World Elephant Day 2023

[Source: PIB](#)

Why in News?

Recently, on the occasion of **[World Elephant Day](#)**, the Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Labour and Employment highlighted various initiatives and accomplishments in India's elephant conservation journey.

What is World Elephant Day?

- **About:**
  - World Elephant Day, observed **globally on August 12,** is a dedicated observance aimed at raising awareness about the **critical challenges confronting elephants and advocating for their protection and conservation.**
  - This significant day provides a platform to emphasize the issues elephants face, encompassing habitat loss, ivory poaching, human-elephant conflicts, and the imperative for enhanced conservation endeavours.
- **Historical Perspective:**
  - The campaign World Elephant Day was **initiated in 2012 to bring awareness to the disturbing situations of African and Asian elephants.**
    - The objective of this campaign is to **create a sustainable environment where animals are not exploited and taken care of.**
  - It was first observed by Canadian filmmakers Michael Clark and Patricia Sims with the Thailand-based Elephant Reintroduction Foundation.
    - In 2012, Patricia Sims **founded an organization called the World Elephant Society.**
      - The organization has succeeded to create awareness about the dangers confronted by elephants and the inevitability to protect them globally.

What are the Key Highlights of Elephants?

- **About:**
  - Elephant is the [Natural Heritage](#) **Animal of India.**
  - Elephants are considered a **"Keystone Species"** as they play a critical role in maintaining the balance and health of forest ecosystems.
    - They are **known for their exceptional intelligence,** boasting the largest brain size of any land animal.
- **Significance in Ecosystem:**
  - Elephants are very **important grazers and browsers,** eating vast amounts of

vegetation every day, spreading seeds around as they go.
- They also help **shape the often-thick vegetation of the Asian landscape.**
  - For example, in forests, **elephants create clearings and gaps in the trees that let sunlight in to reach new seedlings**, helping plants grow and the forest to regenerate naturally.
- Elephants will also dig for water when there is not any surface water – **opening water access for other creatures as well as themselves.**

- **Elephants in India:**
  - India has the **largest number of wild** Asian Elephants**, estimated at **29,964 according to the 2017 census by Project Elephant.**
    - It is about 60% of the species' global population.
  - **Karnataka** has the highest number of elephants, followed by **Assam** and **Kerala.**

- **Conservation Status:**
  - **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** Red List of threatened species:
    - African Forest Elephant (*Loxodonta Cyclotis*)- **Critically Endangered**
    - African Savanna Elephant (*Loxodonta Africana*)- **Endangered**
    - Asian Elephant *(Elephas maximus)*- **Endangered**
  - **Convention of the Migratory species (CMS):**
    - African Forest Elephant: **Appendix II**
    - Asian Elephant: **Appendix I**
  - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**: Schedule I**
  - **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES):**
    - African Savanna Elephant: **Appendix II**
    - Asian Elephant: **Appendix I**

What are the Initiatives and Accomplishments in India's Elephant Conservation Journey?

