

## #EVOLUTION

### Human Origins

Our evolutionary past is messier than scientists used to think. Have you ever been troubled with backache? Or stared jealously after your dog as it lolloped across an uneven landscape?



Scientific study of human evolution historically reassured us of a comforting order to things. It has painted humans as cleverer, more intellectual and caring than our ancestral predecessors.

From archaeological reconstructions of Neanderthals as stooped, hairy and brutish, to "cavemen" movies, our ancient ancestors got a bad press.

Over the last five years discoveries have upended this unbalanced view.

**More Human Species**  
Species such as Homo Longi have only been identified as recently as 2018. There are now 21 known species of human.

In the last few years we have realised that our Homo sapiens ancestors may have met as many as eight of these different types of human, from robust and stocky species including Neanderthals and their close relatives Denisovans, to the short (less than 5ft tall) and small-brained humans such as Homo naledi.

But Homo sapiens weren't the inevitable evolutionary destination. Nor do they fit into any simple linear progression or ladder of progress.

Homo naledi's brain may have been smaller than that of a chimpanzee but there is evidence they were culturally complex and mourned their dead.

Neanderthals created symbolic art but they weren't the same as us. Neanderthals had many different biological adaptations, which may have included hibernation.

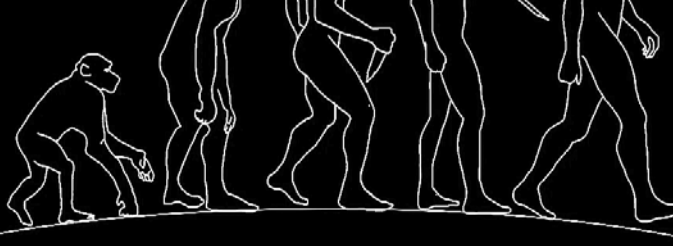
**Hybrid Humans**  
Hybrid species of human, once seen by experts as science fiction, may have played a key role in our evolution. Evidence of the importance of hybrids comes from genetics.

The trail is not only in the DNA of our own species (which often includes important genes inherited from Neanderthals) but also skeletons of hybrids.

**We Got Lucky**  
Our evolutionary past is messier than scientists used to think. Have you ever been troubled with backache? Or stared jealously after your dog as it lolloped across an uneven landscape?

That should have been enough to show you we are far from perfectly adapted. We have known for some time that evolution cobbles together solutions in response to an ecosystem which may already have changed.

For example, where isolated populations have a characteristic, such as some aspect of



their appearance, which doesn't make much difference to their survival and this form continues to change in descendants. Features of Neanderthals' faces (such as their pronounced brows) or body shifts in climate such as the Adams event, which was a temporary breakdown of Earth's magnetic field 42,000 years ago, which coincided with the extinction of the Neanderthals.

**Our Fate**  
We may like to imagine ourselves as masters of the environment. But it is increasingly clear ecological changes moulded us.

The origins of our own species coincided with major shifts in climate as we became more distinct from other species at these points in time. All other species of human seem to have died out as a result of climate change.

Three major human species Homo erectus, Homo heidelbergensis, and Homo neanderthalensis died out with major shifts in climate such as the Adams event, which was a temporary breakdown of Earth's magnetic field 42,000 years ago, which coincided with the extinction of the Neanderthals.

**Kindness**  
Research has uncovered new reasons to feel hopeful about future human societies. Scientists used to believe the violent parts of human nature gave us a leg up the evolution ladder.

But evidence has emerged of the caring side of human nature and its contribution to our success. Ancient skeletons show remarkable signs of survival from illness and injuries, which would have been difficult if not impossible without help.

The trail of human compassion extends back one and a half million years ago. Scientists have traced medical knowledge to at least the time of the Neanderthals.

Altruism has many important survival benefits. It enabled older community members to pass on important knowledge. And medical care kept skilled hunters alive.

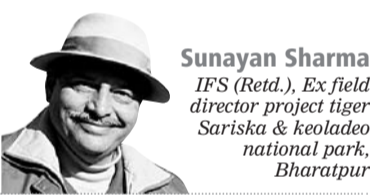
**We're a Sensitive Species**  
We are more sensitive to how people around us feel, and more vulnerable to social influences, we're more prone to emotional disorders, to loneliness and to depression than our predecessors.

