

Gir! The Last Bastion of Asiatic Lions

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Gir National Park © Amit Prasad

GIR National Park, which is also known as Sasan Gir, is part of the Khathiar-Gir dry deciduous forests ecoregion and is located 43 km north-east of Somnath, 65 km south-east of Junagadh and 60 km south-west of Amreli. Gir's forests were once the royal hunting grounds; however, it was established as a national park in 1965 with a total area of 1,410.30 sq km, of which 258.71 sq km is fully protected as a national park and 1,151.59 sq km as a wildlife sanctuary.

'Gir' means mountain and shares its topography with Girnar Hill. The Gir National Park — the last abode of the Asiatic lions, has a semi-dry climate. It has rugged hills and is covered with scrub jungles of teak and ziziphus. Also, it has large open patches of grassland intertwined with several perennial rivers cutting across it. The tree species commonly found in Gir are teak, dhak, khair, ber, babul, jamun, etc. These trees are beneficial for maintaining natural habitats and play a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance of the forest and providing the perfect habitat for lions and their prey. Besides lions, many other species of animals, birds and reptiles share the habitat with the jungle king.

determine the population size of the big felines. It is based on the theory that every big cat has distinct pugmarks, and the total number of lions is then determined based on the uniqueness of their pugmarks.



Most of the water bodies of Gir are infested with crocodiles

In the year 2020, due to the inability to gather thousands of volunteers to count lions in Gir National Park due to COVID-19 restrictions, the authorities devised a novel method called "Poonam Avlokan" for conducting lion census. The method, also known as "observation on a full moon night" was devised by the Forest Department of the Gujarat State and is based on the fact that it is easier to record the movement of lions on a full moon day.

The Asiatic lions (also known as Persian Lions) were once widely distributed in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Arabian peninsula, Asia Minor and Turkey; however, they have vanished from almost all these habitats. They are now confined to the Western part of India and protected in the Gir Sanctuary in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat State. Not far ago, in the 19th century, the rulers of Indian princely states conducted hunting expeditions and also used to invite the British colonists to participate. British rulers hunted



White-eyed buzzard

Red-naped ibis

As per the 14th Asiatic Lion Census 2015, it is estimated that there are approximately 600 Asiatic lions left in the Gir Forest of Western India. The pugmark technique is one of the most commonly used and cost-effective techniques to