the people help to save the cheetah as their own natural heritage. Since the project is implemented by a local team formed in Bafq, its results can impact can be expected to be sustainable under a conservation strategy in long-term.

Figure 5. Young cheetah killed in 1994 in southern Bafq



Figure 6. In 2002, three cheetah cubs were burnt inside their den by a shepherd, because he supposed to prevent these animals to be future "enemies"



Threats to Cheetah Survival in Bafq

Poaching Cheetah

The main reason for cheetah poaching is not trophy hunting, but it is often supposed to be an enemy to the livestock and human ownership, so local people shoot the animal. Meanwhile, human-carnivore interaction assessment indicate that the cheetah rarely attack to livestock comparing to other animals, such as wolf, leopard, and even caracal and jackal.



Poaching Preys

Prey hunting is usually due to catch meat (for use or sale). Other than rifles, leg-hold traps are also used to kill the ungulates, mainly around waterholes.



Habitat Loss

With respect to growing network of roads, railroads and industrial and mining plans, the area is susceptible to be encompassed. Furthermore, overgrazing can result in degradation of habitat for ungulates, and as a consequence for the cheetah.



Roads

Bafq Protected Area is surrounded by roads which are a serious threat for the cheetahs migrating/dispersing to neighboring habitats (Ariz No Hunting Area in north, Bahabad No Hunting Area in east, Kalmand Protected Area in west). Higher traffic frequency in recent years has caused a few cheetahs to be killed in road incident.

The present project targeted mainly cheetah poaching which is mainly due to lack of ability among local people to recognize the cheetah from other carnivores who are mainly in charge of livestock depredation. No compensation program has been implemented, as the cheetahs rarely attack on livestock. Instead, the people needed to know the cheetah, so they do not shoot any predator.

Moreover, for prey poaching, the project tried to clarify basic needs of the cheetah for survival which prey is so important. Finally, the project attempted to increase authorities awareness about the cheetah habitat in order to respect to its essential needs when approving development plans.



Project Aims and Objectives

The present project aims at ensuring the long-term survival of cheetah and its associated biota through a participatory approach.

The objectives of this project were to empower local people to participate in developing and implementing a conservation strategy for whole the ecosystem, including the cheetah by:

1. Developing a local core group composed of local stakeholders for administration and implementation of the present project through a participatory approach;
2. Forming and empowering local NGO/groups inside villages as educational partners;
3. Assessment of local people's knowledge about the cheetah and their attitude toward it;
4. Assessment of human-predator interaction, mainly among villagers;
5. Preparation of educational materials for specific target groups;
6. Implementation of educational programs specifically for villagers and shepherds;
7. Increasing public awareness among the people of the city of Bafq;
8. Increasing the local villagers' awareness about preventive control methods to reduce livestock depredation by carnivores;
9. Preparation a conservation strategy collaboratively aiming at ensuring the cheetah long-term survival;
10. Continuation of awareness increasing and conservational activities by empowered local groups after the end of the project;
11. Increasing the frequency of cheetah reports by local people;
12. Increasing the frequency of cheetah sightings made by game guards (in long-term);
13. Decreasing the cheetah mortality due to local people (in long-term).

In sum, the present project seeks some way to empower local people to know these creatures which they usually encounter, reduce the present conflict in order to have a neutral interaction with decreased mortality for cheetahs. On the other hand, it is hopefully aimed that as a result of educational programs, poaching of the cheetah would be diminished and the people help to save the cheetah as their own natural heritage. Since the project is implemented by a local team formed in Bafq, its results can be expected to be sustainable under a conservation strategy in long-term.

It was hopefully expected that after a period of 5 years, cheetah mortality due to human causes would decrease by half and surrounding potential habitats around Bafq Protected Area would be cloned by dispersed cheetahs from their main origin.



Project Site: Bafq, Central Iran

Natural Features

Bordering the city of Bafq, eastern Yazd province is one of the most important cheetah reserves, with an area of 88527 hectares which was designated protected area in 1996. This mountainous region has sparse plains and rolling hills. The altitude range of 1060- 2860 m, and mean annual precipitation and temperature of 70 mm and 160c, respectively have resulted in extra-arid and arid climate in the region. Springs, wells, air pumps and small dams constructed at high altitudes are the main water supplies of the region. Bafq Mountain is rich in vegetation cover. Some of the main plant species are juniper, Turk terebinth pistache, mountain almond, tamarisk, saxaul, bean caper, soda plant, poppy mallow, acanthofyllum, wormwood, prickly thrift, saltwort, camel's thorn (Darvishsefat 2006). There are more than 80 species of medicinal and industrial plants in Bafq.

The area has large numbers of wild sheep, wild goat and Jebeer gazelle. Persian leopard *Panthera pardus saxicolor*, the largest subspecies occurs in relative high numbers. It is estimated that there are at least 5 cheetahs in the area, and because of the size of the region; the cheetah density is fairly high compared with the other cheetah reserves. Unfortunately, because of high conflict between humans and the cheetah, two tragedies took place during the past years; in 1994 two cubs were killed and the third captured, called Marita. Also, in June 2003 three two month old cubs were burned by a local herder (Farhadinia 2004).



Figure 7. Marita in Pardisan Park, Tehran (Photo: Mohammad Farhadinia)

