

SC moots idea of ‘Project Great Indian Bustard’ to save endangered birds

November 30, 2022 • vajiramandravi.com



What's in today's article?

- **Great Indian Bustard (GIB) - About, habitat and status, threats, conservation measures, SC's intervention**
- **Project Tiger**

Why in News?

- Coming to the rescue of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB), the Supreme Court has mooted the idea of launching 'Project GIB' on the lines of 'Project Tiger'.
 - Project Tiger was started in 1973 to save the big cats.
- The apex court has sought the government's view on the proposal.

What are the characteristics of the Great Indian Bustard?

- GIBs are the largest among the four-bustard species found in India.
 - The other three being **MacQueen's bustard, lesser florican and the Bengal florican.**
- Being terrestrial birds, they spend most of their time on the ground with occasional flights to go from one part of their habitat to the other.
- They feed on insects, lizards, grass seeds etc. GIBs are considered the flagship bird species of grassland and hence barometers of the health of grassland ecosystems.

What is the habitat and status of Great Indian Bustard?

- Great Indian Bustard is **found mainly in Rajasthan and Gujarat.** It has been categorized as **critically endangered** by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
 - As per the 2021 report of the IUCN, they are on the verge of extinction with hardly 50 to 249 of them alive.
- GIBs' historic range included much of the Indian sub-continent but it has now shrunk to just 10 per cent of it.
- Among the heaviest birds with flight, GIBs prefer grasslands as their habitats.

What are the threats to Great Indian Bustard?

- Scientists of Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have been pointing out overhead power transmission lines as the biggest threat to the GIBs.
 - WII research has concluded that in Rajasthan, 18 GIBs die every year after colliding with overhead powerlines.
 - These birds, due to their poor frontal vision, can't detect powerlines in time and their weight make in-flight quick manoeuvres difficult.
- Kutch and Thar desert are the places which have witnessed creation of huge renewable energy infrastructure over the past two decades.
- This led to installation of windmills and construction of power lines even in core GIB areas.

What are the conservation measures for the Great Indian Bustard?

- In 2015, the Central government launched the **GIB species recovery programme.**
- Under the programme, the WII and Rajasthan forest department have jointly set up conservation breeding centres where GIB eggs harvested from the wild are incubated artificially and hatchlings raised in controlled environment.

- The plan is to create a population which can act as insurance against the threat of extinction and release the third generation of these captive-bred birds into the wild.

Supreme Court's intervention to protect the Great Indian Bustard

- The SC in April 2021 ordered that all overhead power transmission lines in core and potential GIB habitats in Rajasthan and Gujarat be made underground.
- The SC also formed a three-member committee, including Devesh Gadhvi, the member of the bustard specialist group of IUCN, to help power companies comply with the order.
- Again, in November 2022, the court sought reports from chief secretaries of the two states in six weeks on installation of bird diverters in priority areas.
- It also asked them to assess the length of transmission lines that need to go underground.

What is the Project Tiger?

- The Govt. of India had launched "Project Tiger" on 1st April 1973 to promote conservation of the tiger.
- The Project Tiger Directorate of the Ministry of Environment and Forests was mandated with the task of providing technical guidance and funding support.
- **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**
 - Project Tiger has been converted into a statutory authority (NTCA) by providing enabling provisions in the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972** through an amendment, viz. **Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006**.
 - The NTCA addresses the ecological as well as administrative concerns for conserving tigers.
 - It provides a statutory basis for protection of tiger reserves, apart from providing strengthened institutional mechanisms for the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and endangered species.

Q1) Why are the Great Indian Bustards endangered?

The main threats to the shrinking habitat of the GIB have been industrialization, mining, intensive agricultural practices, mortality due to collision with electricity transmission lines. Their survival is also threatened by stray dogs which are known to attack the bustard's eggs and young ones.

Q2) In which national park of India is the Great Indian Bustard found?

The Great Indian Bustard is found mainly in Desert National Park in Rajasthan.

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/sc-moots-idea-of-project-great-indian-bustard-to-save-endangered-birds/>

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