

INDIA'S 80TH INDEPENDENCE DAY MARKED BY CONSERVATION MILESTONE: 20 BLACKBUCKS REWILDED IN BANNI GRASSLANDS

Gujarat Forest Department and Vantara advance native herbivore restoration in Banni, strengthening the ecological foundations of one of India's most important grassland landscapes

Jamnagar/Kutch, Gujarat, 16 August 2026: On India's 80th Independence Day, the Gujarat Forest Department, with technical support from Greens Zoological Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre (GZRRC), Vantara, released 20 blackbucks (*Antelope cervicapra*) into the Banni Grasslands of Kutch, marking an important milestone in the restoration of native wildlife and the ecological character of this unique grassland landscape.

The release comprised five male and 15 female blackbucks, transferred from Vantara, Jamnagar, following the requisite approvals of the Chief Wildlife Warden, Gujarat, and the Central Zoo Authority (CZA). The transfer was undertaken in accordance with prescribed protocols covering veterinary examination, health screening, quarantine, disease surveillance, safe and humane transportation and release. Vantara complied with all the necessary requirements.

The significance of the initiative extends beyond the release of 20 animals. Restoring native herbivores is an important part of rebuilding the ecological fabric of Banni, strengthening its native herbivore community, supporting natural predator prey relationships and contributing to the recovery of a more resilient grassland ecosystem.

Banni is a vast grassland landscape supporting pastoral communities and diverse native wildlife. Blackbuck, chinkara, nilgai and wild boar have historically formed part of its herbivore assemblage. Their recovery, alongside habitat conservation and scientific grassland management, can help restore the ecological character and biodiversity of the landscape.

The initiative reflects the broader national commitment to the revival of India's native species and restoration of its grassland ecosystems, a conservation direction strongly championed under the leadership of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi. Project Cheetah, launched under this national vision, has placed ecological restoration, recovery of grasslands, prey base strengthening, scientific wildlife management and community participation at the centre of India's species recovery efforts.

Dr Jaipal Singh, IFS, Chief Wildlife Warden, Gujarat, said: "Restoring native wildlife is fundamental to restoring healthy landscapes. The release of these 20 blackbucks into Banni on India's Independence Day is an important milestone in our continuing effort to recover the ecological character and biodiversity of this unique grasslands. Such restoration requires science, sustained management and collaboration, and we appreciate Vantara's technical support in carrying out the programme in accordance with prescribed protocols."

Ajit Kulkarni, Special Director, Compliance & Due Diligence, Vantara, said: “There can be no greater privilege on Independence Day than contributing to a future in which India’s native species continue to live and flourish in the natural landscapes to which they belong. Species restoration is not simply about releasing animals; it requires a thorough understanding of the habitat, the species and the individual animals being released, as well as habitat dynamics, population planning, and the active support of all stakeholders, particularly local communities, to ensure the long term success and sustainability of these efforts. We are honoured to support the Gujarat Forest Department and the Government’s conservation vision for Banni, and to contribute our technical capabilities wherever they can strengthen India’s wildlife conservation efforts.”

Part of a Wider Gujarat Native Herbivore Conservation Programme

The Banni release forms part of a wider programme to strengthen native herbivore populations across Gujarat. The Central Government, through the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, has approved the translocation of 500 blackbucks and 100 chinkara, with the Chief Wildlife Warden, Gujarat, providing the necessary directions for the exercise.

While components of this wider programme support prey base augmentation in connection with the planned cheetah reintroduction programme, the Banni blackbuck release also has an important and independent species restoration objective: rebuilding populations of wildlife native to the grasslands.

The Banni Grassland Forest Division has sought Vantara’s technical support for the wider translocation programme, including specialised herbivore transport vehicles, portable boma systems, veterinary expertise and technical support for safe handling and transportation.

The initiative builds on the Gujarat Forest Department’s sustained conservation work. With the approval of the Chief Wildlife Warden, Gujarat, Vantara has previously supported the Forest Department in the rewilding of nearly 80 spotted deer in Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, contributing to biodiversity strengthening within the Asiatic lion conservation landscape.

The Banni initiative further strengthens this model of conservation collaboration, with the State Government and Gujarat Forest Department providing leadership and stewardship, supported by Vantara’s specialised capabilities in veterinary medicine, wildlife management, translocation and post release monitoring.

As India celebrates its 80th Independence Day, the return of these blackbucks to Banni carries a significant conservation message: protecting India’s natural heritage means not only safeguarding species, but restoring the landscapes in which they can once again live wild and thrive.



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About Vantara

Vantara, founded by Shri Anant Ambani, Executive Director of Reliance Industries Limited, is an animal welfare and conservation organisation.

Its ex situ programmes (care provided outside the natural habitat) include rescue, rehabilitation, treatment and long-term animal care (where required), supported by advanced veterinary medicine, species-specific nutrition, specialised infrastructure and multidisciplinary teams. Conservation breeding programmes are also undertaken to support the future restoration of viable populations in suitable natural habitats through rewilding.

Its in situ conservation work (conservation in animals' natural habitats) supports native species restoration, habitat restoration and human-wildlife conflict mitigation efforts led by government authorities, conservation institutions and other partners in India and internationally.