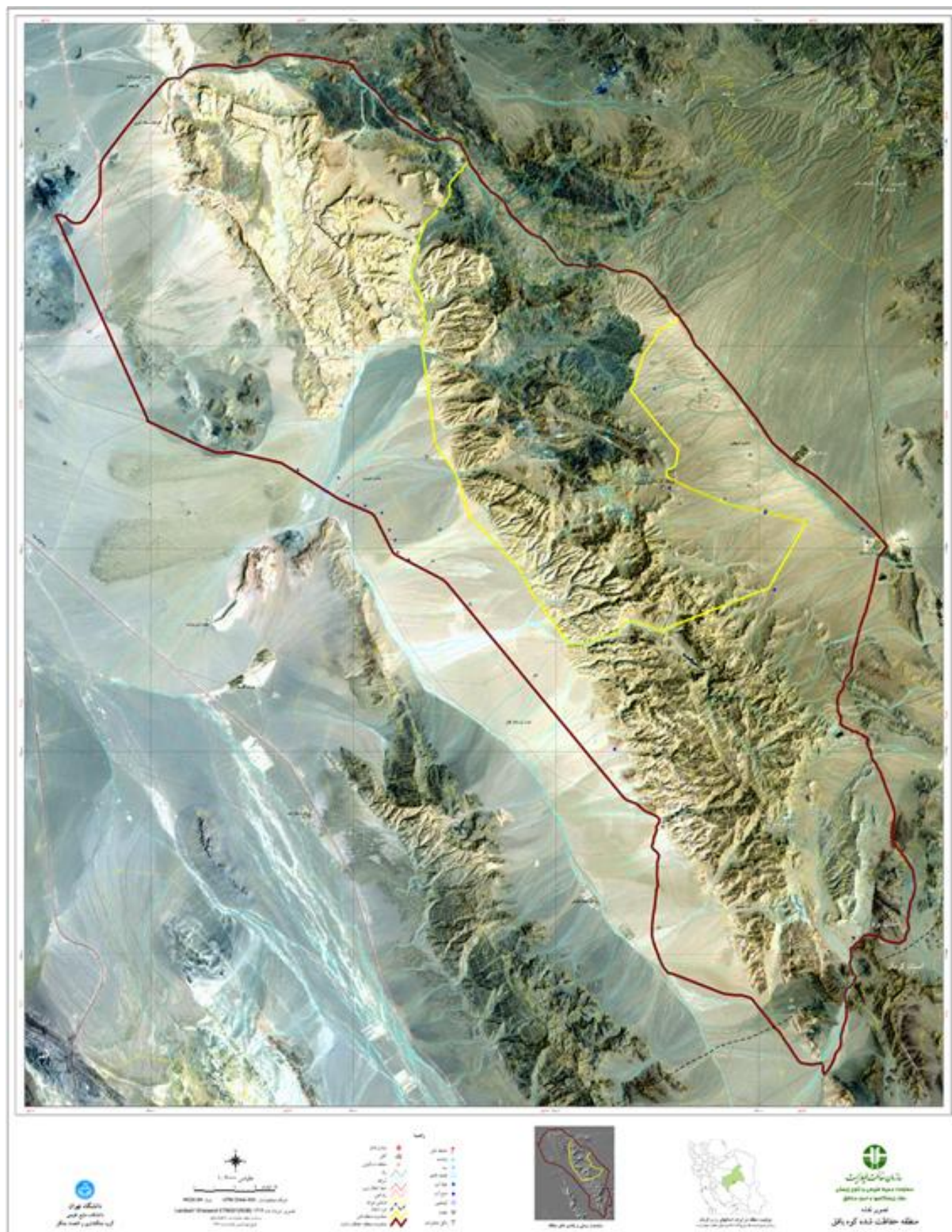


Figure 8. Map of Bafq Protected Area



Figure 9. Asiatic cheetah (Photo: Aliakbar Karimi)



Figure 10. Persian leopard (Photo: Chris Walzer)



Figure 11. Caracal (Photo: Asghar Khajei)



Figure 12. Wild goat (Photo: Bafq Office of Environment)



Figure 13. Wild sheep (Photo: Bafq Office of Environment)



Figure 14. Jebeer gazelle(Photo: Bafq Office of Environment)



Socio-Economic Circumstances

City of Bafq is located on the train route of several main railway lines, such as Tehran-Kerman or Tehran-Bandar-e Abbas which has made it easily accessible. It is a hub of mining industry in Iran and there are great mines in Bafq.

With an area of 17683.8 square kilometer, the city of Bafq has a population of over 52888 individuals (according to national census in 2006). It has the first grade of literacy in Yazd province. Most of its people live in urban areas and only 14455 persons live in rural areas. Nowadays, due to consecutive droughts and lack of enough welfare facilities in the cities, there is an increasing trend of migration from villages to cities.

A population of more than 31046 individuals live only in the city of Bafq, people, meanwhile, it is surrounded by a total of 197 villages and oases. Only 17 villages are inhabited by more than 20 households.

Since some of the most populated villages of Bafq are situated within Bafq Protected Area, there is a significant interaction between human and wildlife, particularly the Asiatic cheetah. Five main villages were identified to have highest priority for conservation education efforts to save the cheetah and area.

During inception phase of the project, a baseline was completed which a brief description about target villages is as following.

Table 1. Socio-economic circumstances of target villages according to the project baseline

| | | | Shadkam | Ghotrom | Sheytour | Dolat Abad | Bajegan |
|---|------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|------------------|
| Location in relation to Bafq Protected Area | | | Centre | Centre | North | Northeast | East |
| Population | People | Inhabitants | 200 | 100 | 277 | 550 | 220 |
| | | Summer Residents | 460 | 200 | 800 | 700 | 700 |
| | Households | Inhabitant | 98 | 70 | 90 | 100 | 75 |
| | | Summer Residents | 98 | 70 | 130 | 100 | 111 |
| No. of Herders | | | 8 | 10 | 10 | - | - |
| No. of Herds | | | 9 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Numbers of livestock | | | 1500 | 3000 | 2300 | 1800 | 2000 |
| Location of Rangeland | Summer | | Sheytour Plain | Qotrom Plain | Sheytour Plain | Sheytour Plain | Around village |
| | Winter | | Qotrom Plain | Qotrom Plain | Sheytour Plain | Sheytour Plain | Around village |
| No. of Schools | | | No | No | 1 primary school and 1 junior high school | 1 Junior high school | 1 primary school |
| No. of Students | | | No | No | 30 | 35 | 6 |
| Health Centre | | | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Main Careers | | | Livestock and farming | Livestock and farming | Livestock, farming and mining | Livestock and farming | Mainly retired |



Figure 15. Dolat Abad and Sheytour, two main target villages



Figure 16. Farming and herding are the main careers of villager



Methods

The first serious steps for this project were started in September 2002 when preliminary surveys were done about the cheetah and possible threats to its survival in Bafq. Initially, a designing team was formed composed of ICS and local people to draw the problem trees and determine the basic objectives. Accordingly, a preliminary logical framework has been prepared to estimate the project's budget. Negotiation was started with potential funding agencies to support this project which has been successful to cover residence and a local secretariat expenses, a proportion of publication of educational materials cost and partial support to train and empower the project team members from ICS and local communities.

After the practical start of the project, a comprehensive analysis of stakeholders done to form a local group, namely the Local Coordination Team to organize, administer, implement, monitor and evaluate the project. The local group finalized the project's logical framework, defined objectively verifiable indicators (OVI) and revised budget and time-table.

After evaluated people's awareness about the cheetah and their attitudes toward it through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques, a baseline of information prepared.

The main phases of designing, administration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this project have been doing by a local core group, so called the Local Coordination Team in this project composed of local and national relevant people/organizations.

The project addressed different social target groups from the city of Bafq and five main villages around the Reserve, such as students, teachers, villagers, herders, hunters, decision-makers and common people through educational workshops, festivals, art & sport matches, mass media, TV, religious & national ceremonies, seminars, field visit, educational materials (including booklet, book, poster, brochure, website), etc with cooperation of local GOs, NGOs and industries. The project was practically launched after finalizing its logical framework and defined objectively verifiable indicators to enable the local coordination team to evaluate during and after the project. A number of domestic organizations/companies supported this project, mainly in fields of equipments, living expenses, and a proportion of publication costs.

