



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – CONSERVATION RED ALERT

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Great Indian Bustard heading towards extinction

If immediate action is not taken, this magnificent bird could become the first mega species to go extinct in India since the cheetah. Only a 'Project Bustard' can save the species, just as 'Project Tiger' did for our national animal.

Experts believe that there may be less than 200 Great Indian Bustards (Scientific Name: *Ardeotis nigriceps*) left in India. The bird has already disappeared from more than 90% of its former range. "What is worse, the meagre remaining number is fragmented into small populations across several Indian states, making the bird even more vulnerable to extinction. If urgent and targeted conservation actions are not taken immediately, the bird will almost certainly go extinct within the next decade or two", says Ramki Sreenivasan, co-founder of Conservation India, India's premier wildlife conservation portal.

The Great Indian Bustard (GIB) lives in short-grass plains and deserts in large arid landscapes. It is now confined to only eight pockets in 6 Indian states – Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The largest population of about 100 birds (>50% of India's total) is in Rajasthan where it is the state bird. Remaining populations number less than 30 birds each. "It may be already extinct in Madhya Pradesh – there are no reliable current estimates from the state", says Sreenivasan.

These are the significant threats to the Great Indian Bustard:

1. Reduction in the extent of undisturbed arid and grassland habitat
2. Degradation of, and disturbance to, existing habitat
3. Hunting
4. Lack of protection for many traditional 'lekking' and nesting sites
5. Lack of importance for natural grassland conservation in management and policy
6. Lack of cooperation between different departments / stakeholders in GIB habitats
7. Lack of awareness and support from local communities
8. Livestock overgrazing
9. Disturbance by tourists and photographers especially during the breeding season

Immediate action points:

The GIB can be saved if the following urgent and coordinated actions are taken by the central government and GIB range state governments immediately:

1. State governments should secure and fully protect all 'lekking' sites of the GIB. "This may be the single most important step in saving the species. A lekking site is a traditional place where males gather to display and attract females. If these sites are subjected to disturbance or degradation, GIBs may not be able to breed, and the bird will continue to decline," informs Sreenivasan.
2. Constitute a GIB task force in every GIB state, with a handpicked membership that includes dynamic and committed government officials from different departments, biologists, conservationists, and local community leaders.
3. Launch a full-scale '**Project Bustard**' under the aegis of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), with adequate funding and authority, with involvement of national and international experts, and key people from each GIB state.
4. Examine the feasibility of captive breeding by constituting a core group that includes international experts with experience in breeding bustards or similar endangered birds in captivity. (The recovery of the California Condor, a large-sized, slow breeding American bird that was on the verge of extinction, was a result of captive breeding).



5. The Ministry of Environment and Forests has banned all bustard photography during the breeding season (Apr 1 – Oct 31). However, even disturbance outside the breeding season can have serious implications for the species. Wildlife photographers should therefore voluntarily desist from GIB photography.

Conservation India has launched a campaign to highlight the plight of the bird and urges concerned citizens to immediately write to the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, the state with the most viable population of Great Indian Bustards, urging him to set up a 'Bustard Task Force' to help secure the future of Rajasthan's State Bird. The campaign page on [Conservation India](#) allows users to send an email to the Chief Minister, Mr. Ashok Gehlot, by just clicking a link.

Several hundred concerned citizens have already written to the Chief Minister.

About Conservation India (CI):

Conservation India is a non-profit, non-commercial portal that aims to facilitate wildlife and nature conservation. CI's previous campaigns to highlight the plight of the Narcondam hornbill and the Amur falcon were extremely successful thanks to the media coverage that ensued. We request you to kindly publicise this critical issue so that we can save the great Indian bustard, a magnificent icon of our grasslands and deserts.

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