

Elephant Corridors in Odisha

Why in News

Recently, the <u>National Green Tribunal (NGT)</u> has directed the **Odisha government** to prepare an **action plan** for **14** identified elephant corridors.

Key Points

- Background:
 - NGT's Order in 2017:
 - The NGT had issued a prohibition order directing that all such activities which
 are not permissible to be carried out in a highly Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ), should
 not be undertaken.
 - The NGT also directed authorities to expedite demarcation of the corridors within a specific time frame.
 - Odisha government's Stand:
 - The Odisha government had proposed 14 corridors stretching over a total area of 870.61 sq.km. having a length of 420.8 km. Even after several years, no tangible progress had been made on the government's proposal.
- Elephant Corridors:
 - They are narrow strips of land that connect two large habitats of elephants.
 - They are crucial to reduce animal fatalities due to accidents and other reasons.
 - Fragmentation of forests makes it all the more important to preserve migratory corridors.
 - This movement of Elephants helps in enhancing the species survival and birth rate.
 - 88 elephant corridors have been identified by the <u>wildlife trust of India</u> under the National elephant Corridor project.
 - Concern: The all-round development like human settlements, roads, railway line, electric lines, canal and mining are the main cause of corridor fragmentation.
 - Reasons for Protecting the Corridors:
 - The movement of elephants is essential to ensure that their populations are genetically viable. It also helps to regenerate forests on which other species, including tigers, depend.
 - Nearly 40% of **elephant reserves are vulnerable**, as they are not within protected parks and sanctuaries. Also, **migration corridors have no specific legal protection**.
 - Forests that have turned into farms and unchecked tourism are blocking animal paths. Animals are thus forced to seek alternative routes resulting in increased_elephant-human conflict.
 - **Weak regulation** of ecotourism is severely impacting important habitats. It particularly affects animals that have large home ranges, like elephants.

Elephants

- Elephants are keystone species.
- There are three subspecies of Asian elephant the Indian, Sumatran, and Sri Lankan.
- The Indian elephant has the widest range and accounts for the **majority of the remaining elephants on the continent.**
- Conservation Status of Indian Elephants:
 - Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I
 - IUCN Red List: Endangered
 - CITES: Appendix I
- India is home to 50% of the Asian Elephant population, and according to the 2017 elephant census, there are 27,312 elephants in the country, marking a decrease of nearly 3,000 elephants from the 2012 census.
- India's Initiatives for Conservation of Elephants:
 - Gaj Yatra: A nationwide campaign to protect elephants, was launched on the occasion of World Elephant Day in 2017.
 - Project Elephant: It is a centrally sponsored scheme which was launched in 1992.
- Objectives:
 - To protect elephants, their habitat & corridors
 - To address issues of man-animal conflict.
 - Welfare of captive elephants
- International Initiatives:
- Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme: It is mandated by the <u>Conference Of Parties (COP)</u> resolution of CITES. It was started in South Asia in 2003 with the following purpose -
 - To measure levels and trends in illegal hunting of elephants.
 - To determine changes in these trends over time.
 - To determine the factors causing or associated with these changes and to try and assess in particular to what extent observed trends are a result of any decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties to CITES.

Way Forward

- Efforts should be to **expand elephant corridors**, using the successful models within the country by **acquisition of lands using private funds** and their transfer to the government. Ending human interference in the pathways of elephants is more a conservation imperative.
- Sensitization and awareness among people at large is necessary to stop poaching and illegal trades.
- Technologies such as **Drones and satellites** could be used for better monitoring throughout the corridors.

Source: TH

PDF Refernece URL: https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/elephant-corridors-in-odisha