



Mains Practice Question

Q. Without a focus on habitat conservation, success of project Tiger may lead to human-animal conflict. Discuss. (250 words)

26 Aug, 2020 GS Paper 3 Bio-diversity & Environment

Approach

- Start by discussing project Tiger and the current situation of tigers in India.
- Explain the issue of Human-Animal conflict due to decreasing habitat and increasing tiger population.
- Briefly discuss the other reasons for habitat loss and challenges of its conservation.
- Provide a way forward to habitat conservation.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

According to the 4th Tiger Census, there are approximately 2,967 tigers in India. Tigers count in India has increased from 1,411 in 2006 to 1,706 in 2010 and to 2,226 in 2014, marking the success of Project Tiger. Through this, India has achieved the goal of doubling the number of tigers as highlighted by the St Petersburg declaration 2010.

However, according to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), India can have a maximum of 3,000 tigers with respect to the available area of tiger reserves. As the current tiger population is reaching a maximum level of carrying capacity of the ecosystem, this could result in increased human-animal conflict.

Body

Increased Tiger population has resulted in **Human-Animal Conflict**, as the human population expands and natural habitats shrink, people and animals are increasingly coming into conflict over living space and food.

- This conflict has become the main threat to the survival of many species as well as local human populations in different parts of the world.
- According to data from the Union environment ministry, more than 1,608 humans were killed in conflict cases involving tigers, leopards, bears and elephants between 2013 and 2017.

Reasons for Human-Animal Conflict:

- **Habitat Loss:** Only 5% of India's geographical area is in the protected area category. This space is not enough to have a full-fledged habitat for wild animals.
 - A territorial animal like a male tiger needs an area of 60-100 sq km. But the area allocated to an entire tiger reserve, like the Bor Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, is around 140 sq km.
 - The territorial animals do not have enough space within reserves and their prey does not have enough fodder to thrive on.

- This has forced the wild animals to move out and venture close to human habitation in search of food, resulting in human-animal conflict.
- **Increasing Infrastructure Development:** Recent relaxations in norms to allow for a widening of highway and railway networks near these protected areas are the new threats, adding to the old ones of retaliatory poisoning and poaching.
 - Apart from highways, railway and irrigation projects are coming up in tiger reserves. For example- the Ken-Betwa river interlinking project will submerge 100 sq. km of Panna Tiger Reserve.
 - Also, wildlife experts estimate that 29% of the tigers in India are outside the protected areas.

Effects:

- Man animal conflict leads to crop damage, animal deaths, loss of human life, injuries to people, injuries to wildlife, livestock depredation, and low compensation for such incidents further leads to degraded living standards of the affected population.
- The outcome of this conflict is very severe and it not only results in the loss of crops to farmers but also in the decline of wildlife populations.

Way Forward

- According to the Wildlife experts, if wildlife protection is confined to reserves and parks alone, several species will stand at the brink of extinction.
 - For example, the Great Indian Bustard, which is a Schedule-I animal. Despite having sanctuaries to itself, the bird has been driven to the brink of extinction.
- **Co-occurrence approach:** Building community participation in conservation is a better idea than just having protected areas.
 - Events of Human-Animal conflict can be reduced by integrating early warning systems with simpler damage-prevention practices (such as improving fencing of crops or better livestock husbandry).
 - Hunting of prey animals, such as deer and pig, needs to stop as they form the base for the growth of tiger and other carnivore populations.
 - Efforts can be taken to better wildlife management practices and understanding of animal behaviour. So that people don't kill an animal out of panic.
 - Crop insurance should be provided in the event of destruction by wild animals.
 - Safeguarding Tiger corridors, building eco-bridges and such conservation measures can be part of corporate social responsibility.

Conclusion

The tiger population seems to be growing in various states which is a positive sign but as the country celebrates its conservation success, policymakers and scientists will have to put their heads together to devise more creative solutions and find homes for the increasing number of tigers, because without the focus on habitat conservation, the human-animal conflict is bound to rise.