

Happy DURGA PUJA and NAVARATRI



September/October 2014

Two Festivals!

Navaratri is a nine day festival dedicated to Devi Durga - the invincible, many-armed, warrior goddess. It is an important Hindu festival, celebrated all over India. In the state of Gujarat, where the wild Asiatic lions live, Navaratri is celebrated with Devi Pujas (prayer rituals) and traditional Garba dancing.

In eastern India, particularly in Bengal, the **Durga Puja** festival takes place at the same time as Navaratri. It also celebrates Devi Durga. Huge decorative structures called pandals are constructed to house grand prayer services. Afterwards food is served to everyone.

Durga and Lions

In Hinduism, Durga fought and killed Mahishasura, the evil demon who had been wreaking havoc on Earth. Every deity gave her a weapon for the battle. Shiva manifested some of his energies as a lion, representing fearlessness, and gave the animal to Durga.

In ancient scriptures Durga used her lion as a vehicle upon which to ride into battle against evil forces. Lions are looked upon in awe because of their special bravery and energy.

By accepting Shiva's gift, Durga also vowed to protect lions (and other animals) from harm. She is a Mother Nature figure, keeping nature in balance.

Protecting Asiatic Lions

Only around 411 wild lions remain in Gujarat. ZSL works with the Gujarat Forest Department and the Wildlife Institute of India to safeguard their future.

ZSL and partners plan to put in place a monitoring system for wildlife management and protection, as well as update local wildlife health facilities, initiate a conservation breeding programme, and train rangers and vets with the latest equipment.

We will also reach out to the local community and to schools, to ensure communities around the Gir forest know best how to keep their lions safe.