- **Addressing Elephant-Human Conflict:**
  - Establishment of over **40 elephant corridors and 88 wildlife crossings to reduce conflicts.**
  - Creation of **buffer zones around protected areas covering more than 17,000 sq. km.**
- **Project Elephant:**
  - Launched in 1992, covering 23 states across India.
  - Improved the status of wild elephants, with a **population increase from about 25,000 in 1992 to around 30,000 in 2021.**
- **Elephant Reserves:**
  - Establishment of **33** Elephant Reserves **covering approximately 80,777 Sq.km.**
  - These reserves play a crucial role in safeguarding **wild elephant populations and their habitats.**
- **Human-Elephant Conflict Management:**
  - Rapid response teams deployed in various states to handle conflict situations.
  - Around **110 critical stretches across the railway network in the country that traverse through elephant habitats** have been identified for the implementation of eco-friendly measures to mitigate human-elephant conflicts.
    - In these locations measures such as building underpasses, clearing vegetation along the tracks to increase visibility for the loco pilots to avoid collisions, provisioning ramps, and others will also be taken up.
- **Community Participation and Empowerment:**
  - **Gaj Yatra program and Gaj Shilpi initiative** involving people to raise awareness about elephant conservation.
- **Recognition of Exemplary Efforts:**
  - Conferment of **Gaj Gaurav awards** individuals and organizations for their exemplary contributions in the field of elephant conservation and management.
- **International Agreements and Protocols:**
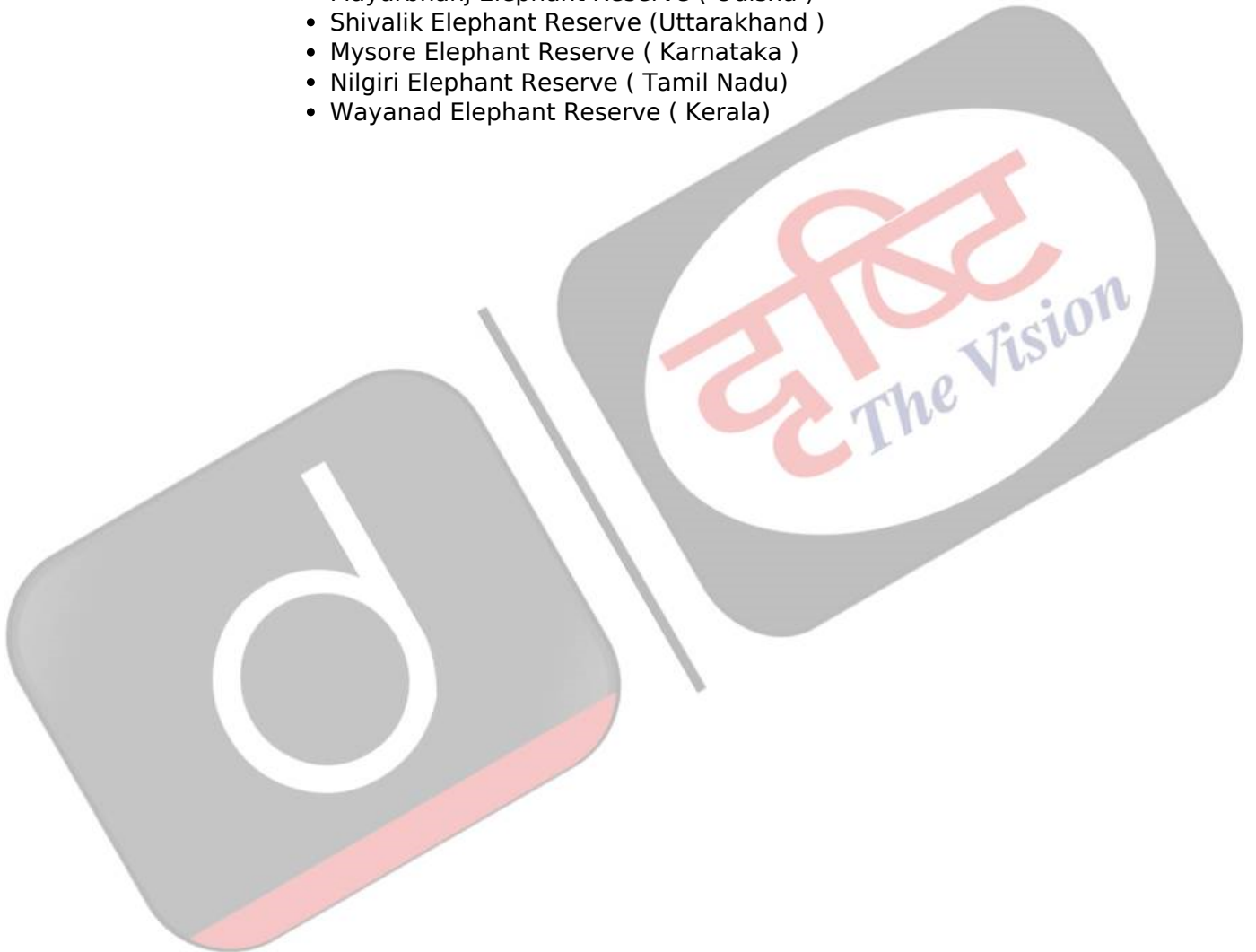 - Participation in international conferences like the Conference of Parties **under CITES.**

