



## Similipal Biosphere Reserve: Odisha

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### Why in News

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Recently, a massive fire broke out in the **Similipal Biosphere Reserve** in Odisha. The core area of the biosphere was untouched by the fire, however the fire is threatening damage to its rich biodiversity.

### Key Points

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- **About:**

- Similipal **derives its name from 'Simul' (silk cotton) tree.**
- It was formally designated a **tiger reserve in 1956** and brought under **Project Tiger in the year 1973.**
- It was declared a **biosphere reserve** by the Government of India in **June, 1994.**
- It has been part of the **UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserve** since **2009.**
- It is part of the **Similipal-Kuldiha-Hadgarh Elephant Reserve** popularly known as **Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve**, which includes 3 protected areas i.e. Similipal Tiger Reserve, Hadagarh Wildlife sanctuary and Kuldiha wildlife sanctuary.

- **Location:**

It is situated in the northern part of Odisha's Mayurbhanj district. Geographically, it lies in the eastern end of the eastern ghat.

- **Coverage:**

The biosphere spread over 4,374 sq. km. has 845 sq. km. of core forest (tiger reserve), 2,129 sq km buffer area and 1,400 sq km of transition space.

- **Vegetation:**

Similipal has 1,076 flowering species and 96 species of orchids. It boasts of having tropical semi-evergreen forests, tropical moist deciduous forests, dry deciduous hill forests, high level sal forests and sprawling meadows.

- **Tribes:**

Two tribes, the **Erenga Kharias** and the **Mankirdias**, inhabit the reserve's forests and practise traditional agricultural activities (the collection of seeds and timber).
- **Wildlife:**

Similipal is home to a wide range of wild animals including tigers and **elephants**, besides 304 species of birds, 20 species of amphibians and 62 species of reptiles.
- **Vulnerability to Forest Fires:**
  - **Natural:** Natural causes such as lightning or even soaring temperatures can sometimes result in **forest fires** here.
  - **Man Made Factors:** Instances of poaching and hunting wherein the poachers set a small patch of forest on fire to divert the wild animals, can lead to forest fires.
- **Mitigation Strategies:**
  - Forecasting fire-prone days and including community members to mitigate incidents of fire, creating fire lines, clearing sites of dried biomass, and crackdown on poachers.
  - The forest fire lines which are strips kept clear of vegetation, could help break the forest into compartments to prevent fires from spreading.

## Other Major Protected Areas in Odisha

- **National Parks:**

**Bhitarkanika National Park:** It is home to the largest congregation of the endangered SaltWater Crocodile in the country.
- **Wildlife Sanctuaries:**
  - **Badrama WLS:** It is characterized by the presence of Moist Sal Forests.
  - **Chilika (Nalaban island) WLS:** Asia's largest and world's second-largest lagoon. Recently, direct sightings of school of Irrawaddy dolphins has been reported here.
  - **Hadgarh WLS:** Salandi river passes through it which is home to mugger crocodiles.
  - **Baisipalli WLS:** It is a sal dominated forest with a significant number of tigers, leopards, elephants, herbivores like Chousingha.
  - **Kotagarh WLS:** It consists of dense deciduous forests with grasslands.
  - **Nandankanan WLS:** First in the world to breed White tiger and Melanistic tiger.
  - **Lakhari Valley WLS:** It is a dwelling place of a large number of elephants.
  - **Gahirmatha (Marine) WLS:** It is a mass nesting spot in Indian Ocean region and the only turtle sanctuary in Odisha. **The Olive Ridley turtles** travel across the South Pacific to breed on the coast of Gahirmatha.

**Source:TH**