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Great Indian Bustard Captive Breeding Count Reaches 94

16 June 2026 · **ENVIRONMENT** · **GS3**

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WHY IN NEWS

Three new chicks, one hatched from a **wild-collected egg** and two produced through **artificial insemination**, took the **captive count to 94** at the **Sudasari and Ramdevra** breeding centres in **Jaisalmer, Rajasthan**. With **2026 set to be the first soft-release year**, the milestone marks a turning point for one of India's most endangered birds.

The Great Indian Bustard is a flagship for grassland conservation and a recurring environment topic for both Prelims and Mains, especially the unusual threat of power-line collisions that drives its decline.

THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD: PROFILE

FEATURE	DETAIL
Scientific name	Ardeotis nigriceps
IUCN status	Critically Endangered
State bird	Rajasthan
Habitat	Arid and semi-arid grasslands, the Thar desert
Biggest threat	Collision with overhead power lines
Breeding programme	Since 2018; centres at Sudasari and Ramdevra, Jaisalmer

The GIB is a large, heavy, ground-dwelling bird of open grasslands. Once widespread across India's dry plains, its numbers have collapsed, leaving a tiny population concentrated mainly in Rajasthan's Thar landscape.

Why Power Lines Are the Killer

The GIB has **poor frontal vision** and is a heavy flier, so it cannot spot and dodge overhead transmission lines in time. Collisions with power lines are the single largest cause of unnatural deaths, a problem worsened by the spread of renewable-energy infrastructure across the same arid landscapes the bird inhabits. Conservation measures such as **bird diverters** and the call to lay lines underground respond directly to this threat.

THE CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The captive-breeding programme, running since **2018**, collects eggs from the wild and rears chicks in protected centres, supplemented now by **artificial insemination** to widen the gene pool.

MILESTONE	DETAIL
Programme start	2018
Centres	Sudasari and Ramdevra, Jaisalmer
Latest additions	3 chicks (1 wild egg, 2 by artificial insemination)
Total captive count	94
2026	First soft-release year

The move to **soft release**, gradually acclimatising captive-bred birds to the wild, is the critical next stage. A captive population is only an insurance policy; the real test is whether birds can be returned to and survive in their natural grasslands.

THE ANALYSIS: CAPTIVE BREEDING AS A BRIDGE

- ❶ **Insurance against extinction.** With so few birds left in the wild, the captive population of 94 is a genetic safety net against a catastrophic local loss.
- ❷ **Technology in conservation.** Artificial insemination widens the breeding pool and reduces dependence on collecting wild eggs, easing pressure on the wild population.
- ❸ **The hard part is release.** Breeding birds in captivity is necessary but not sufficient; the 2026 soft-release year will test whether captive-reared GIBs can survive predators and find food in the wild.

The way forward is to **mitigate power-line mortality** through diverters and underground cabling along priority corridors, **protect and restore grassland habitat**, ensure **successful soft release** with monitoring, and balance renewable-energy expansion with the survival of the species in the same landscapes.

UPSC RELEVANCE

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- **GS Paper 3 (Environment and Ecology):** species conservation, captive breeding, IUCN Red List categories, the conflict between renewable-energy infrastructure and biodiversity.
- **Prelims:** the GIB's scientific name, IUCN status, state-bird status, the power-line threat, the breeding centres in Jaisalmer.
- **Mains:** "Renewable-energy expansion and biodiversity conservation can conflict." Discuss with reference to the Great Indian Bustard.

FACTS CORNER

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THE BIRD:

Great Indian Bustard, *Ardeotis nigriceps*; IUCN Critically Endangered; state bird of Rajasthan

Biggest threat: collision with overhead power lines

THE MILESTONE:

3 new chicks (1 wild egg, 2 by artificial insemination) take the captive count to 94

Centres at Sudasari and Ramdevra, Jaisalmer; programme running since 2018

2026 is the first soft-release year

KEY IDEA:

Captive breeding is an insurance policy; successful return to the wild is the real test

Sources: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (<https://moef.gov.in>), *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com>)

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