

SHEOPUR (KUNO-PALPUR): Gujarat, miffed by the court order on its [Gir lions](#), is asking a string of questions regarding the suitability of MP to house the big cats. Among other things, they say both weather and scarcity of prey in the sanctuary at Kuno would pose a problem. Independent MP [Parimal Nathwani](#) from Gujarat especially, had expressed reservations about the court's direction claiming that the lions would be forced to live in a new geographical area, where everything from climate, land, water and their food pattern would change.

However, officials at the sanctuary -- which TOI visited few days back -- claim that these factors won't be an issue for the lions. Citing a recent survey by Wildlife Institute of India, [World Wide Fund for Nature](#), India and the state forest department, which was submitted to the apex court, officials point out that prey base (sambar, nilgai, wild pig, chinkara, langur, peafowl and feral cattle) in the area has increased 8-fold between 2006-2012. "This is more than the density in Gir or any other park across the country," says Ashok Mishra, former DFO of the sanctuary. Weather, too, won't make a difference, adds another official.

Incidentally, [the move](#) to relocate the lions to Kuno is an old one. The process began after a country-wide survey in 1993-94 by the Indian Wildlife Institute and relocation work started in '96- '97. Between 1997 and 2003, 24 villages, comprising 1545 families, were relocated outside the sanctuary to facilitate the process of transfer of the big cats. And now, when the lions seem set to move in, a number of habitat improvement and prey-based works have been undertaken in the sanctuary which is named after the Kuno River, one of the major tributaries of Chambal that flows through the area.

Interestingly, in their new home, the lions would be in proximity with another member of the cat family. The south-western portion of this landscape is patchily connected to Panna Tiger Reserve through the Shivpuri forest area. On the north-western side, this forest region is contiguous with Ranthambore Tiger Reserve across [the river](#) Chambal.