

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](#)