On the other hand, large carnivores were in direct conflict with local people in villages which sometime result in lethal control actions. The conflict with different species was assessed and local meetings were held to discuss about the situation and possible solutions to reduce predator depredation. Compensation plans were also reviewed in case of the cheetah and leopard, however, with high carefulness. For instance, negotiation was facilitated between villagers and relevant GOs to launch a livestock insurance program. Needless to mention, but it was critical to empower them to identify various predators in the field and motivate them to report their sightings to game guards. Local NGOs or enthusiastic people inside each village were trained to train and empower local people to involve their site in collaborative wildlife conservation.

While implementation of the project, the local coordination team monitored the project and evaluated the outcomes based on OVIs determined in logical framework. Progress reports were distributed among the project stakeholders, especially donors.

At the same time, the project sought for ways to ensure the sustainability of the project outcome after its official ended. Therefore, formation and organizing the local groups who was in charge of all the project's affairs as well as empowering local NGOs (in Bafq and villages) could ensure that cheetah activities would not be collapsed after the project.

To conclude the project, people's awareness and participation was evaluated and possible fields of activities for future were drawn.



Activities

Team Capacity Building

The project team members attended in 3 consecutive educational workshops with a total duration of 10 days in Tehran, Shahroud and Bafq. Also, 6 representatives from local community were invited to attend the workshops. They were great opportunities for the participants to learn basic rules of implementing a collaborative project at local level aiming at conserving an area/a species. Also, Morteza Eslami attended in another workshop to learn more about facilitation skills. Kaveh Hatami participated in workshops for financial management of the project. All these training courses and workshops were organized and funded by the UNDP/GEF/SGP Iran. In 2006, Mohammad Farhadinia was also trained in Conservation Leadership Program (formerly known as BP Conservation Program) training course in the UK.

The project team had ??? of meetings to discuss about the project, each member's role and designing each activity. Also, regular meetings were held with the project's Iranian donors to talk about the project and present feedbacks and progress report.



Figure 17. Reporting meeting with donors in Tehran



Figure 18. Team members field visit



Figure 19. Capacity building workshop with local partners in Bafq



Figure 20. One of numerous team meetings in the ICS office in Tehran



Formation of Local Coordination Group

After stakeholder analysis, a Local Coordination Group was formed composing of relevant stakeholders as one of the first significant steps to implement the project. The group was opened by Bafq Governor and representatives from Ministry of Education, Tourism and Natural Heritage Organization, Natural Resources Organization, Department of Environment, Bafq Centre for Education of Kids and Juveniles, Religious leader office, relevant villages's Islamic Councils, Bafq Red Crescent Organization and the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) attended the meetings. Formation of the group aimed at introducing the project to the stakeholders to conduct decision-making and monitoring process in a collaborative approach.



Figure 21. Representatives of stakeholders in Local Coordination Group, including Bafq Governor



Figure 22. Local Coordination Group meeting discussing about the project



Local NGOs & CBOs

Based on baseline surveys, a total of 17 NGOs and CBOs were identified to be relevant to be selected as local partner. Meetings were held with 10 of them in Yazd as well as Bafq to find joint fields for partnership.

"Bafq Red Crescent" was elected to be eligible as an educational partner with enthusiastic volunteers who helped significantly to promote the project. Moreover, two more CBOs formed in two villages, Sheytour and Dolat Abad which both competitively participated in the project's efforts.



Figure 23. Meetings with local groups to establish a MoU



Educating school students

After initial field visits, the project team developed appropriate lesson plans for two grades, primary schools and junior high schools. Lesson plans comprised of a combination of posters, brochures, interactive map, stories, etc. Meanwhile, 4 clips were produced about the cheetah, its behavior, difference with other cats and its status in Bafq for the students. Lesson plans were trained to more than 16 trainers to start education.

A total of 800 students in the city of Bafq were educated during the first year of school education in 21 workshops. Target schools were selected based on advices of local authorities as to have the highest impact for the cheetah conservation. Finally, about 130 students were chosen based on their performance and interest to be educated more specifically about the cheetah. Field visits were arranged for selected students in companion of game wardens to visit Bafq Protected Area to apply their learnings within the cheetah habitat. Also, school libraries were equipped with more than 40 books on nature and wildlife, provided by 8 publishing company, mainly bought by the ICS for educational purposes.

Meanwhile, several matches were held for the students to send their painting, compositions and stories to the Bafq Office of Environment. Declarations were sent to all the city schools to announce the opportunity and numerous works were received.

Talented students were selected to train local students who live in villages within the protected area. Three workshops were held for local students with Bafq students as trainers. Finally, the most talented students were awarded due to more than 2 years of cheetah conservation effort in Bafq in a final ceremony jointly held by Bafq Office of Education.



Figure 24. Books for donation to local libraries



Figure 25. Educating students using various educational materials and lesson plans



Figure 26. Pre-test exams before each workshop to assess student's knowledge



Figure 27. Holding educational workshops in each village



Figure 28. Group photo at the end of each workshop



Figure 29. Training selected students in 2nd year



Figure 30. Students field visits with game wardens



Figure 31. Village's students trained by the city's trained students



Empowering Bafq Centre for Education of Kids and Juveniles

One of the great chances in Bafq is a center where is depended to the Iranian Ministry of Education. The centre's trainers have been so keen about the cheetah, so they have always allocated a portion of their volunteer time to work with students about the cheetah. In 2002, they received a generous donation from UNDP and Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project to provide a PC due to their efforts to hold painting exhibition about the cheetah. The project held a few educational workshops for the centre's trainers in order to be more capable to educate students. Also, their library was equipped with more than 40 books about nature and wildlife for kids and juveniles. The books were donated from the ICS to the center.



Figure 32. Discussion sessions and workshops of the centre tutors to be empowered

On the other hand, in order to specify cheetah educational programs as part of their annual schedule, a few meetings were held with them as well as their higher decision-making authorities in the capital which was highly welcomed.

The centre have held several exhibitions based on students' works such as painting, poems, composition, research papers, hand-made things. Moreover, they developed a small theater group composed of students.



Project Newsletter

Communication between different stakeholders and securing an updated information flow is an essential guarantee that project partners sustain their involvement. Accordingly, two kinds of newsletter were developed to maintain the process.

Cheetahletter is the official newsletter of the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) which is published quarterly to reflect latest activities and outcomes to the partners and volunteers. Bafq project was cited several times in the Cheetahletter which was printed and sent a large database, including partners, stakeholders and authorities in Bafq.

