

# Saving Gir lions is this American's mission

Himanshu Kaushik | TNN

**Ahmedabad:** Until last year, American wildlife photographer and businessman Steve Mandel, was not even aware that there were lions outside Africa. Today, however, he has become the first foreigner to set up a non-profit organisation, exclusively for the conservation for the Gir lion. Mandel, who runs a management consultancy, has started the 'Lions of Gir Foundation' and will soon launch a website that will create awareness about the endangered beasts.

"While planning my first business trip to India late last year, I was researching where to photograph wildlife," he said. "During my research, I came across pictures of lions. I had no idea there

were lions outside of Africa. I was amazed that these cats are not well known outside India. People across the globe know of the plight of tigers in India, but few know of lions."

In the course of his research, he learnt about the dangers the lions were facing in the Gir forests of Gujarat, including poaching, disease, and the open wells that they were falling into. That in the last seven years, 50



CAT MAN: Steve Mandel in Gir forest

lions had fallen into wells and 25 had died.



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many thousands of years, and he was staring at me from only about 30 metres away! I was hooked!

I was very moved by efforts of some of the NGOs to save the lion and I decided to do something. When I returned home I filed the paperwork with the US Government to set up a non-profit foundation, similar to an NGO in India, and called the Lions of Gir Foundation. The goal

was to raise funds to help build well barricades in conjunction with the Wildlife Conservation Trust of India (WCTI). I am also in the final stages of approval and the website will be lionsofgir.com."

He said that during his stay in India he learnt about WCTI which was managed by Kishore Kotecha. He then decided that the funds he got for the foundation would be routed to India through the WCTI. The trust is out to construct barricades around open wells.

Kotecha said that Steve has committed 5,000 US dollars to the trust. "We are in the process of receiving permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Central Government for receiving foreign funds," he said.

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