

## Importance of Tiger Conservation: RSTV- Big Picture

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**What's in the news?**

- The tiger population across the world is on the decline since the beginning of the 20th century. However, currently, for the first time in conservation history, their numbers are on the rise.
- As per the report on tiger census that was released ahead of International Tiger Day on July 29 2020-
  - India has seventy percent of the world's tiger population and 50 tiger reserves in the country presently.
  - Tigers were observed to be increasing at a rate of 6 per cent per annum in India from 2006 to 2018.
  - This is the biggest increase in terms of both numbers and percentage since the four-yearly census using camera traps and the capture-mark-recapture method began in 2006. The number that year was 1,411; it rose by 295 (21%) to 1,706 in 2010; and by 520 (30%) to 2,226 in 2014.
- Global Tiger Day or International Tiger Day, is an event celebrated on July 29 each year, to raise awareness on tiger conservation.
- It was started in 2010 at the Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit.
- The aim is to promote a global system for protecting the natural habitats of tigers and raise awareness among people on why tiger conservation must be supported.

**Tiger Census in India:**

Since 2006, the government of India has been conducting Tiger Census every four years, led by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) with cooperation from various state forest departments and conservation NGOs.

**What has enabled this rise in the tiger population?**

- Political commitment by the Indian Government during the 1970s wherein several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries were created across India.
- Tiger hunting was banned in the country in 1970.
- In 1973, a national tiger conservation program called Project Tiger was launched in the country.
  - **Objectives and plan:**
  - Various tiger reserves were created in the country based on the 'core-buffer' strategy.
  - Voluntary relocation of local communities from core/critical tiger habitat was undertaken in order to provide safe space for tiger population to regenerate.
- The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 was amended in 2006.
  - This constituted the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), responsible for implementation of the Project Tiger plan to protect the endangered tigers.

- **M-STripES**, short for Monitoring System for Tigers - Intensive Protection and Ecological Status, a software-based monitoring system was launched across Indian tiger reserves in 2010. Its objective is to strengthen patrolling and surveillance of the endangered Bengal tiger.
- India's 2018 tiger census has made a world record of being the largest ever camera trap wildlife survey.
- Since 2010, it has been classified as an endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

### **Why is tiger conservation important ?**

- India is the only natural habitat for the iconic tiger species- the Bengal Tiger.
- Tiger is an umbrella species. It's conservation automatically ensures the conservation of a large number of other species of animals and also enables restoration of soil fertility, rainfall pattern and forest density.
- Tiger population promotes ecotourism which is a responsible form of tourism providing livelihoods to many forest inhabiting communities, who therefore become an integral part of the tiger conservation efforts.
- Tiger colonies need large forests to sustain. More tigers saved, mean a more healthy forest reserve which in turn results in better carbon sequestration and prevents global warming.
- The returns and benefits of the tiger conservation programme is much higher than the amount invested in it.

### **What are the dangers confronting the tiger population in India?**

- **Illegal poaching** - A large number of people across the world take pride in possessing skin, claws, nails, teeth and trophies of the tiger. Every part of the tiger has great market value leading thus promoting hunting by professional poachers, local hunters, trappers, pirates and villagers.
- **Man-animal conflict**- When tigers come in contact with human settlements local antagonism against tigers often erupts into a serious problem.
- **Encroachment**- human encroachment of tiger habitats for livestock grazing, infrastructure expansion and farming, is a cause of concern.
- **Peak carrying capacity**- many reserves are approaching the peak of their capacity at sustaining their populations. Depletion of prey in tiger zones is a cause of concern.
- **Small core habitats**- The core habitats of the tigers in the country are very small. It is only with the addition of buffer zones that protection has become possible. Fragmentation of tiger habitats is a major cause of decreasing tiger population by reducing opportunities for these animals to inbreed. Few tiger reserves don't have any tigers left. In the northeast parts of the country their population has fallen significantly.
- **Infrastructural development**- Linear development such as railways and roadways are a serious threat to the tiger habitats.
- **Climate change**-Due to the global rise in temperatures the tigers along with other species are shifting their belts and migrating upwards towards colder regions.

### **Steps to tackle these challenges:**

- Creating tiger corridors where the gene pool exchange would take place is necessary.
- Corridors have to be built between the existing tiger reserves so that their population can freely move.
- Social upliftment of the communities living in and around the forests must be ensured so that their economic dependence on forest resources becomes lesser.

- Pench Kanha tiger reserve is a good example of development with conservation, where elevated national highway passes through the national park, without disturbing the wildlife.
  - Involving the local communities into conservation efforts and sensitizing them about the importance of ecological conservation is the key.
  - The tiger conservation approach has to be more dynamic and futuristic by mitigating the effects of climate change on wildlife.
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