Our complex feelings may not always be pleasant to live with, but they are part of key transformations which created large, connected communities. Our emotions are essential to human collaborations.

If we accept that humans are not a pinnacle of progress, then we cannot just wait for things to turn out right. Our past suggests that our future won't get better unless we do something about it.



# Cry They May... Cheetah Is Back In India



Sunayan Sharma IFS (Retd.), Ex-Field Director project tiger Sariska & keoladeo national park, Bharatpur

**T**hough Cheetah reintroduction in India had been under discussions since last two decades but it caught real heat after getting a go from the Prime Minister.

Reintroduction preparations took wings after this nod and simultaneously several so called wildlife champions started appearing on TV screens and other media platforms, spilling their invaluable knowledge on the subject with only one motive; to sabotage this long held project.

A friend of mine, a wildlife enthusiast, settled at Meerut (UP), sent me a short video clipping, showing Mr. Valmiki Thapar, the self-proclaimed Tiger man of India; loud as always he was all out to criticize this ambitious project.

He said that he was at that time on a visit to Serengeti National Park, Tanzania and he loudly called this project a futile exercise. According to him none of the Indian jungles are capable of supporting cheetah for want of desired prey base like Thomson gazelle, which are in plenty in Africa. I am unable to understand why cheetah's diet chart is restricted to this prey species only? Won't it be happy preying upon cheetal, sambar, bluebell young ones, wild boar etc, which are available in plenty at

inhabited Indian jungles. It is believed that the last 2-3 individuals were killed by late Shri Ramannuj Pratap Singhdeo, the then Maharaja of Korea (MP) then, sometime in 1948-49.

This fastest land animal is adorned with solid round or oval shaped black spots all over its body and is believed to have its name derived from a sanskrit word, 'Chitrika', meaning spotted. Broadly it resembles leopard alias panther (Baghera) but for the solid spots on its skin, where nature has decorated leopard with non-solid black rose like patterns known as rosettes.

The old records testify that early Mughals like Akbar and Jahangir had such a fancy for cheetahs that several hundred cheetahs were kept by them in captivity, to be used as assisting tool during their shikar expeditions. Interestingly majority of these cheetahs were captured from the wilderness of Kuno.

As an ecologist I always felt that

## #WILD

Kuno as well as several other reserves in India?

Certainly such loud and negative statements calling this project a baseless one based on the cynical ideas of some ill experienced retired forest officers, smells of some ulterior motive. This very expert is the same person who opposed reintroduction of tigers in to Sariska, tooth and nail, after it got bereft of tigers in 2004 at the hands of poachers and some miscreant villagers.

**A Land of Cheetahs**  
It was his negative persuasions at Government of India level that such an ambitious project got delayed by several years and consequently Sariska could have its first two tigers as late as in 2008 only. Today Sariska is roaring with 27 tigers, a self-sustained population.

Thanks to some wise conservationists who came all out to overcome the Valmiki effect otherwise India especially Rajasthan would have lost an important tiger land like Sariska for ever.

Undoubtedly rehabilitation of every single individual of any wild species is a challenge to the management of the area of reintroduction, may it be herbivore or a carnivore, brought from Indian jungles or abroad, but if ecologically such reintroduction is desirable, serious efforts should be made to restore the areas with the species, lost due to shikar or habitat depletion.

India had always been a land of cheetahs. As per natural history, till 70 years back this beautiful cat

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repeatedly by the concerned Chief Ministers.

**Replenish the Reserve**  
Panna Tiger Reserve of MP too had gone Sariska's way and lost all of its tigers in 2009.

The Government of MP wanted to replenish the reserve by bringing tigers from Kanha, Bandhogarh and Panch Tiger Reserves, at the earliest, but despite repeated requests it could not get a nod from NTCA, which had prepared an unending list of queries and conditions, surely not with some good intention. Again the same expert and alike conservation activists were all out to sabotage this ambitious project.

Fortunately the MP Government especially Mr. HS Pabla, the then Chief Wildlife Warden, MP, took a bold decision of going ahead on their neatly prepared plan and restocked Panna with tigers and within a span of 4 years Panna was restored its lost glory

An exquisite plan was drawn by incorporating wisdom from the scientists of the Wildlife Institute of India but NTCA, left no stone unturned in raising hurdles in its way; consequently the project's execution suffered an inordinate delay of good 5 years. Hats off to Mr. Pabla and his team for not calling off their persuasion and finally they introduced some 50 Indian gaur. Today Bandhavgarh is beaming with a population of more than 150 gaur, a self-sustained population and a star attraction of the park. It was a unique rehabilitation of its own kind in the country, good enough to encourage other states too to revive their deficit reserves with such large animals.

