



Shrinking Lion Numbers in Africa

For Prelims: Lion Conservation, African and Asian Lions

For Mains: Initiatives related to Conservation of Lions

Source: DTE

Why in News?

The Study by Journal Nature Communications **highlighted the concerns with respect to the population of [Lions](#) lying well below the carrying capacity** across 62 geographic locations of African countries which also have socio-economic connotation to that.

- The **Lion Population were estimated to be between 20,000 and 25,000 in number** and may be declining, as per the study.

What are the Key Highlights of the Study?

- Across 62 geographic locations of Africa, around **41.9% of the regions had less than 50 lions** and 10 of them reported to have around 50-100 population of Lions.
- Only seven geographic locations across Africa were reported to have more than 1000 lion populations.
- The lions face other threats such as **poaching for prey, indiscriminate killing due to human-lion conflict**, bushmeat and others, which are evidently found in eastern and southern Africa
- Bushmeat poaching with snares led to **local extinction of lions in Nsumbu National Park in Zambia and Limpopo National Park in Mozambique**, which are two major national parks related to conservation of lions.
- The research observed that southern African countries such as **Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia have recorded an increase of population by 12%** between 1993 and 2014.
 - But the remaining lion habitats have seen **a decline by 60%**, especially in west and central Africa.

What are the Key Points Related to Lion?

- **Scientific Name:** *Panthera leo*
- **About:**
 - The lion is divided into **two subspecies**: the African lion (*Panthera leo leo*) and the **[Asiatic lion \(*Panthera leo persica*\)](#)**.
 - **Asiatic lions are slightly smaller than African lions.**
 - The most striking morphological character, which is always seen in Asiatic lions, and rarely in African lions, is a longitudinal fold of skin running along its belly.
- **Role in the Animal Kingdom:**
 - Lions hold an **indispensable place in the ecosystem**, they are an apex predator of their

habitat, responsible for checking the population of grazers, thus helping in maintaining the ecological balance.

- Lions also **contribute to keeping the population of their prey healthy and resilient as they target the weakest members** of the herd. Thus, indirectly helping in disease control in the prey population.

▪ **Threats:**

- Poaching, genetic inbreeding arising from a single population inhabiting one place, diseases such as plague, canine distemper or a natural disaster.

▪ **Protection Status:**

- **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
 - Asiatic Lion - **Endangered.**
- **CITES:** Appendix I for populations of India, all other populations are included in Appendix II.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972:** Schedule I

▪ **Status in India:**

- India is home to the majestic Asiatic Lion, who inhabit the protected territory of [Sasan-Gir National Park \(Gujarat\)](#).
- The lion population escalated from 523 to 674 individuals between the years 2015 and 2020.

▪ **Population of Lion in the World:**

- As per the estimates by IUCN, the population of lions is estimated to be around 23000 to 39000 overall, mostly spread across the Saharan Countries.

What are Conservation Efforts in India for Lions?

- **Project Lion:** The programme has been launched for the conservation of the Asiatic Lion, whose last remaining wild population is in Gujarat's Asiatic Lion Landscape.
- **Asiatic Lion Conservation Project:** The project envisages scientific management with the involvement of communities in coordination with multi-sectoral agencies for disease control and veterinary care for overall conservation of Asiatic lion.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Consider the following statements: (2019)

1. Asiatic lion is naturally found in India only.
2. Double-humped camel is naturally found in India only.
3. One-horned rhinoceros is naturally found in India only.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a)