

Gir National Park

The Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary (also called Sasan Gir) is a wildlife sanctuary and forest located at Talala Gir, Gujarat. It is the only known habitat of the Asiatic Lion.

Established in 1965, it is part of the Khathiar-Gir dry deciduous forests ecosystem.

This article on Gir National Park will be of immense use in the Environment and Ecology segment of the Civil Services Examination.

History of the Gir National Park

The Asiatic Lion used to be widespread throughout the Indian subcontinent before excessive hunting by British colonials and India rulers decimated their population.

By the 1800s only a dozen Asiatic lions remained in India, all of which were concentrated in the Gir forest. This was brought to the Nawab of Junagarh's attention by the British authorities. Since Gir fell within the range of the Nawab's hunting grounds he was in a better position to establish a sanctuary for the remaining lions which he did. Following the annexation of Junagadh in 1948 and the Nawab's family fleeing to Pakistan as a result, the sanctuary was taken over by the Government of India who continued the task of protecting the lions of Gir.

Today the Gir National Park is the only sanctuary where Asiatic lions are found. As a result of efforts by the government forest department and wildlife activists, the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary is a thriving ecosystem with a diverse flora and fauna. It is now considered an essential part of Gujarat's ecology.

To know more about Biodiversity in general, visit the linked article.

Details about the Gir National Park

The total area of the park is 1,412 km², out of which 258 km² is fully protected as a national park and 1,153 km² as wildlife sanctuary.

About 507 plant species were recorded following a survey by the University of Baroda

Some of the flora include, jamun, dhak, tendu flame of the forest, amla, kalakand on the occasional banyan tree. Following an afforestation programme casuarina and prosopis have also been planted in the Gir sanctuary

The Gir National Park was also the location of the Indian Crocodile Conservation Project in 1977 when the state government of Gujarat introduced about 1000 marsh crocodiles into the water bodies of Gir to preserve the population of crocodiles there.

Asiatic Lion Population in Gir National Park

In 1900 the estimated population of Asiatic Lions was 100. As per the census taken in 2020 the numbers stand at 674 consisting of 274 males, 260 females and 137 cubs. This represents a remarkable improvement compared to the previous century

Despite the Gir Forest being protected, the Asiatic Lion population is still under threat from illegal poaching and retaliation from farmers for attack on livestock. Additional threats also include natural calamities like floods, forest fires and epidemics. Despite these problems the Gir National Park is a safe haven for the lions.

Human-lion conflict is quite rare as awareness programs have been successful in making villagers aware on how to better protect their livestock and avoid zones where the lions reside. One recorded instance of lions attacking livestock consistently was during a drought taking place from 1899 to 1901. The losses were compensated by the Nawabs of Junagadh. Now there are rare instances of such conflicts taking place.

Every five years a census takes place. Before indirect methods like counting footprints were used. But since April 2005 direct spotting of the lions is used in the census.

Today the growing concern for the maintenance of the Gir National Park is the threat of mining activities around its borders, illegal encroachment and recurring threats from Cyclones, floods droughts etc.

Relevant Questions for Gir National Park

Which is the best time to visit Gir National Park?

As the protected area remains closed from June to October, the best time to visit Gir is in winter, from November to March. The summer months of April and May are very hot but ideal for wildlife photography and wildlife viewing.

What other wildlife are present in Gir National Park?

Mugger crocodile, Indian Leopard, jungle cat, Striped hyena Chital, nilgai, chinkara, wild boar and four-horned antelope are some of the animals found in Gir National Park.