

1. 30 years of Project Elephant

Prelims Syllabus: Bio Diversity & Its Threat

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



Why in News?

- President Droupadi Murmu took part in Gaj Utsav at Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) in Assam to mark 30 years of Project Elephant.

Status of Elephants in India:

- India has about 27,000 Asian Elephants, which is the world's largest population of the species.
- As per Elephant Census (2017), Karnataka has the highest number of elephants (6,049), followed by Assam (5,719) and Kerala (3,054)
- More than 60% of the world's elephant population is in India.
- The elephant is the Natural Heritage Animal of India

Characteristics of Elephants:

- They are highly intelligent with strong family bonds
- They have the longest gestation period of all mammals (18 to 22 months)
- Adult male Asian elephants are less social than females.
- The elephant makes a low, rumbling sound that can be heard up to 5 miles away.
- An elephant can carry up to 7 tons, making it one of the world's strongest animals.

What is Project Elephant?

- Project elephant is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in February 1992.
- The scheme helps and assists in the management and protection of elephants to the States having free-ranging populations of wild elephants, in order to ensure the survival of elephant population in the wild and protection of elephant habitat and elephant corridor.
- Project elephant is mainly implemented in 16 States / UTs, which includes Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand, Kerala, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Uttaranchal West Bengal Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.
- The union government provides financial and technical assistance to the states to achieve the goals of this project.
- Help is also provided for the purpose of the census, training of field officials and to ensure the mitigation and prevention of human-elephant conflict.
- There are around 32 elephant Reserves in India notified by the state governments. The first elephant reserve was the Singhbhum elephant Reserve of Jharkhand.

What are the Government efforts in Project Elephant?

- The document said financial and technical assistance were provided to elephant range States under the Centrally sponsored 'Project Elephant' scheme to protect elephants, their habitat and corridors to address issues of man-elephant conflict and welfare of captive elephants.
- The Ministry released ₹212.5 crore under the Project Elephant to 22 States in the 10 years.
- Among various measures taken, the document said that guidelines for the management of human-elephant conflict had been issued by the Ministry in October 2017 and elephant range States had been requested to implement the same.
- Critical elephant habitats are notified as 'elephant reserve' for focus and synergy in elephant conservation and to reduce conflict. A total of 30 elephant reserves have been established in 14 major elephant States.
- To reduce man-elephant conflict and to avoid retaliatory killing of elephants, compensation is provided to local communities for loss of property and life caused by wild elephants.
- A Permanent Coordination Committee has been constituted between the Ministry of Railways and the MoEFCC for preventing elephant deaths due to train hits.

What are its other Conservation Efforts?

- ‘Gaj Yatra’ a nationwide awareness campaign to celebrate elephants and highlight the necessity of securing elephant corridors.
- The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), had come out with a publication on the right of passage in 101 elephant corridors of the country in 2017, stressed on the need for greater surveillance and protection of elephant corridors.
- The Monitoring the Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme launched in 2003 is an international collaboration that tracks trends in information related to the illegal killing of elephants from across Africa and Asia, to monitor effectiveness of field conservation efforts.

What is Human-Elephant Conflict?

- Human-Elephant Conflict is broadly defined as “any human-elephant interaction that brings negative effects on social, economic or cultural life of humans, on elephant conservation or on the environment”.
- Human-Elephant Conflict can be categorised as ‘direct’ or ‘indirect’.
 - ✓ **Direct Conflicts:** Direct conflicts impacts upon economic and physical well being of the rural communities.
Examples of direct conflict are crop damage, human death and Injury, damage to food stores, damage to other properties.
 - ✓ **Indirect Conflicts:** Indirect conflicts results in indirect social impacts upon people. For example, the efforts put on by the farmers to their crops and property, the fear of injury or death, and psychological stress etc.
However unlike the direct conflicts, the impact of indirect conflicts cannot be translated to economic value.

Why Human-Elephant conflicts occur?

- Unlike tigers whose territories are within the protected areas, the elephants have only 20% of their range falling in the protected areas like national parks and sanctuaries.
- There are about 28 elephant reserves across India covering 61,830 sq. km.
- Due to deforestation and thinning out of forests, the elephants tend to disperse into areas with high density of human population.
- This has made the elephants to foray into areas where they had no history of presence for several decades, even centuries.

-
- Destruction of elephant habitat has made them to move constantly.
 - Second, the growing human population has resulted in the expansion of human settlements in the elephant migration routes.
 - This often results in the human-elephant conflicts. As of now, there are approximately 100 elephant corridors in the country.
 - The conflict gets intensified when people try to chase away elephants with searchlights, crackers or guns, making the elephants even more aggressive.

