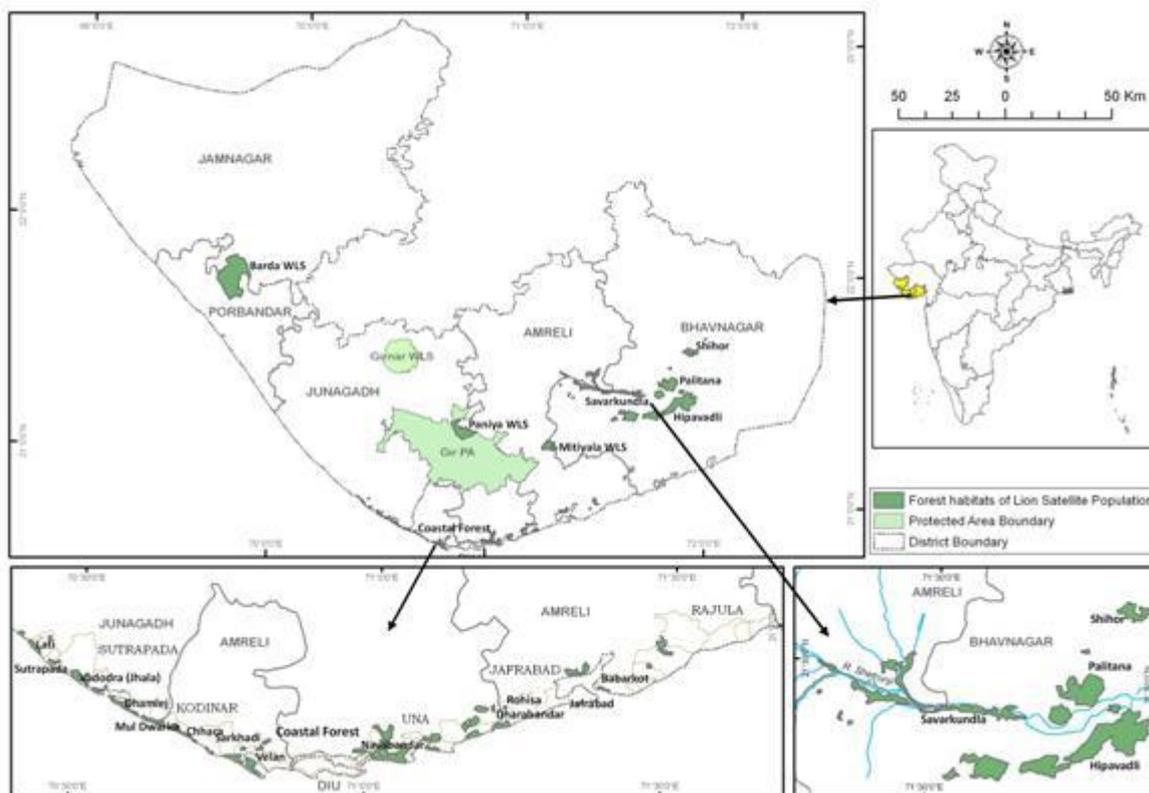


Project Update: June 2011

The only wild population of *Panthera leo persica* occurs in Gir PA, Gujarat, India. In recent years, lions are increasingly dispersing and moving through the agro-pastoral landscape around the PA using small patches of natural vegetation and tree plantations as day-time refuge. People living in the vicinity of these habitats regularly encounter lions - a situation endangering human life as well as causing economic loss due to livestock depredation. These issues obviously influence local perceptions towards lions and thereby lion conservation in the future. The present study was undertaken to understand attitudes and tolerance of local people towards lions, their habitat and conservation.



Methods: Taluka or tehsil is an administrative unit which in turn is part of a larger district within a State. The Greater Gir Landscape in the State of Gujarat extends across three districts - Junagadh, Amreli and Bhavnagar. Human population data was obtained from the office of Registrar General, India for the year 2001 for districts of Amreli, Junagadh, and Bhavnagar at the taluka and village level. A 2-km and 5km buffer was built around Gir PA, Girnar, and Mitiyala WLS in ArcMap 9.2. Data on population of villages within this zone and those separating Gir PA and the satellite habitats of Girnar WLS, Mitiyala WLS and other lion habitats were also extracted. Within each village 20% sampling protocol was followed making sure all communities, age class and strata of the village were interviewed. The interview schedule had five parts:

- 1) Details on respondent name, age, gender, community, occupation and related information

- 2) Relation with the forest, cost and benefit due to proximity to the forest taking into account both perceived annual crop loss and livestock depredation in the previous year
- 3) Interaction, satisfaction with and attitude towards the Forest Department
- 4) Assessment of knowledge of local communities regarding lions, forest related news and incidences.
- 5) All opinions and forest related information was recorded in an unstructured format to record the actual attitude and opinion of the respondent

Additionally, one-time visits to other lion habitats in Greater Gir area was made to understand lion movement and behaviour. In these areas, only the village-heads were interviewed and information was recorded.

Sno	Taluka	Number of Villages	Number of interviews
1	Visavadar	17	599
2	Una	5	47
3	Talala	15	696
4	Mendarda	15	560
5	Maalya	6	261
6	Dhari	17	479
7	Khamba	16	672
	Total	91	3314

Summary: The study revealed that communities living in the periphery of the Gir PA did not depend much on the forest for livelihood, resource collection and use. Although, detailed analysis would give comprehensive results with regard to conflict in these lion-human interface areas, the following overall picture has so far emerged from the study:

Local communities appreciate the proximity to the forest and the fact that the forest is required for their overall wellbeing and that it also contributes to better agriculture yields. Crop raiding ungulates are considered the biggest menace and the most negative influence of the Gir PA, causing farmers to suffer economic losses and the need for constant vigilance to guard the crops at all times of day and night. Although livestock depredation is frequent, people seem to be less perturbed by this loss compared to crop raiding and accept it as a natural process when living close to carnivore habitat. The compensation offered by the forest department generated mixed feelings with majority of the opinion that the amount offered is less. However, majority interviewed had no hesitation in saying that they would definitely inform and approach the forest department in case of wild animal injuries, mortalities or incidents without any apprehension. In terms of knowledge as to the endangered status of lion and other lion related information, not all, but only a handful of people within a village had adequate knowledge.

Additional information and individual opinions of the respondents gave a lot of insight into attitudes but was very varied and requires detailed synthesis. This information will be correlated with village level data of conflict (human attacks and depredation) provided by the forest department.

Thus, field data collection and compilation is complete while the data from forest department records are still awaited. Posters highlighting the importance of Gir PA and Asiatic lions to be put up in Government school within each village are yet to be printed and distributed.

