



IAS PARLIAMENT

Information is Empowering

A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative

'Natural' Wildlife Conservation - Gir Asiatic Lions

What is the issue?

\n\n

- \n
- Twenty-three lions have died in around 20 days in the eastern part of Gujarat's Gir sanctuary.
- \n
- It draws attention to the larger issue of shortfalls in the wildlife conservation approach.
- \n

\n\n

What is the threat?

\n\n

- \n
- The big cat population in Gujarat is the last of the Asiatic lions in the wild.
- \n
- The recent mass mortality is a grave signal that the magnificent Asiatic lion is under threat.
- \n
- Reportedly, the cats have been killed by disease, most likely to be infectious.
- \n
- Some others have died due to poisoning and infighting.
- \n

\n\n

What was the court's order?

\n\n

- \n
- In 2013, the Supreme Court had issued an order in this regard.
- \n
- Under this, lions from Gujarat are to be relocated to the Kuno sanctuary in

Madhya Pradesh.

\n

- This was ordered as a check against the threat of epidemic.
- **Rationale** - A smaller population with limited genetic strength are more vulnerable to diseases and calamities than a large and widespread population.
- The court noted how 30% of the lion population in Tanzania's Serengeti was killed due to an outbreak of a viral disease.
- Asiatic lion has been restricted to only one single habitat i.e. the Gir National Forest and its surrounding areas.
- So an outbreak of possible epidemic or natural calamity might wipe off the entire species.
- Very recently, after the series of deaths, the Supreme Court has asked the Central government to look into it.

\n

\n\n



\n\n

What is Gujarat's response?

\n\n

\n

- Gujarat has been unwilling to relocate its lions, calling them "its pride".

\n

\n\n

- \n
- Gujarat has responded that lions are now spread over the Greater Gir region and this reduces the threat.
- \n
- When ill, lions are routinely picked up, medically treated, and then released.
- \n
- It thus said that good conservation practices and intensive wildlife healthcare had lead to epidemic free regime.
- \n
- It has also said that the lions there are metapopulations in the State, which may be geographically separate but have interactions and an exchange of individuals.
- \n
- So the current Asiatic lion population is not a single population confined to one place.
- \n
- It consists of “metapopulation spread over several locations within the Greater Gir Region”.
- \n

\n\n

What are the ecological concerns?

\n\n

- \n
- When wild animals go extinct locally, they are reintroduced as in the case of tigers in Sariska, Rajasthan.
- \n
- When hungry, they are fed artificially, and even provided salts as supplements.
- \n
- In other parts of India, wild animals are funnelled through artificial trenches, barriers and fences.
- \n
- But this is wildlife conservation in the age of man, where protected areas sometimes resemble zoos.
- \n
- In nature, wildlife conservation concerns itself with maintaining ecological processes and reducing threats to endangered species.
- \n
- This does not entail treating wild animals for disease as done for domestic animals.
- \n
- As it is not conducive to the ‘natural’ process of life and death, goes against

the natural selection processes, and ultimately compromises immunity.

\n

- So intensive artificial medical treatment of wild animals does not augur well for long-term sustainability.

\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n

- The role of wildlife managers should be to reduce unnatural threats, and not unnaturally prolong life.

\n

- E.g. Gujarat should turn its attention to reducing the drivers of disease, which includes controlling feral dog populations.

\n

\n\n

\n

- A geographically separate population of Asiatic lions needs to be created.

\n

- Gujarat should work towards colonising new habitats outside the Gir landscape within the State.

\n

- This is not for creating isolated populations but increasing suitable lion range from its present, much smaller area.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n



IAS PARLIAMENT

Information is Empowering

A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative