Great Indian Bustard Population Status 2026

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Environment*

Why in News?

The Union Environment Ministry has released the first official assessment of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in seven years.

- **Conducted by -** The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in collaboration with the Rajasthan Forest Department.
- **Encouraging Baseline -** The assessment estimates the current GIB population at ***130 birds (±21)***, indicating that numbers have stabilised between *110 and 150 birds.*
- This halts the rapid decline observed over the previous decades.
- **Squeezed Range -** Despite population stability, the species is facing a massive geographic crisis, now restricted to just 16% of its historical, potential habitat in the Thar Desert.

Key Threats

- The Thar Desert landscape is facing severe developmental pressures, turning the habitat of this terrestrial indicator species into a survival zone.
- **The Green Energy Paradox -** India's ambitious push toward 500 GW of non-fossil fuel energy by 2030 has catalysed rapid solar and wind farm expansion in Thar.
- However, because the GIB possesses poor frontal vision, it is highly susceptible to fatal collisions with overhead power transmission lines.
- **Habitat Classification Gaps -** Grasslands are frequently classified as "wastelands" under Indian land-use policy.
- This classification legalizes their rapid diversion for agricultural expansion, fencing, roads, and infrastructure.
- **Invasive and Predator Pressures -** The census noted a rise in free-ranging domestic dogs, feral pigs, and nilgai alongside native GIB predators like the desert fox.

- These factors place severe pressure on GIB nests, which are simple depressions directly on the ground.

Conservation Initiatives

- **Judicial Intervention -** The Supreme Court of India intervened to mandate the re-routing or undergrounding of overhead power lines in designated priority GIB areas.
- **Ex-Situ Conservation-** Under "Project GIB", a joint initiative of the Centre and the Rajasthan Government, captive breeding centres have been established in Jaisalmer.
- The program aims to build a genetically secure captive pool to eventually release captive-bred birds back into the wild.
- **Key Refuge Zones -** The report highlights that the areas in and around the *Desert National Park (DNP) and the Pokhran Range* in Jaisalmer remain the absolute last contiguous, viable habitats due to the absence of heavy renewable energy grids.

Quick Facts

Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*)
• It is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world. It acts as an **indicator species** for the health of grassland ecosystems. • **Conservation Status:** - **IUCN Red List -** Critically Endangered - **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972-** Schedule I - **CITES -** Appendix I - **CMS (Convention on Migratory Species) -** Appendix I

Reference

The Indian Express | Great Indian Bustard

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