



In culmination of 10 years of dedicated efforts, Union Environment Minister and CM (Rajasthan) initiate the process for release of captive-bred Great Indian Bustards into the Wild at Desert National Park, Jaisalmer

A critical step in GIB Recovery Programme - to aid progressive Refining of Protocols for Reintroduction of Captive-bred Birds into their Natural Habitat

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In a significant milestone for the conservation of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB), during the Wildlife Week 2026 Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav, and Chief Minister (Rajasthan), Shri Bhajan Lal Sharma (through VC), today participated in the initiation of the process for release of two captive-bred Great Indian Bustards from the soft-release facility into the wild to be undertaken tomorrow at the Desert National Park, Jaisalmer. This rewilding of the GIB is the fruit of continuous hard work, dedication and scientific pursuit over a decade in building a viable population of the State bird of Rajasthan. The dignitaries also reviewed the progress of GIB Conservation Breeding Centre at Ramdevra and Sam and inaugurated the newly developed Rewilding Aviary, while also releasing the brochure on the decadal journey of GIB in the landscape. Rajasthan State Minister for Forest and Environment, Shri Sanjay Sharma, along with senior officers of the Union and State Governments attended the event.



The project has seen a remarkable beginning in Rajasthan and subsequently a successful ‘jumpstart’ initiative in Gujarat. The Union Minister recently reviewed the soft release and conservation facility at Naliya, Kutch in Gujrat. Tomorrow's release would mark an important transition in India's GIB conservation programme from establishing a viable conservation-breeding population towards rewilding and augmentation of the species in its natural habitat. The exercise was undertaken in a carefully controlled manner with limited presence at the release site to minimise human-induced disturbance to the birds. Learnings from the pilot release will be used to progressively refine the protocols for subsequent releases.

In his address during the evening, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan called this day of rewilding of the State Bird as a day of pride for the whole State. He highlighted how under the coordinated efforts of the Union and State Governments, the GIB which is part of the Thar's cultural heritage has been brought back from the brink of extinction. The Chief Minister also detailed the funding support provided by the State Government for the GIB Conservation Programme, besides other successful interventions in the field of environmental conservation across the State.

Addressing the inaugural session, Shri Bhupender Yadav highlighted that the whole region of Thar Desert has emotional and cultural connect with GIB. The Union Minister thanked Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision that led to the success of the conservation programme for GIB, which has become a global example during the last decade. He commended the efforts of the officials of Union Environment Ministry, State forest department, scientists of WII and local communities to have achieved the swift progress under the GIB Conservation Programme that has today reached the stage of rewilding the bird.



Shri Yadav stated that the success of this programme would also get economic benefits for local communities in the form of eco-tourism, besides GIB conservation's ecological benefits as the umbrella species of the Thar ecosystem. The Minister further highlighted the importance of GIB in grassland conservation, land degradation neutrality and working as an important stopover for migratory birds in central Asian flyways.

During the visit, while reviewing the incubation and breeding facilities Shri Yadav interacted with officials and scientists associated with the conservation programme. The Rewilding Aviary at Ramdevra, measuring 160 m × 64 m × 14 m, has been constructed by the Rajasthan Forest Department through the Rajasthan State Road Development and Construction Corporation Ltd. (RSRDC), with a sanctioned budget of ₹9.25 crore from the Government of Rajasthan in consultation of experts and scientists of Ministry and WII. The large, pillar-less facility provides unobstructed flight space for captive-bred GIBs to develop flight muscles, adapt to natural conditions and exhibit natural behaviour in preparation for their eventual release.

The Bustard Recovery Programme

It is a collaborative initiative of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Rajasthan Forest Department and Wildlife Institute of India (WII), with technical collaboration from the International Fund for Houbara Conservation and funding support from National CAMPA. The ongoing National Action Plan envisages conservation breeding, scientifically informed habitat management, threat mitigation, habitat restoration and community engagement.

The conservation-breeding programme has achieved significant progress. The GIB facilities at Sam and Ramdevra presently house 97 birds, of which 40 originated from wild-laid eggs and 57 have been bred in captivity. Of these, 86 birds are being maintained for captive reproduction, while 11 have been earmarked for release into the wild. Captive reproduction resulted in 24 live chicks during 2025 and 29 during 2026. Scientific interventions under the programme such as the novel '*jumpstart*' approach are aiding in the species' recovery, wherein six chicks in Rajasthan and two chicks in Gujarat have been hatched by placing captive-laid eggs in wild nests that were accepted by the incubating females.

These interventions – enabled by successful conservation breeding of GIB – are being reinforced with significant efforts in restoring habitats by Rajasthan Forest Department that includes the establishment of ~200 sqkm of fenced grassland enclosures inside the Desert National Park, which serve as the prime

breeding habitats for the species, according to long-term telemetry studies of WII. The species' conservation actions are being guided by the Judgement of the Supreme Court of India, based on recommendations of the Expert Committee constituted for this purpose.

The release of captive-bred GIBs represents the next critical step in the species recovery programme and will provide important scientific learnings for progressively developing and refining protocols for reintroduction of captive-bred birds into their natural habitat. As a prelude to Shri Yadav's visit to GIB conservation facilities at Jaisalmer, public awareness and outreach activities were organized across Rajasthan.



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