

## Barda Wildlife Sanctuary [UPSC Notes]

The Gujarat government, in March 2023, proposed a second home for Asiatic lions at Barda Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat. Barda sanctuary, about 100 km away from their current home [Gir National Park](#), has been identified as a potential site to bring the Asiatic Lion. According to the Wildlife Institute of India Report, it has planned to translocate 40 adult and subadult lions to the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary under **Project Lion**. As per the last count of big cats in 2020, there are 674 lions in the state and Gir is overcrowded with the big cats.

In this context, it is necessary to learn more about the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary and the implication of the relocation of the Asiatic Lions. This is an important topic for the [IAS exam](#) environment & ecology segment.

### Barda Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is located 15 km from the coast of Porbandar in the Porbandar district, Gujarat. In 1979, this area was declared a sanctuary.
- It has a forest cover of 192.31 sq. km abundant in floral diversity. It has many medicinal plants along with rare and endangered plants such as Gorad, Bamboo, Dhav, Rayan, Ber, Jamun, Babul, etc.
- Animals like wild boar, leopard, hyena, wolf, blue bull, jackals, etc. are found here.
- Maldharis, Gadhvis, Rabaris and Bharvads are the few known ethnic communities in this region.
- A few rare and endangered bird species such as crested hawk eagles are also found.

### Asiatic Lion Relocation

- Carnivore populations restricted to single sites, like [Asiatic lions](#) in Gir, face various extinction threats from environmental and genetic factors.
- For the past two decades, the translocation of lions in India has been demanded by experts as the big cats have been geographically isolated in Gir.
- A second home would protect the lion population from extinction in case of disease outbreaks such as the Canine Distemper Virus which caused the death of many lions.
- Restriction to a particular place also leads to an unexpected decline in prey.
- If restricted to a limited site, natural calamities could result in their extinction.
- The [Supreme Court of India](#) in 2013 also ordered the relocation of some big cats to Madhya Pradesh. But 10 years have already passed and the transfer is yet to happen.

### About Asiatic Lions

- African lions are slightly larger than Asiatic lions. Asiatic lions have a longitudinal fold of skin running along their belly, unlike African lions.
- Asiatic lions are currently found in 9 districts of Gujarat, under the Saurashtra region such as Jamnagar, Junagadh, Porbandar, Gir-Somnath, Amreli, Bhavnagar, Botad,

Rajkot and Surendranagar. They are spread across an area of 30,000 sq. km.

- The lions face the usual threats of poaching and habitat fragmentation. Three major roads and a railway track pass through the Gir Protected Area (PA). Also, there are three big temples inside the PA that attract a large number of pilgrims, particularly during certain times of the year.
- There are also cases of lions dying by falling into the unguarded wells around the Gir.

**Concerns with the relocation:**

- Barda Wildlife Sanctuary can only hold 26 lions and a maximum of 35 lions as per a 2014 report. It may be due to factors such as a low prey base and the small size of the sanctuary.
- A lion population in Barda cannot be said to be immune from disease outbreaks such as disease epidemics in the Gir landscape due to the close geographic proximity of both areas and the continuous presence of cats, dogs and other livestock in the intervening habitat.

**What has been done for the rehabilitation of lions?**

- The Gujarat forest department has identified centres such as Rampara Wildlife Sanctuary and Sakkarbaug Zoological Garden to diversify the gene pool and more sites will be added further for the rehabilitation of the lions.
- The Sakkarbaug Zoo shall be developed further for breeding programmes.
- Ex-situ conservation efforts of lions will be further encouraged.