

**25– 12 – 2022**

**News:** A 225 km Yatra to save the endangered sacred groves of Rajasthan

- A unique 225 km yatra taken out through remote villages and hamlets in western Rajasthan, which culminated at the Jaisalmer district headquarters earlier this week, has put forth the demand of protection of orans or sacred groves, which face the threat of destruction with their land being allotted for renewable energy infrastructure and high tension power lines.
- Orans also form the natural habitat for India's most critically endangered bird, the Great Indian Bustard (GIB). Many birds have died during the last few years because of collision with power lines, making this the most significant threat to the majestic birds.

## **Sacred Groves**

- The sacred grove is a **traditional method by locals to conserve the local forest and to worship the local deities.**
- The **Sacred Groves** comprises patches of forest or natural vegetation- from a few trees to forests of several acres-that are usually dedicated to local folk **deities.** The sacred groves are **important repositories of flora and fauna diversity that have been conserved by local communities in a sustainable manner.**

## Features

- **Hunting and logging are usually strictly prohibited** within these patches.
- Other forms of forest usage like **honey collection and deadwood collection are sometimes allowed on a sustainable basis.**
- Sacred groves **do not enjoy protection via federal legislation in India.** Some NGOs work with local villagers to protect such groves. Traditionally, and in some cases even today, members of the community take turns to protect the grove.
- However, the **introduction of the protected area category community reserves under the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002 has introduced legislation for providing government protection to community-held lands, which could include sacred groves.**
- Indian sacred groves **are often associated with temples, monasteries, shrines or with burial grounds.**
- Historically, **sacred groves find their mentions in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist texts, from sacred tree groves in Hinduism to sacred deer parks in Buddhism example.** Sacred groves may be loosely used to refer to natural habitats protected on religious grounds.

- Other historical references to sacred groves can be obtained in Vrukshayurveda an ancient treatise, and ancient classics such as Kalidas's Vikramuuvashiiya. There has been a growing interest in creating green patches such as the Nakshatravana grove.
- Among the largest sacred groves of India are the ones in Hariyali, near Gauchar in Chamoli District of Uttarakhand, and the Deodar grove in Shipin near Shimla in Himachal Pradesh.
- A Sarpakkavu or Snake Grove is a kind of holy grove found in Kerala. Kavuvu is the traditional name given for sacred groves across the Malabar Coast in Kerala, South India. Kavus are notable for Theyyam, the centuries-old ritual dance.
- Umang Lai (literally, "Forest Deities") is a form of holy Sacred grove found in Manipur. There are more than 365 Umang Lais, affiliated with the ancient religion of Sanamahism, which exists in various regions scattered across the Himalayan state of Manipur since ancient times. The holy, as well as a religious festival of Lai Haraoba, is celebrated especially in regard to these holy sacred groves.
- The accounts of these holy sacred groves are found in the ancient Manipuri Manuscript named Karthong Lamlen. Interestingly, Manipur stands 8<sup>th</sup> rank among all the Indian States and 1<sup>st</sup> rank for North East India, for having the highest number of sacred groves across the country.

<b>State</b>	<b>Local Term for Sacred Groves</b>
Andhra Pradesh	Pavithravana
Arunachal Pradesh	Gumpa Forests
Goa	Deorai, Pann
Jharkhand	Sarana
Karnataka	Devara Kadu
Kerala	Kavu, Sarppa Kavu
Maharashtra	Devrai, Devrahati, Devgudi
Manipur	Gamkhap, Mauhak
Meghalaya	Ki Law Lyngdoh, Ki Law Kyntang, Ki Law Niam
Orissa	Jahera, Thukuramma
Puducherry	Kovil Kadu
Rajasthan	Orans, Kenkris, Jogmaya
Tamil Nadu	Swami Shoal, Koikadu
Uttarakhand	Deo Bhumi, Bughyal

West Bengal	Garamthan, Harithan, Jahera, Sabitrithan, Santalburithan
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## Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

- GIB is also called **Indian Bustard** and **Ghorad**.
- It is also the **state bird of Rajasthan**.
- GIB is the **heaviest flying bird weighs up to 15 kg** and grows up to 1 metre high.
- Most **commonly arid and semi-arid grasslands**, open country with shrub. **They normally avoid irrigated areas**.
- GIB is also **endemic to Indian Sub-continent**.
- This **omnivorous bird** is considered as **a flagship species in grassland ecology**.
- They have poor frontal vision.
- GIBs are the largest among the fur bustard species in India, the others being MacQueen's bustard, lesser Florican and the Bengal Florican.
- These birds are often found associated in the **same habitat as Blackbuck**.
- GIB is found majorly in **Central and Western India and Eastern Pakistan**.
- The GIB lays one **egg every 1-2 years** and the success rate of these eggs is **60-70 per cent**. However, this **rate has been reduced to 40-50%** due to predators like fox and dogs.

- Population in India is reduced to 150 approximately in 2018. Out of them, 122 are in Rajasthan.
- Recent survey shows that only four female GIBs are left in Gujarat.
- IUCN Status of Great Indian Bustard is Critically Endangered.
- It is also protected under Appendix I of CITES Schedules and Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- Threats faced include developmental projects leading to collision led deaths, Hunting, Loss of Eggs; Noise pollution makes the mating call impossible and Habitat destruction.
- Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary/ Jawaharlal Nehru Bustard Sanctuary, Project Great Indian Bustard and Project Godawan by Rajasthan Gov are intended to protect Great Indian Bustard.
- It is also protected in Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh and Karera Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.
- The government has recently released Rs 33 crore to a project, titled "Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard-An Integrated Approach", for five years from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) for conservation and breeding of the GIB.

- In 2015, the Union Government launched the GIB species recovery programme, under which the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and Rajasthan forest department have jointly setup conservation breeding centres, where GIB eggs harvested from the wild are incubated artificially, and hatchings raised in a controlled environment.
- Until 2020, 9 eggs have been hatched.
- The plan is to create a population that can act as insurance against the threat of extinction and to release the third generation of these captive-bred birds.
- The World Conservation Congress in its session held in November 2004 had urged the Government of India to initiate action to conserve the species of bustards by launching a specific 'Project Bustard' on the lines of Project Tiger.
- Recently, the government informed Rajya Sabha that there were no GIBs in the Kutch Bustard Sanctuary in Gujarat.

## **M.K. Ranjitsinh & Others vs Union of India & Others**

- The Supreme Court in *M.K. Ranjitsinh & Others vs Union of India & Others*, said that, in all cases where the overhead lines in power projects exist, the governments of Rajasthan and Gujarat shall take steps forthwith to install bird diverters pending consideration of the conversion of overhead cables into underground power lines.

- In protecting the birds, the Court has affirmed and emphasised the **biocentric values of ecopreservation**.
- The philosophy of biocentrism holds that the **natural environment has its own set of rights which is independent of its ability to be exploited by or to be useful to humans**.
- Biocentrism often comes into conflict with its contrarian philosophy, namely **anthropocentrism**.
- Anthropocentrism argues that **of all the species on earth humans are the most significant** and that all other resources on earth may be justifiably exploited for the benefit of human beings. Example: Snail darter fish case in USA.