

Great Indian Bustard: Conservation, Threats and UPSC Relevance

The **Great Indian Bustard (GIB)** has received renewed attention following a major milestone in India's conservation efforts. In October 2026, **two captive-bred male Great Indian Bustards were released into the wild at the Desert National Park in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.**

The release marks a transition from conservation breeding towards **rewilding and rebuilding the species in its natural habitat.** The programme is being implemented through collaboration between the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Rajasthan Forest Department and Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

What is the Great Indian Bustard?

The **Great Indian Bustard (Ardeotis nigriceps)** is one of India's most threatened birds and is popularly known as **Godawan** in Rajasthan.

Key Facts

- **Scientific name:** *Ardeotis nigriceps*
- **Conservation status:** Critically Endangered – IUCN
- **Habitat:** Grasslands, scrublands and open dry landscapes
- **State Bird:** Rajasthan
- **Major population:** Rajasthan, particularly the Thar Desert
- **Other important habitat:** Kutch region of Gujarat

The species is particularly important as an **indicator and umbrella species of India's open natural ecosystems and grasslands.**

Why is the Great Indian Bustard Endangered?

1. Power-Line Collisions

One of the most serious threats is collision with **overhead power transmission lines.** Because GIBs are large birds with limited manoeuvrability, they can collide with poorly visible power lines.

2. Habitat Loss

Conversion of grasslands for infrastructure, agriculture, industry and other land uses has significantly reduced suitable habitat.

3. Infrastructure Development

Roads, renewable-energy infrastructure and other development activities can fragment habitats and disturb breeding areas.

4. Low Reproductive Rate

The GIB has a **slow reproductive cycle**, making population recovery difficult when adult mortality is high.

5. Human Disturbance

Disturbance in breeding habitats and other anthropogenic pressures further affect the species.

A 2026 assessment reported that the GIB population in its Rajasthan range remained broadly stable at around **110-150 birds**, but the species survives in only a small fraction of its historical/potential habitat.

Conservation Efforts in India

Project Great Indian Bustard

The **Project Great Indian Bustard** was formally launched in 2016 as a focused conservation initiative.

Major approaches include:

- Conservation breeding
- Habitat restoration
- Protection of breeding grounds
- Power-line mitigation
- Scientific monitoring and telemetry
- Community participation

- Rewilding and release of captive-bred birds

The conservation-breeding programme at **Sam and Ramdevra in Rajasthan** has made significant progress. As of October 2026, the facilities housed **97 birds**, including 57 captive-bred birds.

The “Jumpstart” Approach

An innovative conservation technique called the **Jumpstart Approach** has also been used.

In Gujarat, a fertile captive-bred egg from Rajasthan was transported to Kutch and placed in the nest of a wild female GIB. The female successfully incubated the egg and raised the chick.

This demonstrated the potential of combining **captive breeding with natural parental care** to strengthen small wild populations.

Great Indian Bustard and Renewable Energy

The conservation of GIB highlights an important environmental policy challenge: **balancing renewable-energy expansion with biodiversity protection**.

The Thar and Kutch regions have considerable potential for solar and wind energy. However, power infrastructure can create risks for large birds such as the GIB.

Therefore, conservation strategies include:

- Mapping critical power-line corridors
- Undergrounding power lines in priority areas where feasible
- Installing bird diverters on selected lines
- Careful siting of new infrastructure
- Maintaining contiguous grassland habitats

The Bustard Recovery Programme specifically identifies power lines and renewable-energy infrastructure as important threats requiring mitigation.

Supreme Court and GIB Conservation

The conservation of the Great Indian Bustard has also become an important example of

the interaction between **environmental protection and infrastructure development**.

The Supreme Court has considered the issue of protecting GIB habitats from power-line collisions, with an expert committee examining scientifically appropriate approaches to balancing conservation and energy-infrastructure requirements.

This makes the GIB relevant to debates on **sustainable development and environmental governance**.

UPSC Relevance

Prelims

Remember:

- **Great Indian Bustard:** *Ardeotis nigriceps*
- **IUCN status:** Critically Endangered
- **Rajasthan State Bird:** Great Indian Bustard
- Major habitat: **Thar Desert**
- Important population in **Kutch, Gujarat**
- Conservation breeding centres: **Sam and Ramdevra, Rajasthan**
- Major threats: habitat loss and power-line collisions

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The topic can be linked to:

- Biodiversity conservation
- Grassland ecosystem protection
- Human-wildlife conflict
- Renewable energy vs biodiversity
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Protected areas and habitat restoration
- Sustainable development

Possible UPSC Mains Question

“The conservation of the Great Indian Bustard illustrates the challenge of balancing renewable-energy expansion with biodiversity protection. Discuss.”

Conclusion

The **Great Indian Bustard** represents both India's biodiversity crisis and the possibilities of science-based conservation. The transition from captive breeding to **rewilding**, combined with habitat restoration and power-line mitigation, offers a promising pathway for species recovery.

For UPSC aspirants, GIB should be studied not merely as an endangered bird but as a case study connecting **biodiversity, grassland ecology, renewable energy, infrastructure development, environmental governance and sustainable development**.

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