Meanwhile, to cover Bafq reports and activities more specifically, a special newsletter was published during the project, namely as Bafq Cheetahletter, printed and mailed to the project partners, Bafq people and national donors. It was published on a monthly basis to sustain a dynamic communication at local level.



Figure 33. Some samples of Bafq Cheetahletters



Festivals and Ceremonies

During the project, more than 4 festivals were held in Bafq which brought large number of people to learn about the cheetah in Bafq.

In October 2002, the first festival was organized in central hall of Iron Company, named as “Friendship with Cheetah under Rainbow in Bafq”. The event took place after 3 cheetahs were burnt in Bafq by a local herder and various educational programs had great impact on the people.

In May 2008, the project final ceremony was held in Bafq to conclude several years of education in the city as well as the villages. It was named as “Festival of Land of the Cheetah’s Children”. Most of the cities high-ranked authorities lectured in the ceremony and showed their support and passion to save the cheetahs in Bafq. Meanwhile, cheetah theater and films were showed for the public. Finally, all stakeholders were acknowledged. Game wardens were a special part of the program, as they were recognized by the people and were highly applauded by the public.

In September 2008, the first “Cheetah Day” festival was held in Bafq, concurring the anniversary of Marita’s tragedy. The festival was attended by numerous local people, particularly from villages who each held a booth for the festival.

Meanwhile, several events were also organized for the students to conclude each educational phase in schools and to select new eligible students for next phase.



Figure 34. Awarding outstanding students in “Friendship with Cheetah under Rainbow” festival in 2002



Figure 35. Many Bafqi people attended in “Friendship with Cheetah under Rainbow in Bafq” festival in 2002



Figure 36. Cheetah theater in “Friendship with Cheetah under Rainbow in Bafq” festival on October 2002



Figure 37. Final ceremony poster of “Festival of Land of the Cheetah’s Children” on May 2008



Figure 38. Acknowledging Bafq’s game wardens by local authorities



Figure 39. Most of local high-ranked authorities attended in the final ceremony



Education and capacity building programs for villages' people

During baseline surveys, 5 villages were identified to have the highest interaction with the Protected Area, namely as Sheytour, Dolat Abad, Qotroum, Bajgan and Shadkam. In villages, large carnivores are in direct conflict with local people which sometime resulted in lethal control actions. The conflict with different species was assessed and local meetings were held to discuss about the situation and possible solutions to reduce predator depredation. Compensation plans were also considered in case of the cheetah and leopard, however, with high carefulness. For instance, negotiation was facilitated between villagers and relevant NGOs/GOs to launch a livestock insurance program. However, due to non-stable system of the relevant GO partners, the process failed to form a perfect system.

Also, local NGOs or enthusiastic people inside each village were sought to train and empower to form local partners to involve their site in collaborative wildlife conservation. Because of this villagers and herdsman who live near cheetah's habitat, were informed about the differences between cheetah and other felines and that not only cheetah is harmless for their herds, but also it can act as a tourist attraction factor and it was brought to their attention that, tourism industry boosts the economy of their region.

During baseline surveys in Bafq, 17 NGOs/CBOs were identified. Most of them were negotiated to find potential ways for partnership. Finally, 3 groups were selected for more cooperation. Specific meetings were held with each one to look for how to involve them based on the project TOR and their capabilities. Some of them developed a workplan to clarify their integration in the project.

At villages, 2 CBOs were talked willing to participate in educational activities for the public. Also, Islamic Council members were met and partnerships approached were discussed.

Accordingly, educational programs were implemented with cooperation of local groups for the public.



Figure 40. Meeting with members of Dolatabad Society



Figure 41. Meeting with members of Sheytour Green Society



Figure 42. Visiting Sheytour Plain as one of the main rangelands for local herders with local CBOs



Figure 43. Mapping rangelands, herds and cheetah sightings with local people



Figure 44. Discussing about local CBOs' involvement and activities in educational programs



Figure 45. Educating local herders to remove mis-understandings about the cheetah



Project Outcomes

Decreased Cheetah Poachings

During 1990s, annually a total of 1.5-2 cheetahs were killed by local people, mainly due to confusion with other predators which were in charge of livestock depredation. However, during 2000s, particularly after the project implementation, the record decreased to less than one animal per annum.

Moreover, the people interact more actively with game wardens and Bafq Office of Environment, as at least 5 sightings are reported each year to the wardens, likely due to more awareness among people to identify the cheetah and to know its importance.

Figure 46. Two adolescents poached by a local camel herder in 1997 in Ariz, northern Bafq

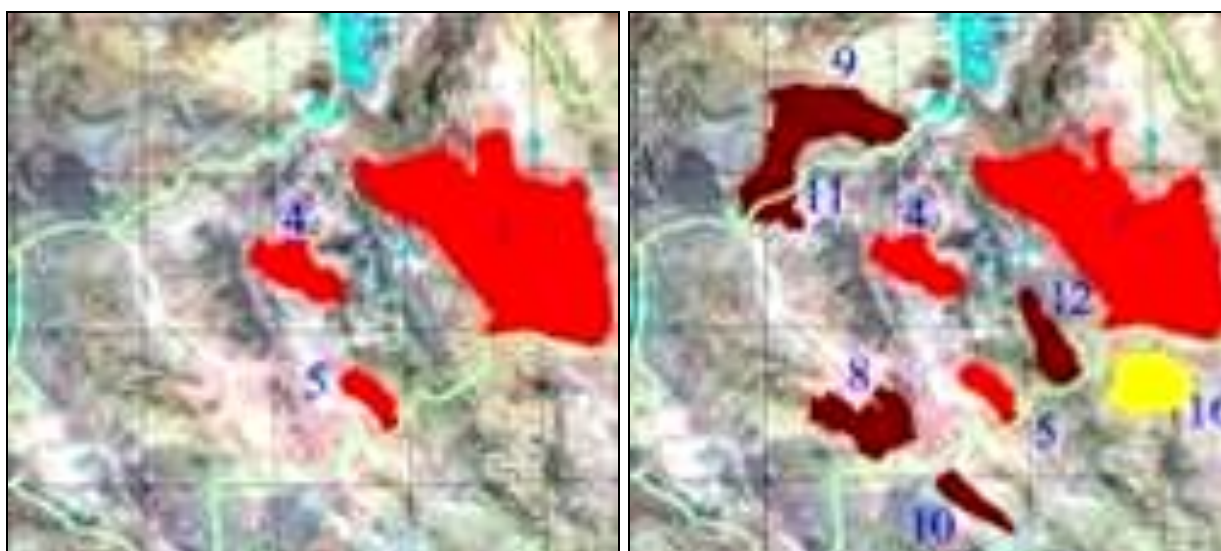


Figure 47. These maps indicate cheetah occurrence in central Iran in 2000 and 2008. Area no.5 is Bafq where in 2000 (left map) no other area was confirmed to hold the cheetahs. But in 2008 (right map), brown patches indicate extension of confirmed habitats for the cheetahs, particularly around Bafq, such as no. 12 (Bahabad), no.8 (Kalmand) and no.10 (Rafsanjan).



A Model for Conservation Education in Iran

Bafq has been a special location for cheetah conservation in Iran. It possessed the highest human-caused mortality in Iran. The most remarkable tragedies for the cheetahs took place in Bafq. Moreover, it was Marita's hometown which was the only captive Asiatic cheetah in the world with numerous citations on national and international media. Also, Bafq hosted the first radio-telemetry effort in Iran, led jointly by Iranian Department of Environment, Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project, UNDP and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)/Panthera in 2006. Meanwhile, regular citation about the project by the ICS on mass media, ICS website and newsletters resulted in that Bafq had the chance to be visited by various partners at local, national and international level. Som it has been a special areas with high attention.

Meanwhile, with respect to the project activities, it has defined as a conservation education model for the cheetah habitats in Iran and was regularly visited by various partners, managers, international authorities and donors as following:

1. *Delavar Najafi*, Deputy of Natural Environment and Biodiversity of the Iranian Department of Environment (DoE)
2. *Hosseini*, Manager, Bureau of Wildlife and Biodiversity, Iran DoE
3. *Elzira Seginbau*, Deputy of UNDP Iran
4. *Mehdi Kamyab*, UNDP Iran
5. *Laleh Daraie*, Executive Manager, UNDP/GEF/SGP Iran
6. *Alireza Jourabchian*, National Manager, Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project
7. *Houshang Ziaie*, Ex-National Manager, Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project
8. *Hesam Hosseini*, Manager, Yazd Provincial Office of DoE
9. *Urs Britenmoser*, Co-Chairman, IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group
10. Most of local authorities

In fact, visiting such a large relevant group of partners of the project site provided the ICS an opportunity to get feedbacks and have occasional monitoring and evaluation. Also, it indicated high national support from the project which was motivating for the project team as well as local partners.



Figure 48. Laleh Daraie (UNDP/GEF/SGP manager) at the final ceremony in Bafq



Figure 49. Urs Breitenmoser and Alireza Jourabchian in Orsestan Game Post, Bafq PA



Figure 50. From left to right: Houshang Ziaie, Delavar Najafi and Hosseini in Bafq



Figure 51. Elzira Seginbau and Mehdi Kamyab visiting Sheytour village, Bafq



Figure 52. Ayatollah Soleymani and Mr Tafakori, religious leader and governor of Bafq



Increasing People's Awareness

More than 50% of the city's primary and junior high school students were educated, its habitat and their role to ensure its survival. Pre and post workshop questionnaire evaluation indicated higher knowledge about the main issues among the students.

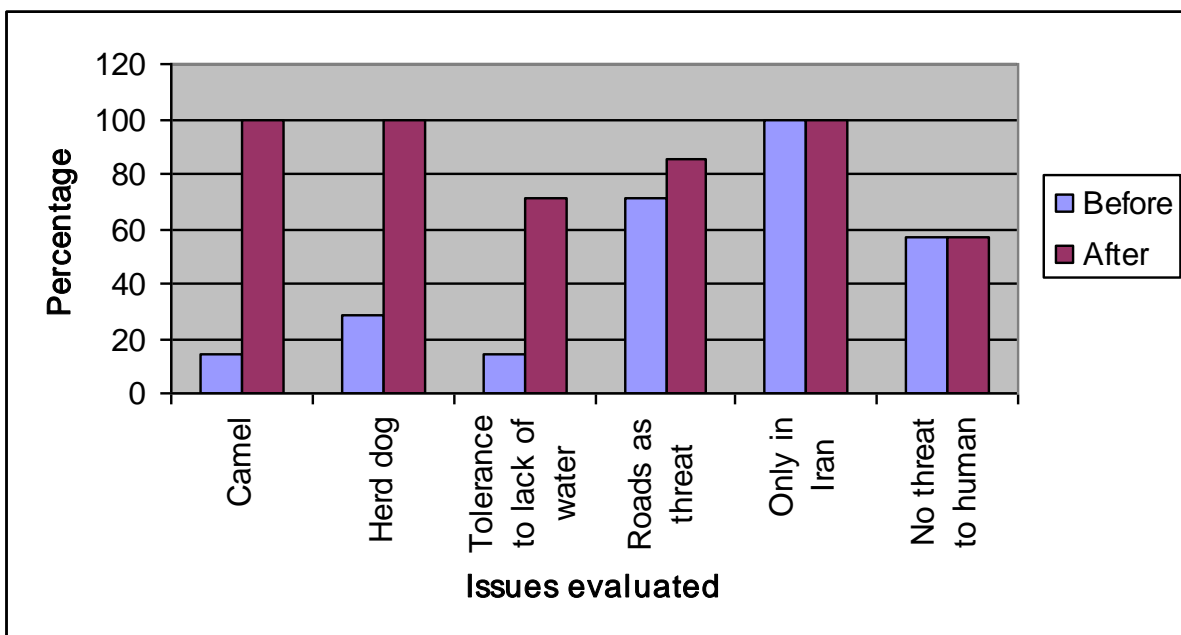


Figure 53. Some results of students' knowledge evaluation before and after workshops

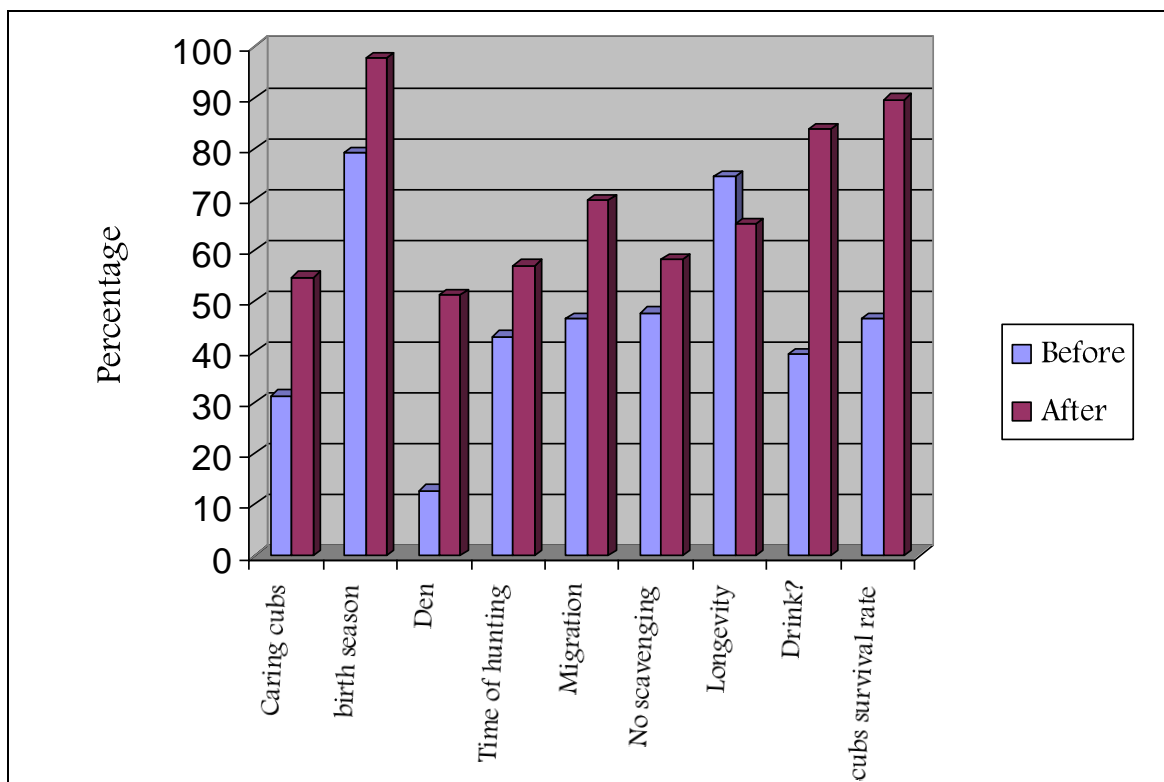


Figure 54. Some results of students' knowledge evaluation on cheetah biology before and after workshops

Furthermore, the city's people became aware that this area is one of the last habitats of the Asiatic cheetah in Iran. They also learnt where the animals exist and how not-evaluated development can threaten their future.



Mass Media Coverage

Mass media has been a useful approach to achieve common people, both at national and local levels. Accordingly, the project was broadcasted on newspapers and magazines on 8 occasions. Moreover, local TV and radio covered the project activities on 10 times. Below some samples are available to see.



Figure 55. Some newspaper samples about the project



Cheetah Square

Due to educational activities in Bafq, the cheetah has been recognized as a symbol for the city. Accordingly, local authorities planned to establish a Cheetah Square. Fortunately, Central Iron Company funded the project (around 12000 £) and two cheetah statues were constructed. The square is located at the city entrance opened in an official ceremony by Bafq highest religious leader on July 2009.

The cheetah square is the first of its kind in Iran which was completely decided and funded by local sources, indicating high tendency of local people to save the cheetah as their treasure.



Figure 56. Opening ceremony of Cheetah Square in Bafq



Figure 57. Participants at the opening ceremony of Cheetah Square in Bafq



Figure 58. Location of cheetah statues in front of city's main constructing hotel



Continuation of Educational Activities

Before the project implementation, no educational activity was done in the city. After finishing the project, it was requested from local people to continue educational activities which were not possible to sustain it anymore, as the ICS plan was to implement more educational programs in other habitats.

Meanwhile, a number of the project enthusiastic partners centralized in Bafq Office of Environment formed a local group (trying to register as a NGO) to spread educational activities. They have held several festivals and educational workshops for the city people.



Figure 59. Describing cheetah behavior and ecology for students by Bafq game wardens



Figure 60. Student workshop held by Bafq Office of Environment

Furthermore, a weblog was developed by Bafq Office of Environment to reflect latest news about Bafq Protected Area to public. The weblog is available as bafghdoe.blogfa.com.



Support of local political, religious and industrial authorities of cheetah conservation in Bafq

Bafq is a developing city with growing network of roads, railroads as well as increasing trend of iron mine exploration and exploitation which potentially can increase the city's income. On the other hand, most of the area is the cheetah habitat which is threatened by the above-mentioned factors.

One of the main goals of the project has been to raise awareness of local authorities in such a way to consider cheetah conservation in developing plans. Accordingly, authorities were targeted and involved in the project.

The religious city's high religious leader has supported the initiative in different events and has asked the people to accompany the process. Also, local political decision-makers are now more conservative to revise the development activities in the region. Central Iron Company also tried to consider the cheetah conservation as much as possible and fund educational actions, including cheetah square.



Figure 61. Central Iron Mine in Bafq



More Involvement of Local NGOs/CBOs

Based on the project baseline, at least 17 NGOs/CBOs are registered in Bafq, mainly for social, charity and religious purposes. However, they have never been involved in any environmental activity. A number of them have been empowered and invited to take part in the project, mainly those base in local villages.

Their most significant measures are as following:

- Producing 2 movies about the Protected Area and distributing among their families;
- Sites visits for village people;
- Printing educational brochures and distributing among tourists;
- Holding soccer matches with cheetah cup;
- Regular broadcasting wildlife movies on the village's Agriculture Training Centre.

Meanwhile, the most considerable outcome of local CBOs involvement is abandonemtn of *Bafq Road Construction Project*. The road aimed at the heard of the protected area where possessed the highest density of the cheetah to connect several villages to the city of Bafq. Presently, there is a useful road, but the new road was planned to pass through the PA to shorten villages-Bafq distance some 30 kiolmeters. It has had a controversial backbone of more than 10 years, as the Iranian DoE did not issued necessary permissions. But, local people always emphasized on the project and it has been one of the usual asks from the city' Parlimanet representative. After the project implementation, the people became aware about the importance of their nearby habitat and they discussed to avoid more follow-up of the project. In a recent visit to Bafq by the Iranian President, the project was officially cancelled.

It is an indication that educational local people decided to save the habitat for a species which they believe that belongs to their hometown.