Translocation of Barasingha (Cervus duvaucelli branderi) from Kanha National Park to Satpura Tiger Reserve and Blackbuck

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Emboldened with the grand success of Panna revival, Mr. Pabla & his team was oozing with enthusiasm to revive Bandhogarh, another important tiger reserve through reintroduction of Indian gaur like flagship species at an earliest. An exquisite plan was drawn by incorporating wisdom from the scientists of the Wildlife Institute of India but NTCA, left no stone unturned in raising hurdles in its way; consequently the project's execution suffered an inordinate delay of good 5 years. Hats off to Mr. Pabla and his team for not calling off their persuasion and finally they introduced some 50 Indian gaur. Today Bandhavgarh is beaming with a population of more than 150 gaur, a self-sustained population and a star attraction of the park. It was a unique rehabilitation of its own kind in the country, good enough to encourage other states too to revive their deficit reserves with such large animals.

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Denial of transfer of Asiatic lions from Gir National Park of Gujarat to other suitable sites in India is another example of this conservative approach of Governments. Asiatic lions, once roaming freely all over the country barring high hills and terai regions, too vanished from entire Asia but for a pocket in Gir, Junagarh district of Gujarat, credit attributed to the then Nawab of Junagarh State who saved the last remnants and encouraged multiplication of this population.

During post-independence the state's forest department did an appreciable job of declaring the

area as Gir National Park and raising a self-sustained population. It gave huge impetus to wildlife tourism in the area. Propelled by this business interest the department did a commendable job of succeeding in raising this lion population to optimum level but it did not stop here and as a consequence over period of time the lion population started overflowing, much beyond ecological carrying capacity of the Gir park.

It was undesirable from scientific management point of view. With large cats another mentionable problem is the possibility of outbreak of epidemic like 'Canine Distemper' (CD), which is caused chiefly due to congestion. This deadly disease took a toll of more than 1000 lions in 1994 in the world famed Serengeti National Park.

**Evading Total Wipe off**  
Since then scientists from world over have been advising for shifting the surplus population of lions from the Gir National Park, in order to create another pocket for this rare species. The idea was to have more than one population of lions in the country in order to evade total wipe off in case of any CD like epidemics. Since then several sites have been recommended by the experts after extensive sur-

veys of like habitats in the country. 'Kuno' was also found as one of the most suitable sites for this purpose. But the project could never take off because of cold response of the Gujarat Government which did not wish to share the lucrative lion tourism with any other state.

It is also believed that project of cheetah reintroduction in Kuno was a politically motivated plan, to sabotage the lion shifting project. It is worth mentioning that the apex court of the land in 2013 had ordered to execute the lion translocation in Kuno from Gir, staying any attempt to release cheetah here. But the powerful Gujarat lobby succeeded in getting this order amended from the same court in 2018, in favour of cheetah reintroduction in Kuno, again succeeding in deferring lion shifting from Gir.

It is commendable yet I welcome cheetahs at Kuno, after all it has opened gates to India for intercontinental translocations of wild animals from one to other wilderness, not zoos. From this point of view 17th of September 22 shall always be remembered as an important day in the history of cheetah management in the country when 8 cheetahs were released in the specially prepared enclosures at Kuno, as a part of soft pad launching.

Many more cheetahs to join in recent future from African Reserves here.

Also to my understanding; failing assumptions and accusations, criticisms by Thapars, this cheetah reintroduction shall prove great success in establishing a viable population in Kuno over period of time. And this Kuno experiment shall be successfully replicated at other reserves as well in various other states like Rajasthan. | | | | |

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## Ask a Stupid Question Day



e've all done it, had that question we wanted to ask that just sounded astoundingly stupid. We're embarrassed that it even occurred to us, and worse, that we didn't know the answer when it seemed so simple. The truth is there is no such thing as a stupid question, except the one that you choose not to ask. Ask a Stupid Question Day encourages you to overcome your fear of sounding uneducated, and opening yourself to learning by asking your stupidest questions.



