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Great Indian Bustard — First Successful Inter-State Egg Transfer Hatching in Nearly a Decade

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Great Indian Bustard — First Successful Inter-State Egg Transfer Hatching in Nearly a Decade

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✎ WHY IN NEWS

A Great Indian Bustard (GIB) chick was successfully hatched in Gujarat's Kutch region on March 26, 2026, using an inter-state egg transfer from a Rajasthan captive breeding centre — the first successful GIB hatching in nearly a decade — demonstrating a new conservation technique called the “jumpstart approach” that could rescue the species from near-certain extinction.

THE HATCHING — WHAT HAPPENED

Operation Details

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Technique	Inter-state egg transfer (“Jumpstart Approach”)
Egg origin	Rajasthan captive breeding centre
Hatch location	Kutch region, Gujarat
Distance covered	770 km in ~19 hours
Transfer method	Temperature-controlled egg incubation (37.5°C)
Hatch date	March 26, 2026
Significance	First successful GIB hatch in nearly a decade

Why Gujarat?

Gujarat’s GIB population had reached a critical tipping point:

- **Only 3 female GIBs** in Gujarat — with **no males**
- No natural reproduction possible in Gujarat
- The Kutch landscape is historically prime GIB habitat (arid grasslands)

The “jumpstart approach” addresses what conservation biologists call **demographic Allee effects** — when populations are so small that normal reproduction becomes impossible even when suitable habitat exists.

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD — SPECIES PROFILE

Classification and Status

ATTRIBUTE	DETAIL
Scientific name	<i>Ardeotis nigriceps</i>
IUCN Red List status	Critically Endangered
Global population	Fewer than 150 individuals
Primary range	Rajasthan, Gujarat (India)
CITES listing	Appendix I (most protected)
Wildlife (Protection) Act	Schedule I
National status	State bird of Rajasthan

Why the GIB is Critically Endangered

The GIB was once found across 11 Indian states. Three factors have driven its near-extinction:

- 1 Overhead power lines:** GIBs have a forward-facing narrow field of vision — they cannot detect power lines in time during flight. Collisions are the **single largest cause of adult mortality** (estimated 18 birds/year in Rajasthan alone).
- 2 Habitat loss:** Arid grasslands converted to agriculture, renewable energy projects, and human settlements.
- 3 Hunting history:** Historically hunted for meat and sport; protected since the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The Power Line Problem — Supreme Court's Role

In 2021, the Supreme Court ordered the underground cabling of power lines in core GIB habitat areas in Rajasthan. However, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy raised concerns that underground cabling could jeopardise India's solar energy targets in the Thar Desert — one of the world's best solar zones. The Court issued revised guidelines balancing both concerns — a rare example of climate-vs-biodiversity trade-off adjudication.

PROJECT GIB AND CAPTIVE BREEDING

History of the Programme

- **Project GIB launched:** 2016
- **Lead institutions:** Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun + State Forest Departments (Rajasthan and Gujarat) + MoEFCC
- **Captive breeding centres:** Sam (Jaisalmer) and Ramdevra (Jaisalmer district), Rajasthan
- **Current captive population (Rajasthan):** ~73 birds
- **Breeding technique:** Artificial insemination + incubation (GIBs rarely breed in captivity through natural mating)

International Support

The **Abu Dhabi breeding programme** (UAE) has been a key partner — sharing aviculture expertise from Houbara bustard conservation, a related species that has been successfully bred in captivity at scale in the Gulf.

CMS COP15 AND GIB — INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

The 15th Conference of Parties to the **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)** — held in Brazil in March 2026 — added the Great Indian Bustard to Appendix I of CMS (highest protection level). This obligates CMS member states to protect GIB habitat and prohibit hunting.

CMS at a Glance

DETAIL	INFORMATION
Full name	Convention on Migratory Species (CMS / Bonn Convention)
Established	1979, Bonn, Germany
Administered by	UNEP
India hosted	CMS COP13, Gandhinagar, 2020
Appendix I species	Strictly protected; hunting prohibited
Appendix II species	Requires cooperative agreements
COP15 outcome	40 new species added to protected lists
Species at high risk	188 total (103 birds, 26 fish, 28 terrestrial mammals, 23 aquatic mammals)

Other Species Added at CMS COP15

- Cheetah (reintroduced in India via Project Cheetah)
- Striped hyena
- Snowy owl
- Giant otter
- Great hammerhead shark

INDIA'S GRASSLAND ECOSYSTEM — BROADER CONTEXT

The GIB's fate is emblematic of India's **grassland ecosystem crisis**. Grasslands — unlike forests — receive limited policy protection in India:

- **Not counted as forest cover** in FSI surveys
- **Not covered under Forest Conservation Act** (only recently amended)
- **Treated as wasteland** for land acquisition purposes

The **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022** strengthened protections for both captive and wild species, but grassland-specific protections remain weak. Conservation biologists have called for a **National Grassland Policy** — analogous to the National Forest Policy — to address this structural gap.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GIB scientific name (*Ardeotis nigricaps*); IUCN status (Critically Endangered); Rajasthan state bird; CMS Appendix I; Project GIB (2016); captive breeding centres (Sam, Ramdevra, Jaisalmer); CMS COP15 (Brazil, 2026); India hosted CMS COP13 (Gandhinagar, 2020).

MAINS GS-3:

“The Great Indian Bustard faces dual threats from power lines and habitat conversion for renewable energy. How should India resolve this climate-biodiversity trade-off?”

MAINS GS-2:

Role of international conventions (CMS, CITES) in complementing India's domestic wildlife protection laws.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD (GIB):

Scientific name: *Ardeotis nigriceps*

IUCN status: Critically Endangered

Global population: fewer than 150 individuals

CITES: Appendix I

WPA 1972: Schedule I

State bird: Rajasthan

2026 HATCHING:

Technique: Jumpstart Approach (inter-state egg transfer)

Egg source: Rajasthan captive breeding centre

Hatch location: Kutch, Gujarat

Distance: 770 km in ~19 hours

Gujarat GIB population before hatch: 3 females, 0 males

PROJECT GIB:

Launched: 2016

Lead: Wildlife Institute of India (WII) + State Forest Departments + MoEFCC

Captive breeding centres: Sam + Ramdevra (both in Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan)

Captive population (Rajasthan): ~73 birds

CMS COP15 (2026):

Venue: Brazil

New species added to protected lists: 40

India hosted CMS COP13: Gandhinagar, January 2020

CMS established: 1979, Bonn, Germany (Bonn Convention)

Administered by: UNEP

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Biggest threat: Overhead power lines (forward-facing narrow vision of GIBs)

Supreme Court 2021: Ordered underground cabling in core GIB habitat; revised to balance solar energy concerns

Historical range: 11 states; now effectively restricted to Rajasthan + small Gujarat population

Abu Dhabi programme: Partner in captive breeding (Houbara bustard expertise)

Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act: 2022 (strengthened protections)

Sources: [Wildlife Institute of India](#), [MoEFCC](#), [The Hindu](#), [CMS Secretariat](#)

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