

5. India Records Less Tiger Deaths

Prelims Level: Bio Diversity & its Threat

Mains Level: GS-III Conservation, environmental pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Why in News?

- According to data from the Ministry of Forest Environment and Climate Change (MoEFCC), for the first time in the past three years the number of tiger deaths in a year in the country has been less than 100.

About Project Tiger:

- Project Tiger was launched in 1973 with 9 tiger reserves for conserving our national animal, the tiger. Currently, the Project Tiger coverage has increased to 50, spread out in 18 tiger range states.
- The tiger reserves are constituted on a core/buffer strategy.
- The core areas have the legal status of a national park or a sanctuary, whereas the buffer or peripheral areas are a mix of forest and non-forest land, managed as a multiple use area.
- It is an ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change providing central assistance to the tiger States for tiger conservation in designated tiger reserves.

About NTCA:

- It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- It was initially launched in 2005, following the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force. It was given statutory status by 2006 amendment of the Wildlife Protection Act
- It is set up under the chairmanship of the Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- It approves the reserve specific tiger conservation plan prepared by the State Government.
- Evaluate and assess various aspects of sustainable ecology and disallow any ecologically unsustainable land use such as, mining, industry and other projects within the tiger reserves;
- Provide for management focus and measures for addressing conflicts of men and wild animal and to emphasize on co-existence in forest areas outside the National Parks, sanctuaries or tiger reserve, in the working plan code;

- Provide information on protection measures including future conservation plan, estimation of population of tiger and its natural prey species, status of habitats, disease surveillance, mortality survey, patrolling, reports on untoward happenings and such other management aspects as it may deem fit including future plan conservation.

Tiger Census in India:

- Every 4 years the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) conducts a tiger census across India.
- The first was conducted in 2006, followed by 2010, 2014 and 2018.
- According to results of the Tiger census report, released in July 2019, the total count of tigers has risen to 2,967 from 2,226 in 2014 – an increase of 741 individuals (aged more than one year), or 33%, in four years.
- India has achieved the target of doubling the tiger count four years ahead of the deadline of 2022.
- This is by far the biggest increase in Tiger count in terms of both numbers and percentage (since the four-yearly census using camera traps and the capture-mark-recapture method began in 2006).
- India accounts for majority of the 3,500-odd tigers that are scattered among Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russian Federation, Thailand and Vietnam.
- India's five tiger landscapes are: Shivalik Hills and Gangetic Plains, Central Indian Landscape and Eastern Ghats, Western Ghats, North-East Hills and Brahmaputra Plains, and the Sundarbans

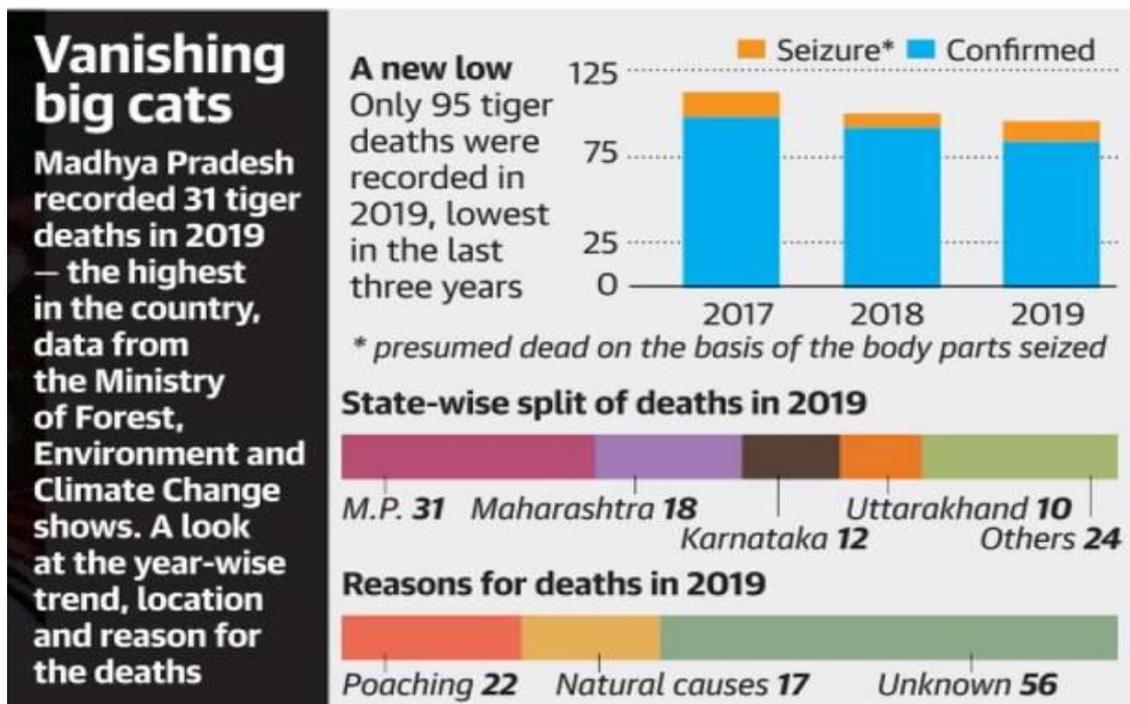
Why Tiger Conservation is Needed?

