

SC BATS FOR GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

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Death trap: Power companies say a diminishing habitat is the bigger threat for the birds.

The Supreme Court on Monday swooped-in to intervene on behalf of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustards over the birds falling dead after colliding with power lines running through their dwindling natural habitats in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde will examine on a priority basis whether overhead power cables can be replaced with underground ones to save one of the heaviest flying birds on the planet.

Attorney General K.K. Venugopal, appearing for the Power Ministry, however submitted that only low voltage lines can go underground but not the high voltage ones.

The court found further that an alternative mechanism — to install flight bird divertors — to guide the birds away from the power lines would be expensive.

The court discovered that the divertors, with their recurring costs, would end costing more than installing and maintaining underground lines. But the court suggested treading the middle path. “Wherever there is high voltage power lines, they can use flight bird divertors even if the recurring costs are high. Wherever there are overhead low voltage lines, these lines can be placed underground,” Chief Justice Bobde remarked.

Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, appearing for some power companies, objected to the court passing any sort of blanket ban which would affect over 50 lakh jobs.

Mr. Singhvi said the greater threat to the birds was from their diminishing habitat, flattened for agriculture.

The court agreed to further hear the case next week.

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