



## Death of 186 Elephants in 10 Years

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### Why in News

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According to the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**, a total of **186 elephants were killed** after being **hit by trains** across India **between 2009-10 and 2020-21**.

### Key Points

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- **Data Analysis:**

**Assam** accounted for the **highest number** of elephant casualties on railway tracks (62), followed by **West Bengal (57)**, and **Odisha (27)**.

**Uttar Pradesh** saw a **single death**.

- **Measures Taken:**

- A **Permanent Coordination Committee** has been constituted between the **Ministry of Railways** and the **MoEFCC** for preventing elephant deaths in train accidents.
- **Clearing vegetation along railway tracks** to enable clear view for loco pilots, **construction of underpass/overpass** for safe passage of elephants, **regular patrolling of vulnerable stretches** of railway tracks, **warning sign boards**, etc.
- The **MoEFCC** has released **Rs. 212.49 crore** to elephant range States under the **Project Elephant** between 2011-12 and 2020-21.
- Elephant was **declared a 'national heritage animal' in 2010**, considering the valuable ecological services rendered by the species.
  - Elephants are **architects of the forest and woodland ecosystem (keystone species)**.
  - Considered nature's 'gardener', they are **key in shaping the landscape, in pollination, germination of seeds and improving the fertility of forest soil** with heaps of dung.

- **Project Elephant:**

- **About:**

- It was **launched in 1992** to provide financial and technical support to wildlife management efforts by states for their free ranging populations of wild **Asian Elephants**.
    - It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)**.

- **Objectives:**

- To protect elephants, their habitat & corridors.
    - To address issues of man-animal conflict.
    - Welfare of captive elephants.

- **Implementation:**

The Project is being **mainly implemented in 16 States / UTs** , viz. Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal.

- **Elephant Census:**

- Elephant census is conducted **once in 5 years** under the aegis of Project Elephant. Last Elephant Census was conducted **in 2017**.
    - According to the Elephant Census 2017, India's **Asian elephant population is 27,312**.
      - The numbers are **lower than** from the **last census estimate in 2012** (between 29,391 and 30,711).
      - **Karnataka** has the **highest number of elephants**, followed by Assam and Kerala.

- **Elephant Reserves:**

There are around **32 Elephant Reserves** in India. The very first elephant reserve was the **Singhbhum Elephant Reserve of Jharkhand**.

- **Protection Status of Asian Elephants:**

- **IUCN Red List:** Endangered.
  - **CITES:** Appendix I
  - **India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I.

- **Related Global Initiative:**

The **Monitoring the Illegal 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.

- **Recent Developments:**

- **Seed Bombs:**

- Recently Odisha's Athagarh Forest Division has started casting seed balls (or bombs) inside different reserve forest areas to enrich food stock for wild elephants to prevent **man-elephant conflict**.

- **Right of Passage of the Animals:**

- Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) upheld the 2011 order of the Madras High Court (HC) on the Nilgiris elephant corridor, affirming the right of passage of the animals and the closure of resorts in the area.

**Source: TH**