- Tigers are at the top of the food chain and are sometimes referred to as “umbrella species” that is their conservation also conserve many other species in the same area.
- The Tiger estimation exercise that includes habitat assessment and prey estimation reflects the success or failure of Tiger conservation efforts.
- More than 80% of the world's wild tigers are in India, and it's crucial to keep track of their numbers.

About Tiger Deaths in India:

- The threat to India's tiger population remains due to factors such as poaching, human-wildlife conflict and loss of habitat including threat to tiger corridors.

- According to data from the Ministry of Forest Environment and Climate Change (MoEFCC), there were 84 cases of tiger deaths in the country and 11 cases of seizures (in which a tiger is presumed dead on the basis of body parts seized by authorities). Both put together, the number of tiger deaths in 2019 is 95.
- In 2018, the number of tiger deaths recorded was 100 (93 mortalities and seven seizures). The number of tiger deaths in 2017 was 115 (98 mortalities and 17 seizures), and the number of tiger deaths in 2016 was 122 (101 mortalities and 21 seizures).



How Tiger Deaths Reduced?

- The reduced numbers of tiger mortalities are because of surveillance, good management of Tiger Reserves and a lot of awareness and education programmes on tiger conservation.
- Using technology to maintain surveillance on tigers has also come as an added advantage.
- Government has ensured that the M-STriPES (Monitoring System for Tigers-Intensive Protection & Ecological Status) patrolling app is deployed and used in every Tiger Reserve.
- **M-STriPES** (Monitoring System for Tigers - Intensive Protection and Ecological Status) is an app based monitoring system, launched across Indian tiger reserves by the NTCA in 2010.
- The system would enable field managers to assist intensity and spatial coverage of patrols in a geographic information system (GIS) domain.

Other Key Facts of the Report:

- An analysis of the tiger mortality figures shows that 57 of the 95 deaths occurred inside Tiger Reserves, while 38 cases of tiger deaths were recorded outside Tiger Reserves.
- Madhya Pradesh, which has the highest number of tigers in the country (526, as per the last census), has recorded the most number of cases of tiger deaths, with 31 tiger deaths reported from the central Indian State in 2019.
- This was followed by Maharashtra, which reported 18 deaths. Karnataka, another State with high tiger population, recorded 12 deaths, and Uttarakhand recorded ten deaths. Tamil Nadu recorded seven cases of tiger deaths.
- Deaths were also recorded from non-tiger bearing States like Gujarat, where a tiger had strayed into the State and died.
- The data on tiger mortality also confirms 22 cases of poaching in the country and one case of tiger poisoning in 2019.
- An analysis shows that in 16 out of 22 poaching incidents, which is almost over 70% of cases of poaching, have been reported outside Tiger Reserves.
- Eight cases of poaching have been reported from Madhya Pradesh, six from Maharashtra, and two each from Assam and Karnataka.
- According to experts, tigers are most vulnerable when they are outside Reserves as they are not under surveillance.
- In all, 17 cases of natural deaths of tigers have been recorded, while the reason for 56 other deaths could not be ascertained.

Scope for New Tiger Reserves:

- The increase in tiger numbers, more areas in the country need to be declared Tiger Reserves. We have 50 Tiger Reserves with an area of about 73,000 sq. km. With tigers coming out of Reserves and covering long distances, we need more Tiger Reserves.
- According to the NTCA at least three new Tiger Reserves will be added in 2020.
- It also added that the areas under consideration are in both south Indian and central Indian landscapes.

Tiger Translocation Protocol:

- The first inter-State translocation of tigers to the Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha, which did not go as planned, is considered to be the effort that was not a failure but a “learning experience”.

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- The inter-State translocation of tigers has not been stalled.
 - There are plans to translocate tigers to the western part of Rajaji National Park and also to the Buxa Tiger Reserve from similar tiger landscapes in Assam.

