

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](#)

