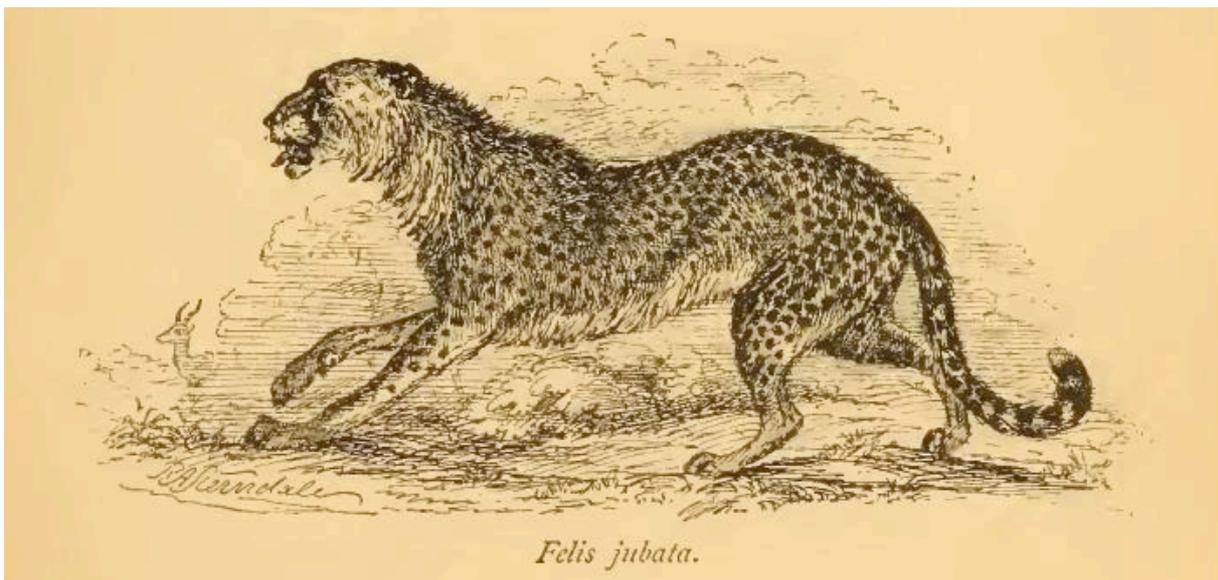


In Conclusion

We can now safely conclude that Cheetahs were more-or-less distributed throughout the state of Jharkhand, and had presence in every district of the state. They disappeared from at least three districts viz. Hazaribagh, Saranda and Deoghar within a span of ~30 years, with the dawn of the 20th century. However, some of them managed to survive in western Jharkhand – Palkot & Biru Hills (Greater Ranchi District) and north-Palamau. They first disappeared from Palkot and Biru hills in *circa* 1915. In Palamau, they managed to ward off the imminent right up to the first-quarter of the 20th century at least; the last ones I believe disappeared *circa* 1930. And with their demise from Palamau, the sad story of Jharkhand's little understood Cheetahs came to an end. Approximately 18 years later, three Cheetah brothers would be shot by the Maharaja of the neighboring princely state of Korea, about 170 kms south-west of *Palamau* — and these three would eventually become the last ones to be ever shot in India.

Cheetahs, it seems, were never abundant in Jharkhand and occurred in very low densities throughout their range in the state. This perhaps was their biggest downfall. Since they occurred in such low densities, even the slightest change in their habitat along-with a decline in prey-base would have adversely affected their population. With the scrub-forests being aggressively brought under the plough, Cheetah's natural prey that inhabited these scrubs was declining rapidly. Cheetahs would have been forced to increase their live-stock depredations; and this would have brought them into conflict with humans like never-before. And this direct-conflict with humans after they had already eaten away into their habitat, was the final straw for the species. The death-knell for this lithe spotted feline had been sounded, and by *circa* 1930, the last Cheetah's trails quietly disappeared forever from the state.

Much water has flown down Chota-Nagpore's gurgling rivers since, and many other species from the state have joined Jharkhand's Cheetahs in the halls of Valhalla. The few that survived are on tenterhooks, and most of us who know Jharkhand's forests realize that even these relicts are slipping away fast. Palamau, it seems, has a history of providing that last refuge to species' gone extinct from the rest of Jharkhand — 80 years back it was the Cheetah that made its last stand here; today the last of Jharkhand's Tigers tenaciously hold on in Palamu, as do the Gaurs that have an even smaller range within Palamu Tiger Reserve. Will they go the Cheetah's way? I hope they won't, I fear they will.



R.A. Sterndale's sketch of a Cheetah from his book *Natural History Of Mammalia Of India And Ceylon*, 1884

So the story of Jharkhand's Cheetahs is essentially the story of Jharkhand's now-almost-lost natural heritage, which withered away just like their forgotten Cheetahs — uncared-for and unmourned!

Divyabhanusinh, after reviewing this paper, remarked that the discovery of a considerable number of new hitherto unknown Cheetah references (See Appendix VII) in this paper — the ambit of which is just a small portion of the Cheetah's overall historic range in India — highlights the need for detailed regional studies on the species' history. He opined that carrying out such detailed regional studies throughout the Cheetah's historic range in the subcontinent would surely bring forth noteworthy additions to the story of Indian Cheetahs.