16th Asiatic Lion Census

***Prelims**: Conservation | Ecology and Environment | Government Initiatives | Current events of national and international importance.*

Why in News?

The 16th census (2025) on Asiatic Lion by Gujarat Government marks the highest population since conservation efforts began.

> *The **Asiatic lion census** is conducted once every 5 years by the Gujarat Forest Department under the State Government.*

Asiatic Lion (Panthera leo persica)
• **Habitat & Distribution –** It is endemic to India, found only in the **Gir Forest region** of **Saurashtra, Gujarat**. • Current range includes **Gir National Park**, **Girnar**, **Mitiyala**, **Pania**, **Barda Wildlife Sanctuary**, and adjoining areas. • **Physical Characteristics –** It is slightly smaller than African lions. • **Threats** - Single population risk that is all lions in one geographical region, habitat fragmentation and human animal conflict. • **Single population risk -** All lions in one geographical region. • habitat fragmentation, human-lion conflict. • **Conservation status:** - Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. - IUCN Status - Endangered (earlier *Critically Endangered* until 2008).

- **Record Population Growth -** It records **891 Asiatic lions** in Gujarat that is a **32% increase** from 2020.
- **Expanded Lion Range -** The lions now occupy **35,000 sq km** across **58 talukas in 11 districts**, up from 30,000 sq km in 2020 which is a **17% range expansion** in five years.
- **New Habitats Identified -** Lions have colonised areas like **Barda Wildlife Sanctuary**, **Jetpur**, and **Babra-Jasdan**, indicating the species' adaptability beyond Gir Forest.

Significance of the Rise

- It reflects successful **conservation efforts** by the Gujarat government.
- **IUCN status** upgraded from *Critically Endangered* to *Endangered* in **2008**.
- It demonstrates the lion's natural **range expansion** and **adaptive recovery**.

Project Lion

• **Project Lion** was launched to ensure **long-term survival** of Asiatic lions through habitat diversification and scientific monitoring.
• **Launched in 2020**
• **Focus Areas - ** It promotes **meta-population management**, creation of **new lion habitats**, and use of **technology** like GPS tracking and drone surveillance.
• **Proposed Relocations -** Initially identified **seven sites** across India (including Kuno), though later limited to sites **within Gujarat**, such as **Barda Sanctuary**.

Reference

DD News | Gujarat has completed its 16th lion population census

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering