

## **Union Environment Minister inaugurates ‘Lion’ Species Spotlight Programme at Sasan Gir Gujarat, as a Pre-IBCA Summit Event**

**‘Gir’ a living example of how Economic Progress can go hand in hand with Wildlife Conservation through an Ecological Approach: Chief Minister (Gujarat)**

**Lion is a symbol of India’s pride, courage and natural heritage; Project Lion strengthening Long-Term Conservation of Asiatic Lions in Gir Landscape: Shri Bhupender Yadav**

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Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav, today inaugurated the ‘Lion’ Species Spotlight Event at Sasan Gir, Gujarat. The programme was organised as part of the series of Pre-Summit Species Events under the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) Summit 2026.

The event was presided over by Chief Minister (Gujarat), Shri Bhupendra Patel, through virtual medium. Other dignitaries gracing the occasion included Gujarat State Forest Minister, Shri Arjun Modhwadia, Minister of State for Forest (Gujarat), Shri Pravin Mali, besides senior officials from IBCA, Union and State Governments.



In his address, Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Bhupendra Patel thanked Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for his vision of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, which led to the establishment of the IBCA as an iconic initiative in direction of Big Cat Conservation. He attributed the growing global consciousness

towards big cat conservation to this vision.

Shri Patel further highlighted the crucial role of community participation in the conservation of the Asiatic Lion. He noted that the lion is an integral part of the region's popular culture, which has contributed to the flourishing population of Asiatic Lions in Gir. Shri Patel said that Gir stands as a living example of how economic progress can go hand in hand with wildlife conservation through an ecological approach. He also informed about the steps taken by the Union and State Governments under various big cat conservation initiatives, including the development of Barda Wildlife Sanctuary as a new site for the natural dispersal of Asiatic lions.

Addressing the gathering, Shri Bhupender Yadav informed that India will host the first-ever IBCA Summit 2026 in New Delhi on June 1–2, 2026, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, followed by technical sessions on June 1–2. He said the summit with tagline — Save Big Cats, Save Humanity, Save Ecosystem — would bring together Heads of State and Government, Ministers, policymakers, scientists, conservation practitioners, multilateral agencies, financial institutions, partner organisations and 400 representatives from 95 range countries across Asia, Africa and the Americas. IBCA serves as a global coalition dedicated to the conservation of seven iconic Big Cat species — Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar and Puma — through collaborative international action and strengthened scientific and technical cooperation, he added.



The Minister described Sasan Gir as a living symbol of India's rich biodiversity, sensitivity towards nature and commitment to conservation. He stated that the Gir lion is not only the identity of Gujarat, but also a symbol of the pride, courage and natural heritage of the entire nation. The Minister informed how under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi various steps like Asiatic Lion Population Estimation initiative, National Wildlife Referral Centre in Junagadh and developing Barda National Wildlife Sanctuary as the site for natural dispersal of Asiatic Lion, are being taken ahead in mission mode.

Shri Yadav said the 'Lion' Species Spotlight Event highlighted the global conservation status of lions and India's initiatives towards species conservation. He stated that the event aimed to showcase India's successful lion conservation model, promote international cooperation among lion range countries, deliberate on emerging challenges such as habitat pressures, climate change and human-wildlife interactions, and strengthen knowledge exchange and capacity building.



Describing lions as one of the world's most iconic and social Big Cat species, Shri Yadav said lions are apex predators that play a vital ecological role by regulating herbivore populations, maintaining ecosystem balance and shaping biodiversity and inter-species dynamics. He noted that lion populations globally have declined by more than 30 per cent due to habitat loss and degradation, while the Asiatic lion survives as a single wild population in India's Gir landscape.



Highlighting India's conservation success, Shri Yadav informed that the lion population in the Greater Gir Landscape has risen to an estimated 891 individuals in 2025, marking a 32 per cent increase compared to 2020. He said effective conservation and management efforts have helped stabilise and expand lion sub-populations across several regions of the Gir landscape. The Minister noted that the Asiatic lion receives the highest level of legal protection under Appendix-I of CITES and Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. He further highlighted that 'Project Lion', launched by the Government of India in 2020, adopts a comprehensive landscape-based approach for the long-term conservation of Asiatic lions through habitat restoration, population management and ecological resilience.

Concluding his address, Shri Yadav said the IBCA Summit 2026 will further strengthen international cooperation, public awareness, knowledge sharing and adoption of best conservation practices to secure a stronger socio-ecological future for Big Cats and their habitats.

The dignitaries also launched a 'Lion Conservation Brochure' during the event. Besides this, detailed presentations and educational films on conservation efforts being taken for Big Cats were shown to the gathering that included students from various educational institutions of the region.



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