

The Road Ahead for the Asiatic Lion

Mains: GS III - Environment

Why in News?

The Asiatic lion, once reduced to 100-150 individuals, has recovered to over 1,000 after six decades of conservation.

What is the present status of Asiatic Lion?

- **Total Count** - Reached 891 individuals according to the official May 2025 census data released to Parliament.
- **Historical Recovery** - Up from roughly 100-150 animals in the 1960s.
- **Territorial Spread** - The spatial range expanded by over 16%, covering more than 35,000 square kilometers across 9 to 11 satellite districts in Gujarat.

What are the measures taken by Gujarat?

- Satellite telemetry studies to monitor lion ecology, movement, habitat use, and corridors.
- Engagement of *Vanya Prani Mitras* and trackers to raise awareness among local communities.
- Grassland restoration, prey base enhancement, and habitat improvement across the Gir landscape.
- Strengthening protection and management of satellite lion populations.
- Protection and improvement of wildlife corridors to facilitate safe lion movement.
- Construction of machans (elevated platforms) for farmers to safely guard crops at night.
- Augmentation of water sources to reduce lion movement into human settlements.
- Promotion of eco-development, community participation, and conservation awareness programmes.
- Implementation of railway safety measures, including train speed restrictions, patrolling, and an SOP to prevent lion deaths near railway tracks.
- Barda Wildlife Sanctuary has been developed as the second home for Asiatic lions, supporting population expansion and reducing dependence on Gir.
- A Hi-Tech Monitoring Unit established at Sasan Gir (2019) enables real-time tracking of lions using radio telemetry.
- These initiatives collectively aim to ensure the long-term conservation, habitat connectivity, and sustainable growth of the Asiatic lion population.

What are the achievements of India in Asiatic Lion Preservation?

- **Massive Recovery** - Numbers grew from near extinction to a thriving population estimated near 1,000.
- **Natural Dispersal** - Nearly half of the lion population now lives safely outside strict protected park borders.
- **Territory Expansion** - Lions have moved successfully into coastal and neighboring districts of Gujarat.
- **Project Lion** - Launched to secure long-term habitats, upgrade veterinary care, and manage diseases.
- **Prey Base Upgrades** - Boosted wild deer and antelope numbers so lions rely less on farm animals.
- **Local Community Support** - Pastoral groups like the Maldharis coexist peacefully with the big cats, aided by livestock compensation programs.

The IUCN Red List has improved the Asiatic lion's status from Critically Endangered to Endangered.

What are the key concerns?

- **Single population risk** - Despite population growth, all wild Asiatic lions remain confined to a single landscape centred around Gir, making them vulnerable to disease outbreaks and disasters.
- **Threat to wildlife corridors** - A proposal to divert 75 hectares of reserved forest for limestone mining in the Babarkot-Jafrabad corridor threatens a crucial habitat link connecting coastal lion populations to the main Gir population.
- **Habitat fragmentation** - Mining could result in the loss of about 5,000 mature trees, disrupt lion movement, isolate satellite populations, and increase human-lion conflict.
- **Disease vulnerability** - The 2018 Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) outbreak killed over 20 lions, highlighting the danger of keeping the entire population in one region.
- Recent babesiosis-related deaths (2026) and possible CDV involvement have renewed these concerns.

What lies ahead?

- The Asiatic lion's recovery is a major conservation success, but its future depends on protecting habitats and movement corridors, preventing habitat fragmentation, strengthening disease management, and creating a second secure population.
- Conservation efforts must now focus not only on increasing numbers but also on ensuring the species' long-term ecological security.

Reference

[The Hindu| Asiatic Lion](#)



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