



International Tiger Day 2023: Indian Tiger Conservation

Source: [DTE](#)

For Prelims: International Tiger Day, [Project Tiger 1973](#), [National Tiger Conservation Authority](#), [tiger reserves](#)

For Mains: Significance of Tiger Conservation, Related initiatives

Why in News?

Recently, [on International Tiger Day 2023](#), two significant reports have brought attention to the state of [tiger conservation in India and the challenges it faces](#).

- The **Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) of tiger reserves in India, 2022 (Fifth Cycle)** report for Indian [tiger reserves](#) prepared by the [Wildlife Institute of India](#) and the [National Tiger Conservation Authority](#) revealed a mixed picture of progress and challenges.
- On the other hand, a study by **Panthera**, the **global wild cat conservation organization**, and the **Chinese Academy of Sciences** highlights the **alarming situation of tiger poaching and trafficking in Bangladesh**.
- Concerns are emerging as **India's wild tiger population has increased to a healthy 3,167 in 2022 from just 1,400 in 2006**, prompting discussions about the nation's forest capacity to sustain these numbers.

What is International Tiger Day 2023?

- 29th July is observed as **International Tiger Day (ITD)** to promote the conservation of the striped cat as well as to advocate a global system for protecting its natural habitats.
- ITD was established in **2010 at St Petersburg Tiger Summit in Russia** to raise awareness about the decline of wild tiger numbers, leaving them on the brink of extinction, and to encourage the work of Tiger Conservation.

TIGER

Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera Tigris*) is the National animal of India.

Subspecies of Tiger

- * The continental (*Panthera tigris tigris*)
- * The Sunda (*Panthera tigris sondaica*)

Habitat

Tropical rainforests, evergreen forests, temperate forests, mangrove swamps, grasslands, and savannas



Countries Where Tiger Population Is Found

- Found only in 13 Tiger Range countries- India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Russia, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam
- As per the latest report by IUCN, tiger has gone extinct in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam

Protection Status

- IUCN Red List: Endangered
- CITES: Appendix I
- WPA 1972: Schedule I

Threats

- Habitat loss
- Poaching and illegal trade
- Human-Wildlife conflict

Conservation Efforts

- International Big Cats Alliance (IBCA): For conservation of seven big cats namely Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar and Puma (launched by India)
- Tx2 campaign: Launched by WWF; stands for 'Tiger times 2' signaling the goal to double the tiger population by 2022
- National Tiger Conservation authority (NTCA): Constituted under the WPA, 1972
- Project Tiger: Launched in 1973
- Tiger Census: Every 4 years

Tigers In India

- India has the largest population
 - As of 2022, India has 3167 tigers
 - Largest population has been found in Central Indian Highlands & Eastern Ghats Landscape
- Tiger Reserves: India now has 53 tiger reserves
 - Ranipur in UP is the latest
 - Nagarjun Sagar (Andhra Pradesh) is the largest while Orang (Assam) is the smallest (Core area)



What are the Key Highlights of the MEE Report?

Overall Management Performance Improvements:

- The report evaluated **51 tiger reserves using 33 parameters for the analysis.**
- The results were divided into **four groups based on the percentage** of the maximum score. Among the Tiger Reserves, **12 achieved the 'Excellent' category** (scoring $\geq 90\%$), **21 were classified as 'Very Good'** (scoring 75-89%), 13 as 'Good' (scoring 60-74%), and **5 as 'Fair' (scoring 50-59%)** categories.
- The mean score for management performance in tiger reserves indicates an **overall mean score of 78.01% (ranging between 50% to 94%) for 51 Tiger Reserves.**

Climate Action Identified as Weakest Area:

- The report identifies [climate change](#) and [carbon capture](#) efforts as the weakest performing area for Indian tiger reserves, receiving the lowest **score of 60% in the current cycle.**
- Climate change poses a major concern for tiger reserves, particularly those affected by **high-intensity climatic impacts like the Sundarbans.**

Fund Flow Hinders Conservation Efforts:

- Inadequate funds** from the Union and state governments, as well as other donors, pose significant challenges for tiger reserve management.
- Three parameters related to fund flow rank among the five poorest performing areas in tiger reserves.
- Actual fund allocation for **tiger conservation has decreased since 2018-19, with a surge in 2022-23 but limited actual fund release.**
 - Complex requisition and release processes have further slowed down the fund flow, causing delays in conservation efforts.
- Lack of funds **affects infrastructure maintenance, village relocation, and human-wildlife conflict management.**

