

Firefly bird diverters to protect Great Indian Bustard

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In news

The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) along with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) India has come up with a unique initiative a “firefly bird diverter” for overhead power lines in areas where Great Indian Bustard (GIB) populations are found in the wild

Background

A report by the Ministry, submitted to the National Green Tribunal in 2019, pointed out that power lines, especially high-voltage transmission lines with multiple overhead wires, are the most important current threat for GIBs in the Thar region, and are causing unsustainably high mortality in about 15% of their population.

A brief note on firefly bird diverters

- Firefly bird diverters are flaps installed on power lines.
- They work as reflectors for bird species like the GIB.
- Birds can spot them from a distance of about 50 meters and change their path of flight to avoid collision with power lines.
- The firefly detectors have been installed along two stretches of approximately 6.5 km, selected between Chacha to Dholiya villages in the Pokhran tehsil after ground surveys and due consultations with the Rajasthan Forest Department.
- A total of 1,813 firefly bird diverters are being installed in this stretch – a model that has been endorsed by experts from the International Union for

Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission's (SSC) Bustard Specialist Group.

- The diverters are called fireflies because they look like fireflies from a distance, shining on power lines in the night.

About Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

- The GIB is one of the heaviest flying bird's endemics to the Indian subcontinent.
- They are primarily terrestrial birds.
- 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.
- Today less than 150 individuals are left in India.
- They have poor frontal vision.
- Maximum numbers of GIBs are found in Jaisalmer and the Indian Army controlled field firing range near Pokhran, Rajasthan.
- Other areas where they are found in less than 10 in number are Kutch district in Gujarat, Nagpur and Solapur districts in Maharashtra, Bellary and Koppal districts in Karnataka and Kurnool district and Amravati in Andhra Pradesh.
- IUCN status: Critically Endangered

Protected areas:

- Desert National Park Sanctuary in Rajasthan
- Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh
- Karera Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh

Threats:

- Collision/electrocution with power transmission lines
- Irrigation and farming technology
- Mining
- Wind turbines and Solar farms (photovoltaic power

stations)

- Plantation of exotic shrub/tree species in deserts and grasslands in the name of afforestation

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.