Figure 62. Present trail which was formerly discussed to be constructed as the new road, now used as warden patrolling trail



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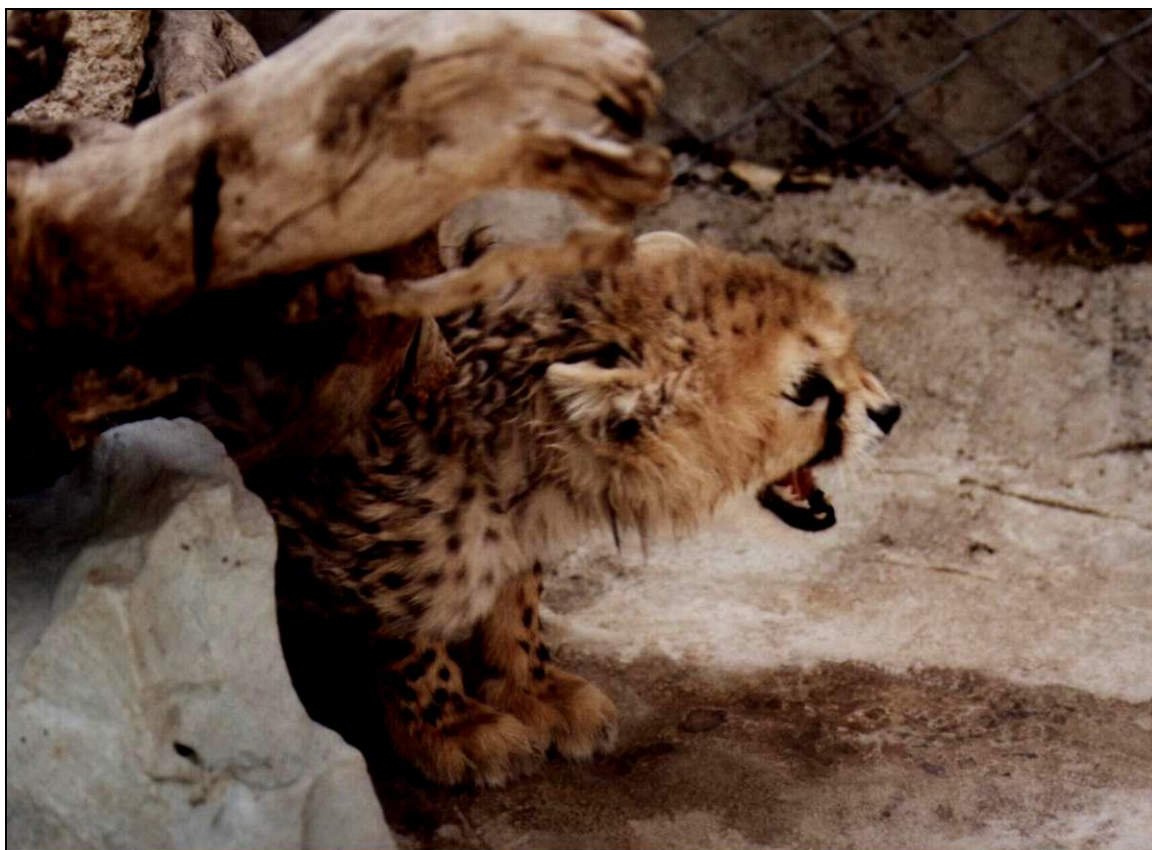


Figure 63. Marita when was just translocated to Pardisan Park, Tehran (Photo: M.Khalili)



