

Asiatic Lion Conservation Breeding Programme

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Asiatic Lion (*Panthera leo persica*) is a critically endangered species (sub-species), whose estimated population in the wild is about 359 +/-10 (April 2005 estimate of the Gujarat Forest Department). This wild population survives in and around the Gir National Park and Sanctuary in the Southern Saurashtra region of the Gujarat State, India. This wild population has shown gradual increasing trend since 1960s. Besides its wild population, there are about 84 Asiatic lions in Indian Zoos and a few in the Zoos of other countries. The total population including wild as well as in Zoos of this sub-species is estimated to be 450 to 480. Currently this sub-species is assigned a highest conservation priority by the State of Gujarat, the Government of India and world conservation organizations.

Conservation Breeding for Asiatic lion was first discussed in a meeting in May, 1995 at Sasan (Gir PA), which was chaired by the Chief Wildlife Warden of the State of Gujarat. The salient features of the meeting were – for planned breeding of Asiatic lion in Indian Zoos a minimum 20 founders i.e. 10 male and 10 females will be required. The breeding of the species will be done in such a way that all the founders contribute equally to the population. About 150 animals in different Zoos/ captive breeding facilities were considered to be genetically viable. In view of the possibilities of new founders coming into the planned breeding programmes from time to time by way of capture from the wild, even population of 100 animal is good enough in Zoos/ captive breeding facilities. It was estimated that the genetically viable population of 100-150 would be achieved in three generational breeding. Chennai Zoo, Ahmedabad Zoo, Kanpur Zoo and Van Vihar National Park, Bhopal were identified for coverage under the planned breeding of the Asiatic lion.

Fourteen animals (6 males and 8 females) were transferred from Sakkarbag Zoo, Junagadh to these Zoos under the programme. In the later years, 19 more animals (8 males and 11 females) were also moved out of Sakkarbag Zoo for display and planned conservation breeding at other destinations.

Between May, 1995 to October, 2003, there were 186 births (84 males and 90 females and 12 identified cubs) in nine Indian Zoos with majority (143) in Sakkarbag Zoo, Junagadh.

As all the participating Zoos do not have the uniform birth recording procedure, the birth rate recorded at other Zoos appears to be low. The cub mortality before they attain the age of six month is very high (25%) and between 6-10 months (6% to 10%). Thirty Three percentage (33%) of the born cubs

attain the age of more than 12 months.

The cub mortality recorded at the Zoos also includes the still births as well as the juvenile cubs injured/ killed and devoured by their mothers.

The Central Zoo Authority has decided to fund the creation of a new off-display facility at Sakkarbag Zoo for the Conservation Breeding of Asiatic Lion in Gujarat. Scientific/ technical personnel inputs in form of engaging a skilled person in project mode will also be placed at the disposal of Sakkarbag Zoo, Junagadh to assist in the Breeding Programme. The Chief Wildlife Warden of Madhya Pradesh where Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary is being prepared for re-introduction of Asiatic Lions has also requested by the Central Zoo Authority to identify a suitable Zoo/ site for creation of off-display conservation breeding facility in Madhya Pradesh for conservation breeding of Asiatic lions. Sakkarbag Zoo, Junagadh will continue to be the species coordinator under the Programme.

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Unique Job Opportunities

Operations Manager with botanical and horticultural background with emphasis on conservation for an upcoming Botanic Garden situated at Anaikatty, on the outskirts of Coimbatore. The Garden would replicate the flora and fauna of the Nilgiri Biospheric Reserve. The incumbent should be a PG in Botany/ Wildlife Biology/ Forestry/ Natural Resource Management with some active experience in a similar job. He must be a good administrator, passionate and committed to the job, creative and able to 'think out of the box'. He would be responsible for working with other technical experts in planning, coordinating and directing activities related to the garden. Salary would be competitive and not a constraint for the **right candidate**.

Interested personnel may apply with their latest CV to the address below. CV should include a few paragraphs about past experience and its relationship to the requirements described above.

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