

1. India celebrates 50 successful years of “Project Tiger”

Prelims Syllabus: Bio Diversity & Its Threat

Mains Syllabus: GS-III Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.



Why in News?

- The Indian government will officially mark the 50th year of ‘Project Tiger’ on 9 April with a three-day event in Mysuru, Karnataka.

About the Project Tiger:

- Project Tiger - an initiative to save tigers, was first initiated in the year April 1, 1973 in Jim Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand, during Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's tenure.
- Aim: Ensuring a viable population of Bengal tigers in their natural habitats, protecting them from extinction, and preserving areas of biological importance as a natural heritage
- From 9 tiger reserves since its formative years, the Project Tiger coverage has increased to 54 Tiger Reserves (Guru Ghasidas National Park and the Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary in Chhattisgarh being the latest), spread out in 18 of our tiger range states.
- The tiger reserves are constituted on a core/buffer strategy.
 - ✓ Core areas have the legal status of a national park or a sanctuary.
 - ✓ Whereas, buffer or peripheral areas are a mix of forest and non-forest land, managed as a multiple use area.

- The government has set up a Tiger Protection Force to combat poachers and funded relocation of villagers to minimize human-tiger conflicts.
- National Tiger Conservation Authority was established in 2005 following a recommendation of the Tiger Task Force, to reorganise management of Project Tiger and the many Tiger Reserves in India. It is the overarching body for conservation of tigers in India.

About the NTCA:

- Environment Minister is the Chairman of the NTCA.
- Below chairman are eight experts or professionals having qualifications and experience in wildlife conservation and welfare of people including tribals, apart from three Members of Parliament (1 Rajya Sabha, 2 Lok Sabha).
- The Inspector General of Forests, in charge of project Tiger, serves as ex-officio Member Secretary.
- Its main administrative function is to approve the Tiger Conservation Plan prepared by the State Governments and then 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.
- As per the WLPA, every State Government has the authority to notify an area as a tiger reserve.
- However, the Tiger Conservation Plans sent by state government need to be approved by the NTCA first.
- Alternatively, Central Government via NTCA may advise the state governments to forward a proposal for creation of Tiger Reserves.

Challenges faced by project tiger:

- **Poaching:** Project Tiger's efforts were mainly hampered by poaching, also by the debacles and irregularities in Sariska and Namdapha.
- As per NTCA, 1059 tiger deaths were in the last 10 years, most in Madhya Pradesh
- **Conflict with FRA, 2006:** The Forest Rights Act passed by the Indian government in 2006 recognizes the rights of some forest-dwelling communities in forest areas.
- Lack of adequate protection in the outside tiger reserve.
- According to a report, nearly 29 per cent of tigers lives outside of the core zone

- Man-Animal Conflicts Wildlife habitats are shrinking leading to more instances of human-animal conflict.
- From 2001 to 2016, 1,065 cases of human-tiger conflict were recorded including injuries and even fatalities on both sides.

Factors that determine tiger density:

- Availability of food and space.
- Tolerance levels exhibited by the locals who live around them to policymakers who decide management strategies.

Causes for human wildlife conflict:

- Physical (space) and biological (forest productivity) factors have an obvious influence on a reserve's carrying capacity of tigers.
- More so when different land uses overlap and a good number of people depend on forest resources for livelihood.



What is the way ahead to avoid conflict in tiger density areas?

- Artificially boosting the prey base in a reserve.
- **Tiger corridors:** Create safe connectivity among forests and allow tigers to disperse safely to new areas.

Key facts related to tiger population:

- As per the World Wide Fund for Nature, the number of tigers dropped by 95 per cent over the past 150 years.
- India is the land of royal tigers and current tiger population stands at 2967 which is 70 per cent of the global tiger population.
- Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka (524) and Uttarakhand (442).
- Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh is the first tiger reserve in India to officially introduce a mascot, Bhoorsingh the Barasingha.

Conservation efforts- National and Global:

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has launched the M-STrIPES (Monitoring System for Tigers – Intensive Protection and Ecological Status), a mobile monitoring system for forest guards.
- At the Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010, leaders of 13 tiger range countries resolved to do more for the tiger and embarked on efforts to double its number in the wild, with a popular slogan ‘T X 2’.
- The Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) program of the World Bank, using its presence and convening ability, brought global partners together to strengthen the tiger agenda.
- Over the years, the initiative has institutionalised itself as a separate entity in the form of the Global Tiger Initiative Council (GTIC), with its two arms –the Global Tiger Forum and the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program.
- The Project Tiger, launched way back in 1973, has grown to more than 50 reserves amounting to almost 2.2% of the country’s geographical area.

Protection Status:

- **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I.
- **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:** Endangered.
- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES):** Appendix I.