



## **Identification of Coronavirus in 8 Asiatic lions in Nehru Zoological Park; lions under recovery**

**4<sup>th</sup> May, 2021, Hyderabad:** On 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2021, the Nehru Zoological Park (NZN) at Hyderabad reported eight Asiatic lions in the zoo with mild respiratory distress. Based on the guidelines of the Central Zoo Authority, their nasal and oral discharge samples were collected and sent to the Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species at CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (LaCONES-CCMB). The samples were tested using RT-PCR, and found positive for coronavirus.

CCMB analysed the genomes of coronavirus samples from these lions, and did not find those to be a variant of concern.

“As and when we noticed symptoms of nasal discharge from the lions housed in the Lion Safari enclosures we decided to send the samples for testing possibility of viral infection,” says Subhadra Devi, Curator, NZP. “The lions have been now isolated at the zoo from other animals, and are receiving due care and necessary treatment. They are also responding well to the treatment and recovering,” says Dr S Kukrety APCCF and Director of Zoos, Telangana.

“Since the pandemic began, many zoos and animal farms have reported that their animals have gotten infected from humans. It is essential to strictly follow the safety regulations in Indian zoos in the current times to avoid transmitting the infection to the animals. We have to carefully document the different symptoms that coronavirus infection causes in animals as well as develop non-invasive ways to procure samples from animals. Getting swab samples from animals is very difficult,” informs Dr Karthikeyan Vasudevan, Scientist-in-charge, LaCONES-CCMB.

India has four designated COVID-19 testing centres for captive animals, of which LaCONES-CCMB is one. “We are looking forward to now testing animal samples for coronavirus by testing their fecal samples. This can be a useful method of testing for both captive and free-ranging animals,” says Dr Rakesh Mishra, Advisor, CCMB. “Looking for the spread of coronavirus in animals opens up an uncharted area of work for CCMB. And it is an emerging requirement for managing the pandemic,” says Dr Virendra Tiwari, Director-in-charge, CCMB.