

Pakistan permits hunting Houbara Bustard

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In news : Recently, the Pakistan government has issued special permits to Dubai ruler and others to hunt houbara bustard during the 2020-21 hunting season

Key updates

- The Pakistan External Affairs Ministry has issued special permits to Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, the crown prince and five other members of their family to hunt the bird during the 2020-21 hunting season
- However, this is not the first time royals from the Gulf and their wealthy friends have descended on the deserts of Pakistan to hunt the rare bird species.
- These secretive and controversial private hunting expeditions date back over four decades and have continued even after Pakistan's Supreme Court imposed a blanket ban on the killing of the houbara bustard in 2015
- Challenging the ban, the government argued that wealthy Arabs brought prosperity to underdeveloped areas surrounding the hunting fields and the ban would have a negative impact on Pakistan's relations with Middle East countries.
- The ban was lifted in 2016 and the government continued to issue special hunting permits to Arab royalty during the winter.

Why is the houbara bustard hunted in Pakistan?

Vast swathes of land in Pakistan are allocated in blocks to wealthy dignitaries from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, who arrive in the country to hunt the birds every

year using hunting gear and falcons. They kill the bird for sport and also because its meat is supposed to have aphrodisiac qualities

Why did Pakistan give permission for Hunting?

The Pakistan Foreign Ministry has been extending yearly invitations to wealthy and powerful Arabs for hunting houbara bustards in the deserts of Balochistan and Punjab, **to strengthen the country's relations** with Gulf nations. **Arab hunters first started coming to Pakistan to hunt in the 1960s** after the houbara/bustard population in the Arabian peninsula began to dwindle.

Is there any limit that they are permitted to hunt?

The allotted hunting areas are spread over Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab provinces.

Each permit allows the individual to hunt a total of 100 bustards in a designated area during a 10-day safari. But the Arab VIPs are known to violate the terms of the permit and kill far more bustards than agreed upon.

About the houbara bustard

- It is a large terrestrial bird found in parts of Asia, the Middle East and Africa.
- The North African houbara (*Chlamydotis undulata*) and the Asian houbara (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*) are separate species.
- The Asian houbara is related to the critically endangered great Indian bustard native to India.
- After breeding in Central Asia during the spring, Asian houbara bustards migrate south to spend the winter in Pakistan, the Arabian peninsula and nearby Southwest Asia.
- Some Asian houbara bustards live and breed in the southern part of their ranges including parts of

Iran, Pakistan and Turkmenistan.

- **Population:** As per the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC), roughly 42,000 Asian houbara bustards and over 22,000 of the North African houbara bustards remain today
- **Reasons for decline in population:** The main reasons for the decline in the species' population are poaching, unregulated hunting and the degradation of its natural habitat