

# 10 lions, hundreds of dead animals in India floods: report

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Floods in India's western Gujarat state in June claimed the lives of ten endangered Asiatic lions

Ten endangered Asiatic lions, 1670 blue bulls and 87 spotted deer were amongst hundreds of wild animals killed in the recent floods to hit west India's Gujarat, a government report said Sunday.

The flash floods that hit Saurashtra region of the state in late June also killed at least 55 people with thousands evacuating their homes for safer areas after heavy rains.

"Till July 2 this year, carcasses of ten lions were recovered," Press Trust of India (PTI) said, quoting from a report prepared by Gujarat's Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF).

Gujarat is home to about 500 Asiatic lions in their last remaining sanctuary globally.

"Besides, carcasses of 1670 blue bulls, 87 spotted deer, nine black bucks and six wild boars were also recovered," it added.

In some of the worst affected parts of the region the water levels rose by almost 2.8 metres (nine feet) in a short span of time.

The forest department officials and local activists who began the process of assessing damage to habitat and wildlife after the floods, PCCF told PTI, had come across lions in "weak health and shocked condition."

Besides immediate concern for the wellbeing of the affected wildlife, the flash floods have also reignited the ongoing debate about relocating lions outside their only habitat in India.

Several wildlife experts have questioned the government's reluctance to allow the endangered species to move outside its current west India habitat to other suitable sanctuaries across the country.



Indian rescue workers carry the body of an Asiatic lion in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat on June 27, 2015 after floods triggered by torrential rain

"There is no way to predict the occurrence of catastrophes, which is why it is crucial to establish at least one more free-ranging population of lions before such risks manifest again," wildlife expert Ravi Chellam, who has studied animals in the region for years, earlier told AFP.

The issue of relocating lions outside Gujarat has been caught in a heated legal and political battle for years.

In 2013 India's Supreme Court ruled that some of them should be relocated to a sanctuary in a neighbouring state.



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Even experts have argued that restricting the lions to just one area puts them at risk of inbreeding, disease and extinction.

But the Gujarat government has consistently resisted any move from the state, where the lions are a source of pride.

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