

ARTICLE (15-18)

“THE MIGHTY BIRD IN MIGHTY DANGER!”

“The Great Indian Bustards have been wiped from existence “, this is going to be headlines in the upcoming years if we don’t act fast enough to save them.

The Great Indian Bustard is one of the largest heavy-flying birds native to India, heavy-flying Rajasthan to be exact. Although it is native to Rajasthan only about 120 of them remain in the state. This is truly shameful for us, for we are failing to protect the state bird of Rajasthan.

“The bird which was fighting for the title of national bird is now fighting for existence “

The Great Indian Bustard, once a widespread species across northwestern and west-central India, has drastically declined its population and range. Studies by ecologists have found that around 90% of its natural habitat has been lost due to human activities such as road construction, mining, irrigation, and intensive agriculture. The conversion of croplands that once supported the bustard's diet of sorghum and millet seeds to commercial crops like sugarcane, cotton, and grapes has further reduced its food sources. Additionally, hunting and other forms of disturbance have added to the decline. These factors, along with the bird's low reproductive rate and the presence of natural predators, have placed the species in a perilous state.

While people believe that the cause for their population decline is just habitat loss or poaching for its meat, the recent cause is quite a bit different. The Supreme Court in April 2021 ordered that all overhead power transmission lines in core and potential GIB habitats in Rajasthan and Gujarat should be made underground. The reason for this? You guessed it, they were causing the death of countless GIBs.

These power lines have been an enemy of the birds for years, killing about a lakh in a year just in India but they are especially harmful to the GIB; due to its 7-foot long wingspan and over-a-meter-tall body, they can easily get caught in these lines and die on impact. Moreover, The GIBs are not great fliers and have a wide sideways vision to maximise predator detection but the species’ frontal vision is narrow. These birds cannot detect power lines from far since, they are heavy fliers, they fail to manoeuvre across power lines within close distances.

Hearing petitions highlighting deaths of the GIBs due to power transmission lines, a special bench of the apex court led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud directed Chief Secretaries of Gujarat and Rajasthan to undertake and complete a comprehensive exercise within four weeks to find out the total length of transmission lines in question and the number of bird diverters required. The result of this was they found 72 such lines which either needed to have bird diverters or be undergrounded, whatever was more feasible.



Water footprint of different type of fabric.

The undergrounding or installing bird diverters on the power lines may take up to 1-3 years which is a great step taken by the government. This is truly a big win for environmentalists. It has proved that anything is possible if we actually put in the effort instead of just showing it. We should learn from this and let it never repeat again. If we want to achieve SDG 15 (life on land) before the due time (2030), many more such steps are required.

Although the GIB may be saved for now, many species on the endangered and critically endangered list need urgent care. These animals on the critically endangered list include Javan Rhinos, Amur Leopard, Sunda Island Tiger and many more. They can be protected in the same way the GIBs were, through the support of the people and due to the awareness in people about the detrimental impacts of the loss of a species.

The concept of loss of biodiversity is not a new one from earlier times human activities have been detrimental in causing habitat loss and straight-up death(poaching) for many animals. We, humans, fail to understand that every animal has a role in the ecosystem and if even the population of one goes down, the entire ecosystem will be disrupted. So, any animal big or small needs to be saved from extinction. We have lost 12 animal species just in the last 100 years and 600 plant species have been wiped from the wild in the last 250 years. Moreover, the loss of biodiversity also has an impact on the country's economy as many tourists come to see the wildlife of the country and if we don't have much to show we would lose precious foreign exchange.

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