

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD: ENVIRONMENT'

NEWS: Exclusive: SC-named panel proposes 'power corridors' through Great Indian Bustard habitats

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Supreme Court-appointed expert committee has proposed power corridors and stricter zoning of critical habitats to prevent power line collisions threatening the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB). Conservation measures include revised no-go zones, selective undergrounding of power lines, and advanced breeding interventions.

Supreme Court Expert Committee Report on Great Indian Bustard (GIB) Conservation – Key Issues and Recommendations

Designated Power Corridors

- The SC-appointed committee recommended the creation of “power corridors” in **Rajasthan (5 km width)** and **Gujarat (1–2 km width)**.
- Aim: To **minimise the risk of GIB collision** with power lines while **permitting renewable energy development** in nearby areas.
- These corridors are designed to **divert high-risk infrastructure** away from critical GIB zones.

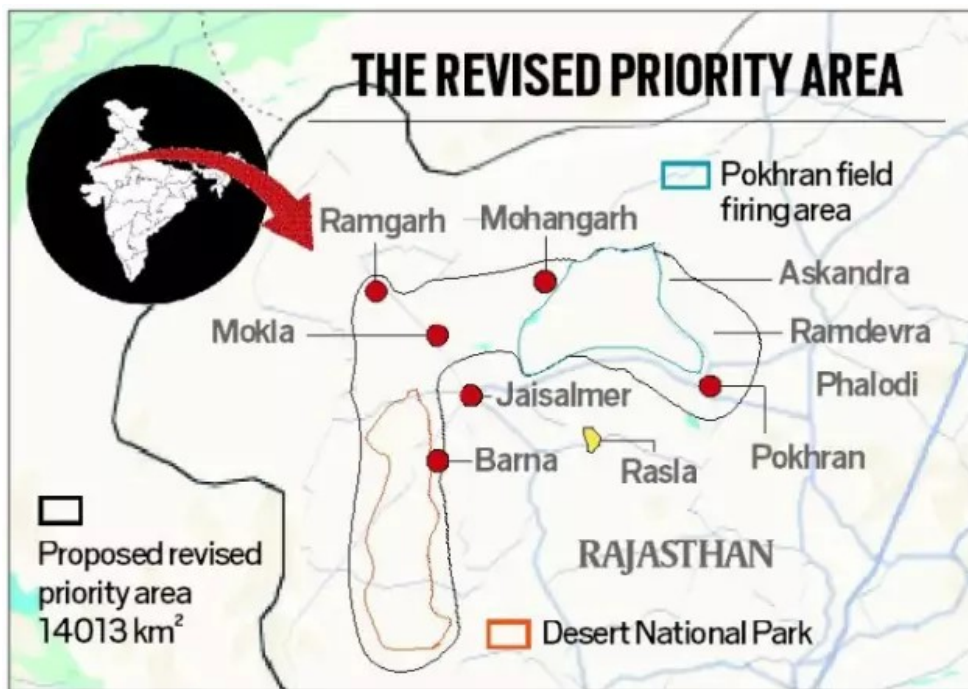
Classification of GIB Habitat

- The committee classified the GIB landscape into three categories based on field surveys and satellite telemetry data (since 2014):
 - **Priority areas:** Sites with regular GIB presence.
 - **Additional Important areas:** Seasonal usage by GIBs.
 - **Potential areas:** May serve as future habitats.
- These zones help **prioritise conservation actions and regulate development**.

Revised Priority Areas for GIB

- Total **priority GIB habitat areas expanded** to:
 - **14,013 sq km in Rajasthan**
 - **740 sq km in Gujarat**
- These are now marked as **no-go zones for infrastructure** like large solar and wind installations.

- Aim: To ensure **uninterrupted grassland ecosystems** for GIB survival and breeding.



Voltage-Based Power Line Management

- Immediate recommendation to **underground select 33 kV lines** in core areas.
- Strict restrictions on new infrastructure in revised priority areas:
 - **No new solar projects >2 MW**
 - **No new wind turbines**
 - **No new overhead power lines**
- Intended to significantly **reduce GIB mortality from collisions**.

Proposed Conservation Measures

- **“Jump-start” technique** proposed to improve reproduction:
 - Late-stage GIB eggs from Rajasthan to be **hatched and fostered** by wild GIB females in Gujarat.
- **Tagging of all remaining GIBs** in Gujarat to monitor survival and movement patterns.
- Enhanced **data tracking** will help identify emerging threats and migration shifts.

Dissent Note by Committee Member

- A dissenting member raised concerns that:
 - Some known GIB habitats were **left out of the revised priority zones**.

- Called for **all power lines above 33 kV** in the area to be either **undergrounded or rerouted**, not just selectively managed.

About the Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

- **Scientific Name:** *Ardeotis nigriceps*
- **IUCN Status:** **Critically Endangered**
- **Legal Protection:**
 - **Schedule I** of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
 - **Appendix I** of CITES
- **Habitat:**
 - **Dry grasslands and scrublands**, especially in the **Thar Desert region of Rajasthan**
- **Physical Characteristics:**
 - Large-bodied bird weighing up to **15 kg**
 - Long bare legs, brownish body, and a distinct **black crown on a pale head**
- **Feeding & Breeding:**
 - **Omnivorous:** Consumes seeds, insects (grasshoppers, beetles), rodents, and reptiles.
 - **Breeds during the monsoon;** the female lays **one egg on bare ground**, which increases vulnerability.
- **Population:** Only about **100–150 individuals remain**, making it one of the **rarest bird species** in India.
- **Lifespan:** Around **12–15 years**.

Challenges in GIB Conservation

- **Low Reproductive Rate:**
 - Only one egg per year, and chick requires **nearly 2 years of care**, slowing recovery.
- **Power Line Collisions:**
 - Poor frontal vision and flight trajectory make them **highly prone to hitting wires**.
- **Habitat Degradation:**

- Agricultural expansion, infrastructure projects, and **livestock grazing pressure** reduce available habitat.

Steps Taken for Conservation of GIBs

- **Species Recovery Programme:**
 - GIB is part of the **centrally sponsored initiative** under the Development of Wildlife Habitats scheme.
- **Bustard Recovery Project (2016):**
 - Supported by **Rajasthan government** and **Ministry of Environment**.
 - Funded under **Compensatory Afforestation Fund**.
- **Protected Areas Notified:**
 - **Desert National Park (Rajasthan)** and **Naliya Grasslands (Gujarat)** designated for GIB protection.
- **Financial and Technical Aid:**
 - Centre assists states in conservation planning, technology, and capacity building.
- **Conservation Breeding Centres (CBCs):**
 - Established at **Ramdevra and Sorsan** in Rajasthan.
 - Aimed at **long-term captive breeding** and eventual **wild reintroduction**.
- **Legal Safeguards:**
 - **Hunting banned** under Schedule I protections.
 - **CITES inclusion** ensures international trade restrictions.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/supreme-court-named-panel-proposes-power-corridors-through-great-indian-bustard-habitats-10153661/>