Appendix 1. Some of educational materials



Figure 64. Bafq carnivores field guide

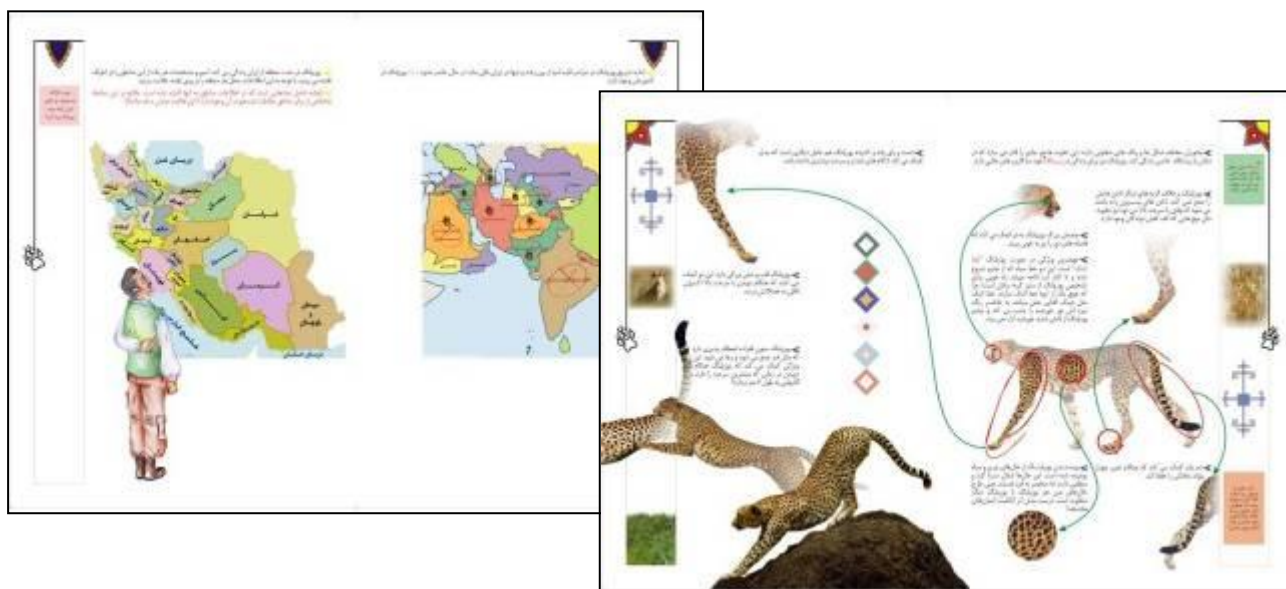


Figure 65. Layouts of cheetah educational Manual for students



Figure 66. Cheetah postcards

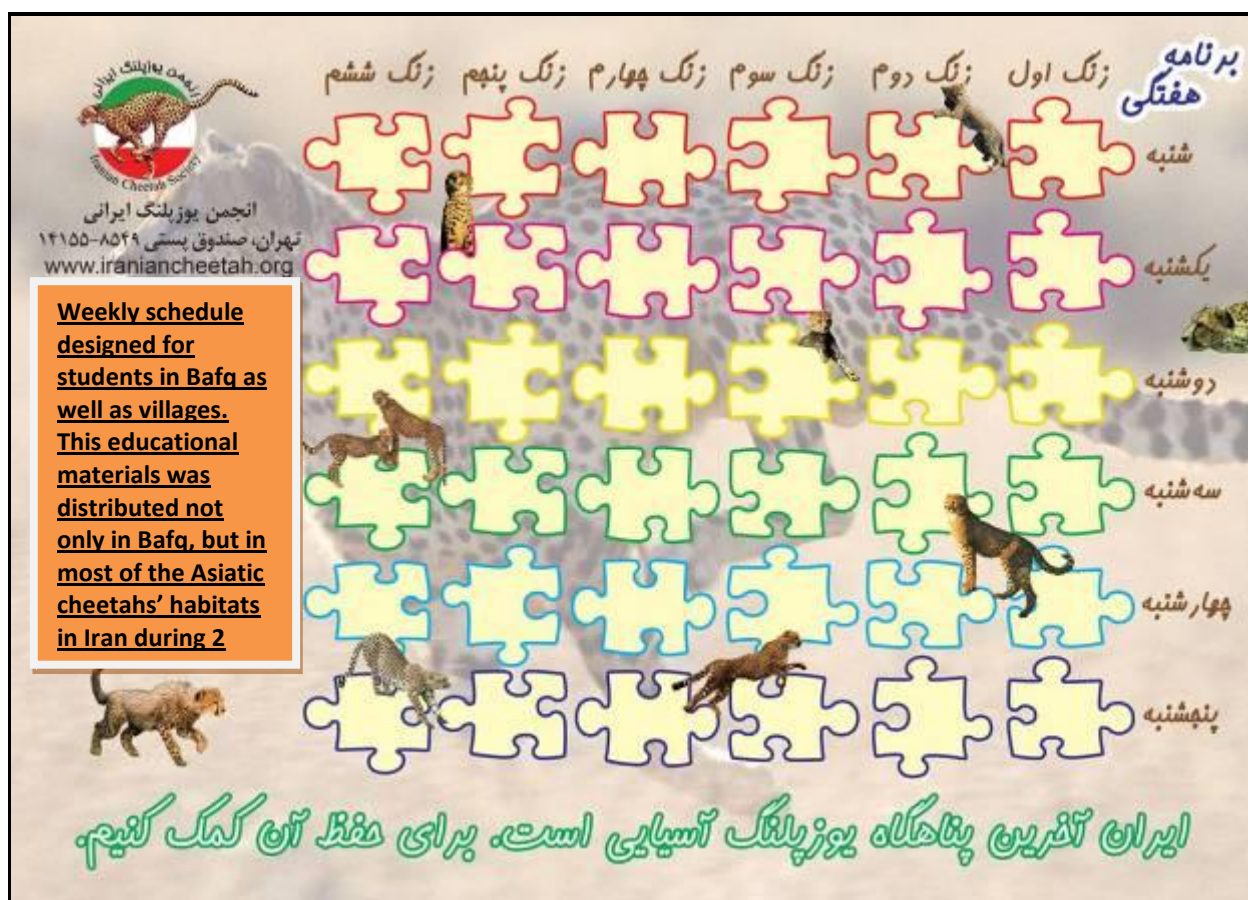


Figure 67. Students' weekly schedule



Figure 68. Cheetah pugmark label

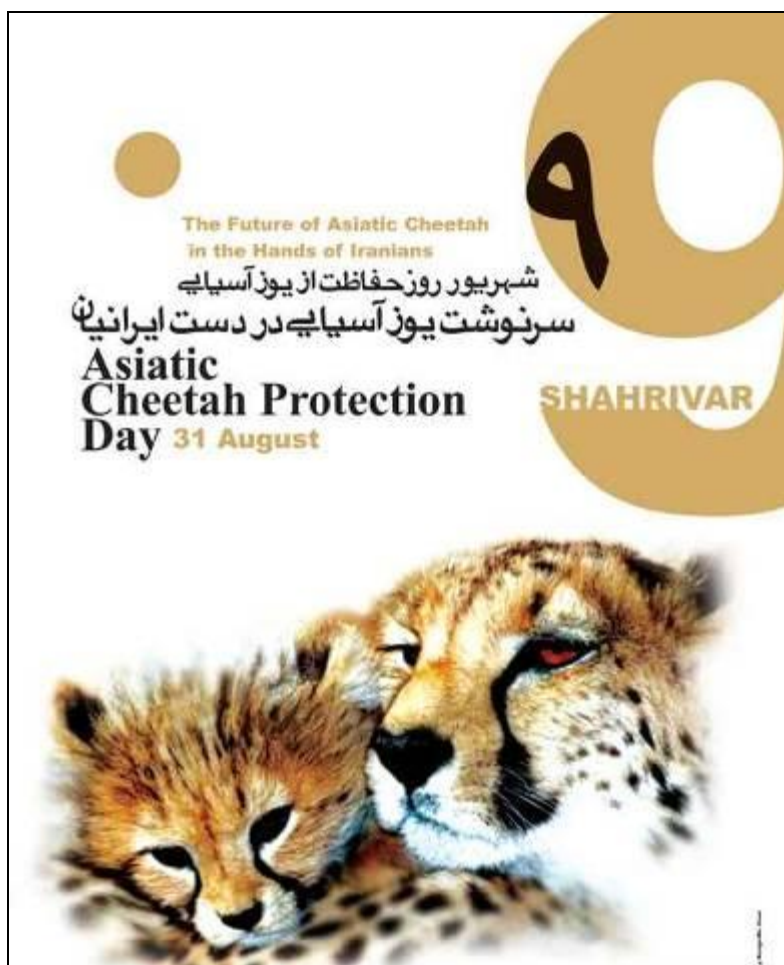


Figure 69. Cheetah Day poster



Figure 70. Educational brochure



Appendix 2. ICS staffs and volunteers involved in the project

Table 3. List and expertise of the ICS staffs and volunteers worked in the project

| No. | Name | Expertise |
|-----|--------------------------|--|
| 1 | Morteza Eslami | Project management |
| 2 | Mohammad Farhadinia | Project coordination (rural section) |
| 3 | Safura Zavarani | Project coordination (city section) |
| 4 | Fatemeh Hosseini-Zavarei | Educator and educational material designer |
| 5 | Leila Amigh | Educator, educational material designer and graphic designer |
| 6 | Kaveh Hatami | Financial affairs |
| 7 | Mahboubeh Shirkhorshidi | Educator and educational material designer |
| 8 | Sara Bagheri | Educator and educational material designer |
| 9 | Saba Sohrabinia | Educator and educational material designer |
| 10 | Hadi Kashani | Educator and newsletter coordinator |
| 11 | Melika Ghelichpour | Educational material designer |
| 12 | Mehdi Sheykh Sarraf | Festival coordination |
| 13 | Mahyar Alizadeh | Educator and educational material designer |
| 14 | Sara Askarnia | Educational material designer |
| 15 | Negar Saljoughi | Educator and educational material designer |
| 16 | Maryam Beheshti | Rural affairs |
| 17 | Fathollah Amiri | Documentary film making |
| 18 | Farshid Jafarzadeh | Administration coordination |
| 19 | Shahriar Siami | Documentary film making |
| 20 | Alireza Mahdavi | Documentary film making |
| 21 | Bagher Nezami | Educational materials designer |
| 22 | Morteza Hashemi | Graphic designer |
| 23 | Alireza Bahmanpour | MS Office applicant |



Figure 71. Project large team