Resilience in Landscape Integration and Human-Wildlife Conflicts:

- Landscape integration and countering human-wildlife conflicts were found to be the better-

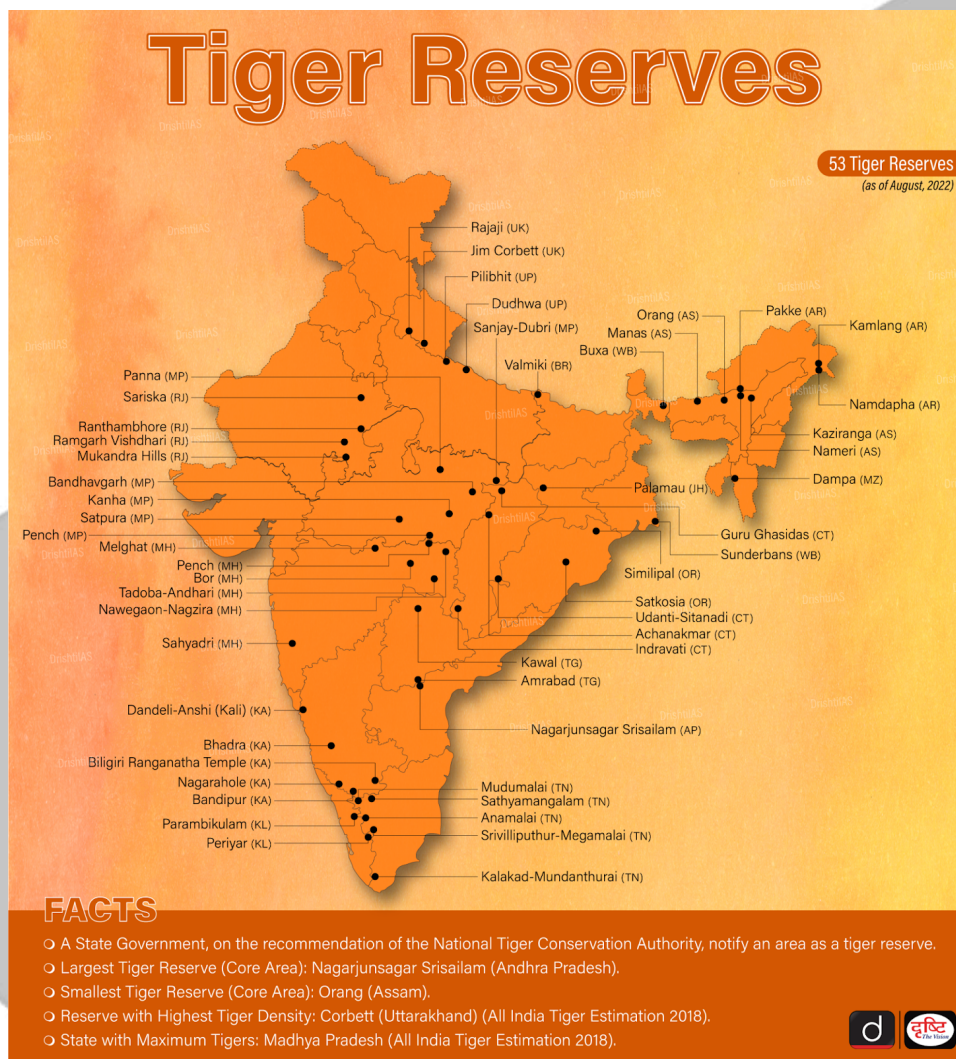
performing indicators, scoring over 85% marks.

▪ **Top-Performing and Poorly Performing Reserves:**

- **Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala** stands out as the **best performer with a MEE score of around 94%** followed by **Satpura in Madhya Pradesh** and **Bandipur in Karnataka**.
- **Sundarbans in West Bengal**, the only **tiger forest in the world with mangroves**, continued to be in the **'very good' category and got a rank position of 32nd**.
- **Dampa in Mizoram** is identified as the **poorest performing tiger reserve** with only **50% followed by Indravati in Chhattisgarh** and **Nameri in Assam**.
- Overall, 29 tiger reserves have improved their status compared to the previous assessment, while two reserves deteriorated.