- **Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme** - The MIKE Programme was established by the CITES by **Resolution 10.10 adopted at the tenth Conference of the Parties in 1997.**
  - The MIKE program **started in South Asia in the year 2003 with the following purpose:**
    - To provide information needed for elephant range States to make appropriate management and enforcement decisions, and to **build institutional capacity within the range States for the long-term management of their elephant populations.**
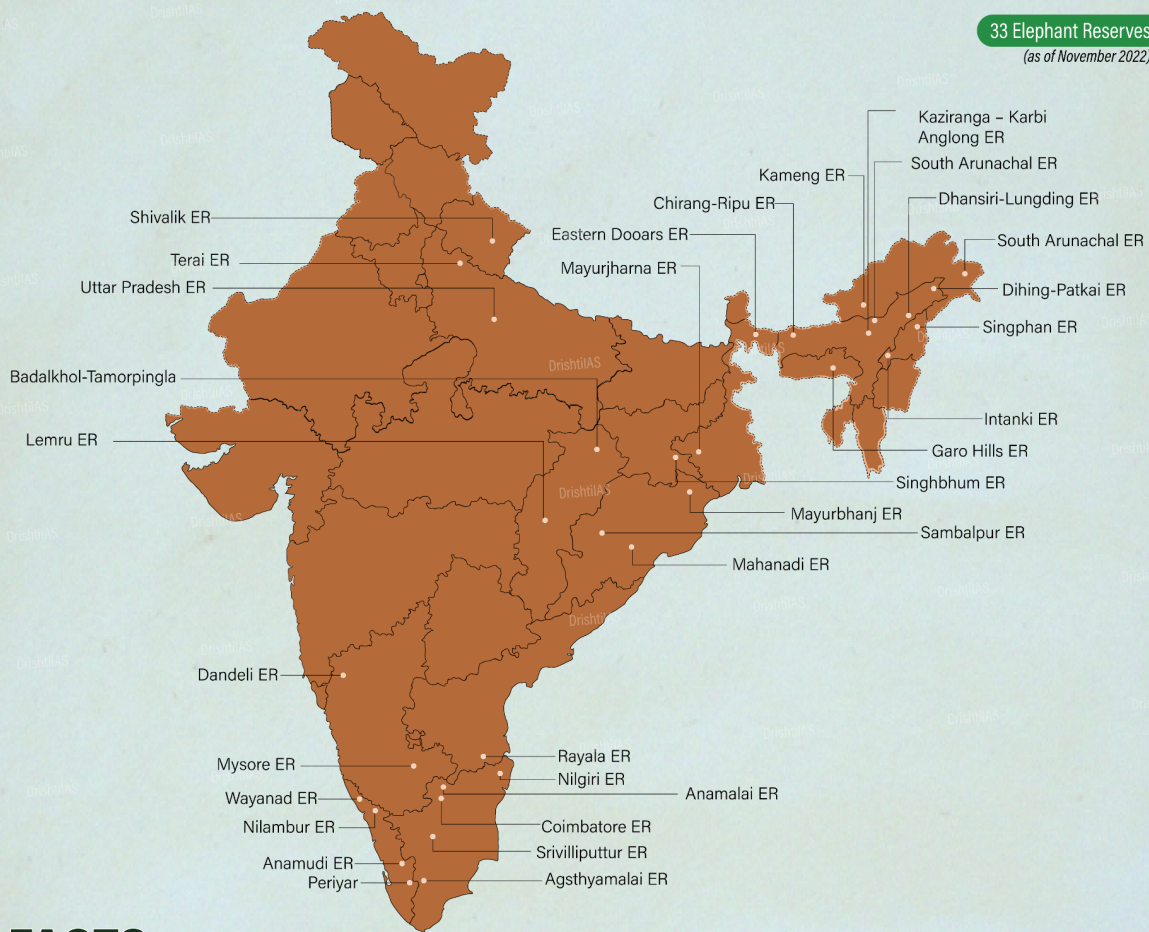 - **Mike Sites in India:**
    - Chirang-Ripu Elephant Reserve (Assam)
    - Deomali Elephant Reserve (Arunachal Pradesh)
    - Dihing Patkai Elephant Reserve (Assam)
    - Garo Hills Elephant Reserve (Meghalaya)
    - Eastern Dooars Elephant Reserve (West Bengal)
    - Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve (Odisha)
    - Shivalik Elephant Reserve (Uttarakhand)
    - Mysore Elephant Reserve (Karnataka)
    - Nilgiri Elephant Reserve (Tamil Nadu)
    - Wayanad Elephant Reserve (Kerala)

Elephant Reserves

33 Elephant Reserves
(as of November 2022)

- Kaziranga – Karbi Anglong ER
- South Arunachal ER
- Kameng ER
- Chirang-Ripu ER
- Dhansiri-Lungding ER
- Eastern Dooars ER
- South Arunachal ER
- Shivalik ER
- Mayurjharna ER
- Dihing-Patkai ER
- Terai ER
- Singphan ER
- Uttar Pradesh ER
- Badalkhol-Tamorpingla
- Intanki ER
- Lemru ER
- Garo Hills ER
- Singhbhum ER
- Mayurbhanj ER
- Sambalpur ER
- Mahanadi ER
- Dandeli ER
- Rayala ER
- Mysore ER
- Nilgiri ER
- Anamalai ER
- Wayanad ER
- Nilambur ER
- Coimbatore ER
- Anamudi ER
- Srivilliputtur ER
- Periyar
- Agsthyamalai ER

FACTS

- Tamil Nadu and Assam have the highest number (5) of elephant reserves in India.
- The Indian *elephant Elephas maximus* is included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in Appendix I of CITES.
- Indian Elephant has also been listed in the Appendix I of the Convention of the Migratory Species and as 'Endangered' in the IUCN Red List.
- The elephant was declared the National Heritage Animal of India in 2010.
- MoEFCC provides financial and technical support to major elephant range states in the country through Project Elephant. Project Elephant was launched by the Government of India in the year 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. With reference to Indian elephants, consider the following statements: (2020)

1. The leader of an elephant group is a female.
2. The maximum gestation period can be 22 months.
3. An elephant can normally go on calving till the age of 40 years only.
4. Among the States in India, the highest elephant population is in Kerala.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 4 only
(c) 3 only
(d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Ans: (a)

Exp:

- The elephant herd is led by the oldest and largest female member (known as the matriarch). This herd includes the daughters of the matriarch and their offspring. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- Elephants have the longest-known gestational (pregnancy) period of all mammals, lasting up to 680 days (22 months). Hence, statement 2 is correct. Females between 14 - 45 years may give birth to calves approximately every four years with the mean interbirth intervals increasing to five years by age 52 and six years by age 60. **Hence, statement 3 is not correct.**
- As per Elephant Census (2017), Karnataka has the highest number of elephants (6,049), followed by Assam (5,719) and Kerala (3,054). Hence, statement 4 is not correct.
- **Therefore, option (a) is the correct answer.**

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