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## #CURTAIN RAISER

### Art And Design Bonanza



A 2-day art and design festival 'Shift' will feature an array of lifestyle, designer and wellness brands alongside artisan-led startups and NGOs. An initiative of Awaaz Studio and supported by the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Rajasthan, the festival is focussed on enhancing the art business ecosystem in the state and breaking the age-old narrative of a starving artist.



Tusharika Singh Freelancer writer and city blogger

**B**ringing together homegrown brands, designers and artists, rural artisans, folk performers, indie musicians, curated culinary experiences, and more - the 'Shift Art & Design Festival' is back to the Pink City on 1 and 2 October for its fifth edition. An initiative of Awaaz Studio, which is a Jaipur-based art furtherance house committed to breaking the age-old narrative of a starving artist, the festival showcases an array of lifestyle, designer and wellness brands alongside artisan-led startups and NGOs from across Jaipur and other cities.



The pop-up souk at Shift this year will showcase brands like Jaipur Rugs, Princess Diya Kumari Foundation, Thlonia Bazaar, Jaipur Modern, Thela Gaadi alongside budding homegrown businesses. Many workshops and activities such as puppet show, macramé, block printing, hand tufting, natural dyeing, tie and dye, storytelling, etc. are also curated for kids and parents to encourage and initiate the interest of families towards art.

**Enhancing the art business**  
The festival is focused on enhancing the art business ecosystem and generating sustainable monetary opportunities for all artists. Leading incubation center of the city, CIE.CO is the official funding and acceleration partner of

the festival providing mentoring and funding awareness and support to participating brands as well as the general audience. Jaipur Rugs, one of Asia's largest handmade rug manufacturers, are hosting a unique recruitment drive at the festival, thereby providing work opportunities to all city-based creative professionals.

The Princess Diya Kumari Foundation (PDKF) has also collaborated with Shift for an interesting project called 'The Future Resources' under which textile waste was collected from across the city. This collected waste will be converted into upcycled clothing and accessories by the PDKF artisans at the festival's live upcycling station.

**Music, Dance and Talks**  
Shift will also feature some eclectic music and dance performances such as folk dance circle by Jaipur Virasat Foundation, Bachata dance circle, open mic, and more. On day 2, the festival mainstage will feature live performance of independent singer-songwriter, Rahgir. Throughout the festival, various craft demonstrations, discussion and talks will be held. Some of the key sessions include Meet & Greet with Shilpguru Gopal Saini, Jaipur Rug's founder Nand Kishore Chaudhary, digital influencer Marcela Baur, origami artist Aditi Anuj and more.

The festival is supported by the Department of Art & Culture, Government of Rajasthan.

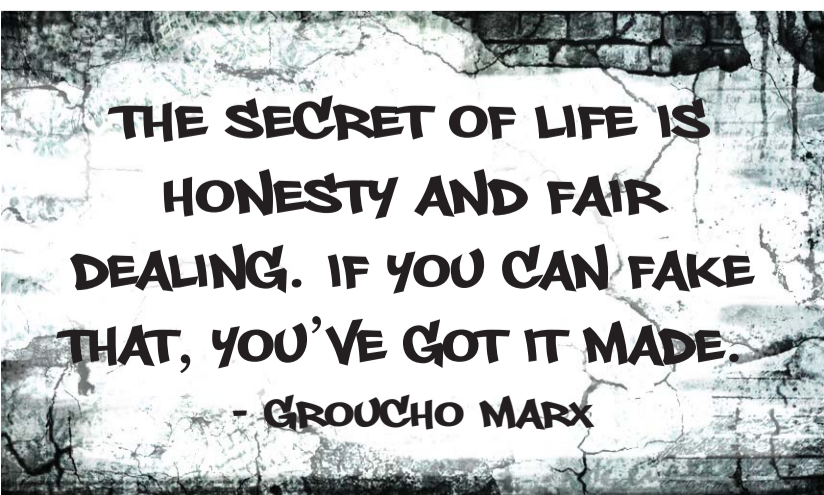
**When:** 1 & 2 October, 11 am to 10 pm  
**Where:** Birla Auditorium  
**Entry:** Free Registration  
Register free to attend the festival at bit.ly/3LANeUY

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By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## THE WALL



## BABY BLUES



## ZITS

