



African Elephants

Why in News

The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** has declared **African Forest** and **Savanna (or bush)** elephants as '**critically endangered**' and '**endangered**' respectively.

- Earlier, African elephants were treated as a single species, listed as Vulnerable. This is the **first time the two species have been assessed separately** for the IUCN Red List.

Key Points

▪ About:

- African elephants are the largest land animals on Earth. They are slightly larger than Asian elephants.
- They have **two fingerlike features on the end of their trunk** while Asian elephants have just one.
- Elephants are **matriarchal**, meaning they live in female-led groups.
- African elephants are **keystone species**, meaning they play a critical role in their ecosystem. Also known as "**ecosystem engineers**," elephants shape their habitat in many ways.
- Elephants have a **longer pregnancy than any other mammal**—almost 22 months. This compounds the problem of conservation since there are simply not enough calves being born to make up for the losses from poaching.
- There are **two subspecies** of African elephants, the **Savanna (or bush) elephant** and the **Forest elephant**. Savanna elephants are the larger of two.

▪ African Savanna Elephant:

- **Scientific Name:** *Loxodonta africana*
- **Decline:** Dropped by 60% in the last 50 years.
- **IUCN Status:** Endangered
- **Habitat:** Plains of sub-Saharan Africa

▪ African Forest Elephant:

- **Scientific Name:** *Loxodonta cyclotis*
- **Decline:** Dropped by 86% in the last 31 years.
- **IUCN Status:** Critically Endangered
- **Habitat:** Forests of Central and West Africa. They rarely overlap with the range of the savanna elephant.

- The forest elephant has a **more restricted natural distribution**. Therefore, its decline is especially worrying.
- While savanna elephant populations can bounce back given sufficient protection, the forest elephant is likely to recover much more slowly.
- **Law enforcement** is also more problematic in many Central African countries which are home to the forest elephant.

▪ Threats:

- **Poaching** for the illegal ivory trade.
 - Regions with high levels of poverty and corruption are more likely to have higher poaching rates. This suggests that **helping communities develop sustainable livelihoods** could reduce the lure of poaching.
- **Habitat Loss:** Increasing human population, and conversion of land for agriculture and development.

Asian Elephants

- There are **three subspecies of Asian elephant** which are the **Indian, Sumatran and Sri Lankan**.
- **Global Population:**
 - Estimated 20,000 to 40,000.
- The Indian subspecies has the widest range and accounts for the majority of the remaining elephants on the continent.
- There are around 28,000 elephants in India with around **25% of them in Karnataka**.
- **Protection Status:**
 - [IUCN Red List Status](#): Endangered.
 - [CITES](#): Appendix I.
 - [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#): Schedule I.

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