▪ **Significance of MEE:**

- The report has been prepared based on a detailed analysis involving top-notch Indian wildlife experts and follows a framework by the **International Union for Conservation of Nature's World Commission on Protected Areas**.
 - It identifies gaps in conservation efforts and helps adopt more effective strategies for the long-term survival of tigers.



What are the Key Highlights of Research Conducted by Panthera?

- The study conducted by Panthera highlighted **Bangladesh as a major hub for the illicit poaching and trafficking of endangered tigers**.
- It identified a **growing class of Bangladeshi elite** both within the country and abroad, driving the **demand for tiger parts for medicinal, spiritual, and ornamental purposes**.
- The research revealed that tiger parts from Bangladesh were being supplied to **15 countries, including India, China, and Malaysia**, as well as developed **G20 nations like the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Japan**.

- The **Sundarbans**, a vital tiger habitat in Bangladesh, witnessed infiltration by **pirate groups involved in tiger poaching**, leading to a significant decline in the tiger population.
- The study identified four source sites for tiger poaching, including the **Sundarbans in India and Bangladesh**, **Kaziranga-Garampani Parks in India**, **Myanmar's Northern Forest Complex**, and **Namdapha-Royal Manas Parks in India**.
- Traders involved in tiger trafficking concealed illegally sourced tiger parts easily by owning logistics companies and holding licenses for legal wildlife trade.
- The research suggested a problem-oriented approach by the Bangladesh government, targeting specific players, trade routes, and poaching issues.

What are the Concerns about India's Forest Capacity Reaching its Limit to Support Tigers?

- **Roaming Outside Protected Areas:** Almost **30% of the tiger population roams outside protected areas and regularly enters human habitations**, leading to human-tiger conflicts.
 - With the increasing tiger population, questions arise about whether India's forests are nearing their carrying capacity to sustain these apex predators.
- **Shrinking Tiger Corridors:** The construction of **linear infrastructure, such as railway lines, highways, and canals**, has resulted in the **shrinking of tiger corridors**, essential patches that connect two large forest areas.
- **Foraging into Human-Dominated Landscapes:** Tigers are believed to **leave forests in search of herbivores** that increasingly venture into human-dominated landscapes. This behavior is driven by the takeover of **natural flora by invasive species like lantana**, which **disrupts the natural ecosystem** and forces herbivores to seek food in areas inhabited by humans.
- **Inequitable Population Distribution:** While India has 53 tiger reserves spread over 75,000 sq km, just 20 reserves cover one-third of the area for tiger conservation, leading to inequitable population distribution.

Way Forward

- Strengthen **forest management practices** for better conservation of tiger habitats.
- **Protect and restore tiger corridors** to enable unrestricted movement between forest areas.
- Implement **evidence-based strategies** for managing human-wildlife conflicts.
- Expedite **voluntary village relocation within tiger reserves** to reduce conflicts.
- Adopt an **inclusive approach to conservation, considering human rights and other species' needs**.
- Conduct **research on tiger movements** and social tolerance in human-dominated landscapes.
- Ensure **sustainable infrastructure development** to minimize habitat disturbances.
- Foster continued support from **local communities** for tiger conservation efforts.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Among the following Tiger Reserves, which one has the largest area under “Critical Tiger Habitat”? (2020)

- Corbett
- Ranthambore
- Nagarjunasagar-Srisaillam
- Sundarbans

Ans: (c)

- Critical Tiger Habitats (CTH), also known as core areas of tiger reserves, are identified under the Wild Life Protection Act, 1972 based on scientific evidence that “such areas are required to be kept as inviolative for the purpose of tiger conservation, without affecting the rights of the Scheduled Tribes or such other forest dwellers”.

- The CTHs are notified by the state government in consultation with the expert committee constituted for the purpose.
- Area of the Core/Critical Tiger Habitat
 - Corbett (Uttarakhand): 821.99 sq. Kms
 - Ranthambore (Rajasthan): 1113.36 sq. Kms
 - Sundarbans (West Bengal): 1699.62 sq. Kms
 - Nagarjunsagar Srisaillam (part of Andhra Pradesh): 2595.72 sq. Kms
- **Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer.**

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