

About the Festival

The Biocultural Festival 2026 celebrates the Van Gujjar community and their deep bond with the Gojri buffalo, an indigenous heritage of the Himalayas. Organised in the spirit of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026), the festival highlights pastoral resilience, conservation potential, sustainable livelihoods and traditional knowledge systems that sustain biodiversity and culture.



Kindly scan to register

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cordially invite you to a biocultural festival in celebration of

Gojri Buffalo- A shared heritage of the Himalayas

Gujjaran-Go-Kaarj

February 11th, 12th and 13th, 2026,
Rajaji Retreat, Ganga Bhogpur Talla,
near Rishikesh, Pauri Garhwal

IYRP, 2026

The United Nations has declared 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP), recognising pastoralist communities and rangelands that cover nearly half the Earth's land. These landscapes safeguard biodiversity, food security, and traditional knowledge. Each month has a theme dedicated to pastoral life and a specific pastoral animal. The theme for February is **Mobility, Land and Water Security**, which is also the **International month of the Buffalo**.



The Van Gujjars

The Van Gujjars are a semi-nomadic pastoralist community living in the forests and Himalayan foothills of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and western Uttar Pradesh. Their way of life is rooted in transhumance, the seasonal migration with herds across forest corridors and alpine meadows (bugyals).

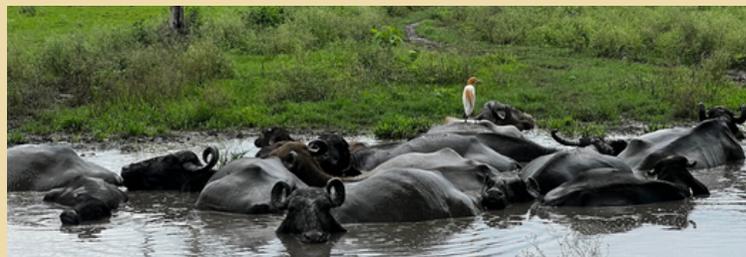
Buffalo herding is central to their livelihood, and their movements ensure sustainable grazing while maintaining a delicate balance with the forest ecosystem. The Van Gujjars foster commoning of pastures, facilitate conservation of forests and embody resilience, carrying forward centuries-old traditions of living in harmony with nature.

Gojri Buffalo



The Gojri Buffalo has been recognised as the 17th indigenous buffalo breed by NBAGR-ICAR, Karnal. Known for its pattih wala seengh (curved horns), hairy tail and unique body structure, these buffaloes depend on everyday mobility and seasonal migration across forests and pastures for sustenance. Such movement ensures the fat and nutritional content remains high in their milk and sustains the forest-based pastoral livelihood of the Van Gujjars.

The ecological significance of these buffaloes includes regeneration of native tree and grass species, maintenance of fire lines and traditional water sources as well as trampling upon invasive species. The Gojri buffalo dwells, cohabits and coexists with several mammals, birds, insects and other life forms in the forest. The Van Gujjars maintain a kin-like relation with these buffaloes, caring for their well-being and adapting their life and livelihood around their needs.



Festival Themes and Schedule



- **Day 1: 11th February 2026**

Theme: Who are Van Gujjars- Histories of forest life and migration

- Oral history sessions by elders on pastoral life and migration
- Exhibitions of photos and handicrafts
- Cultural performances: *Nukkad Natak* and storytelling by Maai on the Gojri buffalo

- **Day 2: 12th February 2026**

Theme: Coexistence and Conservation

- The relation between Van Gujjar, Gojri buffalo and the forest ecosystem
- Van Gujjar women and their traditional ecological and cultural knowledge
- Exhibitions, traditional games, and music performances

- **Day 3: 13th February 2026 (Venue TBD)**

Theme: Pashu Mela- Celebrating Gojri Heritage

- Buffalo fair with contests, demonstrations
- Community celebrations and performances honouring the Gojri heritage