

ICMR RECOMMENDS VACCINE FOR LIONS

Relevant for: Environment & Disaster Management | Topic: Environmental Degradation - Wildlife related issues

Endangered Asiatic lions at Gir sanctuary in Gujarat. APAjit Solanki

The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) has confirmed that the Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) was responsible for lion deaths in the Gir forest of Gujarat and recommended that the remaining lions be vaccinated to prevent further outbreaks. This goes against recommendations by wildlife biologists that wild animals shouldn't be vaccinated.

"The scientists of ICMR-NIV (ICMR-National Institute of Virology) have recommended the existing CDV vaccine, which should work as a protective intervention for Gir lions," said a press statement on Friday from the institute.

East African strains

Though 21 lions reportedly died between September and October, the Pune-based ICMR-NIV found CDV responsible for the death of five Asiatic lions in Gir. The genetic sequence of the virus was compared to available CDV sequences and it was found to be related to the East African strains.

"It would be stupid to vaccinate wild lions because it's likely to compromise their immunity against future infections. These are wild animals and not ones in a zoo," Y.S. Jhala, a senior scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India, had told *The Hindu* on Thursday. An ICMR official said administering a vaccine could, at best, protect unaffected animals.

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