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Written by **Nikhil Ghanekar**

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The Great Indian Bustard (GIB) spotted at Naliya, Kutch. (Express photo by Nirmal Harindran/File)

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has approved Rs 56 crore for the next phase of the **conservation of Great Indian Bustard (GIB) and Lesser Florican.**

The plan includes habitat development, in-situ conservation, completion of the conservation breeding centre, releasing captive-bred birds and habitat development among other things.

Earlier in a June 7 meeting, the executive committee of the National CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority) had recommended the Wildlife Institute of India's (WII) proposal to the governing body, multiple sources aware of developments said. Submitted in March, the WII proposal which outlines the plan to scale up the project for 2024-2033 includes two components.

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The conservation programme has been running since 2016 for long-term recovery of critically endangered GIB and Lesser Florican. As of now, around 140 GIBs and

fewer than 1,000 Lesser Floricans are surviving in the wild.

The first component comprises targets such as completion of the conservation breeding centre (CBC) in Jaisalmer's Ramdevra, development of the Sorsan Lesser Florican facility, preparatory work for releasing captive-bred birds, release in [Rajasthan](#) and other range states, post-release monitoring and artificial insemination.

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The second component comprises in-situ conservation of GIBs in other range states such as Gujarat, [Maharashtra](#), [Karnataka](#), [Andhra Pradesh](#) and [Madhya Pradesh](#).

This component will be implemented by WII along with state governments. The budget for this component has been pegged at Rs 43.68 crore and its approval will be sought later.

Between 2024-2026, WII will also undertake GIB population estimation in Jaisalmer, its range states and rangewide population estimation of the lesser florican.

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As the rewilding won't begin before 2027, until then WII plans to collect two to four eggs of the GIB and six to ten eggs of Lesser Florican each year.

To release the captive-bred Bustards, release sites will be identified. According to the WII plan, these Bustards will be trained for release and soft release enclosures

will also be developed.

The 2024-2029 phase will also target developing and implementation of artificial insemination techniques as a back-up to the captive-breeding conservation, scientists working on the project said. The WII has been collaborating with Dhabi-based International Fund for Houbara Conservation for the same.

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“Artificial insemination will help to facilitate genetic management and diversity. If we want sperm from a particular male GIB to manage the population from a genetic perspective, we can go for cryopreservation. Artificial insemination will also help augment fertility rates. It has been tried successfully in the UAE, but not in India,” said a scientist associated with the project.

The two species have faced severe decline over the years due to hunting, habitat loss and depredation of eggs by other predators. Additionally, the overhead power lines have also emerged as a key threat to GIB with a 2017-18 study estimating deaths of 88,000 birds of different species annually.

Plans to recover the species first started in 2013 under the National Bustard Recovery Plan, which later gave way to the Bustard Recovery Project in 2016. Later, in July 2018, a tripartite agreement was signed between MoEFCC, Rajasthan forest department and WII.

As part of the project run by the three parties, two GIB conservation breeding centres and one Lesser Florican centre are functioning in Rajasthan’s Sam, Ramdevra and Sorsan respectively.

The team at Sam and Ramdevra built up a founder population by collecting GIB eggs from the wild, which were incubated and hatched artificially in the facility. As of today, there are 40 GIBs in the two CBCs. As for the Lesser Florican, there are seven individuals at the Sorsan facility, three males and four females.



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The Supreme Court is also monitoring the GIB and Lesser Florican conserva programme and a petition seeking protection of the two species is pending before it. Earlier, the SC had ordered burying power transmission lines in GIB habitat in Rajasthan and Gujarat in 2021, however, it recalled its order in 2024 after the Centre submitted that the exercise would be expensive and impractical. The SC also tasked an expert committee to study the issue.

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The NEET PG entrance exam for medical postgraduate courses will likely take place in August learnt Indian Express from sources. The exam was postponed on June 22 due to concerns raised by the Ministry of Education, but NBE President Dr. Abhijat Sheth has assured that there...