



Translocation of Elephants

For Prelims: Asian elephants, Natural Heritage, Convention of the Migratory species (CMS), Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, Project Elephant, Elephant reserves.

For Mains: Issues Related to Relocation of Wild Animals in India.

Why in News?

The [Supreme Court](#) recently dismissed the **Kerala government's appeal** against the order of the **Kerala HC directing the relocation of Arikomban** ([Wild Elephant](#)), the "rice tusker" of Munnar, to the [Parambikulam tiger reserve](#).

What are the Arguments in Favour of Elephant Translocation?

- The **Kerala High Court** highlighted that the availability of **natural food and water resources** in the relocation site would **deter the elephant from foraging in human settlements**.
- The court also emphasised that the elephant will be **radio-collared**, and its **movements monitored by forest/wildlife officials**, which would effectively remove the surprise element of any conflict situation.

What are the Arguments Against Elephant Translocation?

- India's first **radio-telemetry study of a translocated problem elephant** was conducted in **2006** on a large male shifted from the **cropland of West Midnapore in South Bengal to the Mahananda Sanctuary** in Darjeeling district.
 - Almost immediately, the elephant started **damaging houses and raiding crops** in villages and Army areas.
- A study on **translocated problem Asian elephants** was conducted in **2012**, in which a team of biologists monitored **12 male elephants translocated 16 times to different national parks in Sri Lanka**.
 - The study found: Translocation caused **wider propagation and intensification of human-elephant conflict, and increased elephant mortality**.
- **Vinayaga**, a bull that **gained notoriety as a crop raider**, was **translocated from Coimbatore to the Mudumalai-Bandipur landscape in December 2018**.
 - It soon started using **gaps in the elephant-proof trench to raid crops**, until he was driven back.

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT



When encounters between humans and wildlife lead to negative results, such as loss of property, livelihoods, and even life

Causes of HWC

- Agricultural Expansion
- Urbanization
- Infrastructure Development
- Climate Change
- Wildlife Populations Growth and Range Expansion

Impacts of HWC

- Grave injuries, Loss of life
- Damage to farms and crops
- ↑ violence against animals

WWF India during 2003-2004 developed the Sonitpur Model by which community members were connected with Assam Forest Dept and given training on how to drive elephants away from crop fields and human habitations safely.

In 2020, the SC upheld Madras HC's decision on the Nilgiris elephant corridor, affirming the right of passage of the animals and closure of resorts in the area.

Data on HWC

- Tigers killed 125 humans between 2019 and 2021
- Death of 329 tigers due to poaching, natural and unnatural causes.
- Elephants killed 1,579 humans in three years
- Death of 307 elephants due to poaching, electrocution, poisoning and train accidents

Advisory for HWC Management (Standing Committee of the National Board of Wildlife)

- Gram Panchayats empowered to deal with problematic wild animals (WPA 1972)
- Compensation against crop damage due to HWC (PM Fasal Bima Yojna)
- Local/State depts. to adopt early warning systems and create barriers
- Paying a part of ex-gratia as interim relief within 24 hours of the incident to the victim/family

State – Specific Initiatives

- **UP** - Man-animal conflict under **listed disasters** (in State Disaster Response Fund)
- **Uttarakhand** - **Bio-fencing** carried out by growing various species of plants in areas
- **Odisha** - Casting **seed balls** inside different forests to **enrich food stock for wild elephants**



Elephant

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:

- **Convention of the Migratory species (CMS):** Appendix I
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I
- **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of threatened species:**
 - **Asian Elephant- Endangered**
 - African Forest Elephant- Critically Endangered
 - African Savanna Elephant- Endangered
- **Other Conservative Efforts:**
 - **India:**
 - **Project Elephant** was initiated by the Indian government in 1992 to safeguard elephants and their natural habitat in India.
 - There are also **33 elephant reserves in India** aimed at conservation efforts.
 - **Worldwide**
 - **World Elephant Day:** It is observed annually on **August 12th** to raise awareness about the urgent need to protect and conserve elephants.
 - The day was **established in 2012 to highlight the critical plight of both Asian and African elephants.**
 - **Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme:** It is an international collaboration that **measures the levels, trends and causes of elephant mortality**, thereby providing an information base to support international decision-making related to conservation of **elephants in Asia and Africa.**

Way Forward

- **Relocation Impact Assessment:**
 - It is important to carefully consider the **specific circumstances and characteristics** of each problem elephant and its **potential relocation site.**
 - Thorough **research and analysis should be conducted to assess the availability of natural food and water resources**, habitat suitability, and potential risks and challenges of translocation.
- **Monitoring and Management:**
 - Proper monitoring and management plans should also be in place, including **post-relocation monitoring** and measures to mitigate any potential conflicts.
 - While translocation of problem elephants may be considered as a strategy to **mitigate human-elephant conflicts**, it should be approached with caution and based on **sound scientific research, community engagement, and comprehensive management plans** to minimise potential risks and ensure the well-being of both elephants and local communities.
- **Alternative to Translocation of Elephants:**
 - **Capturing and transforming wild elephants** with the help of 'kunkis'(a trained elephant used to capture wild ones) presents a promising approach for translocation.
 - This method can offer several benefits, including **increased safety during capture operations**, reduced stress on translocated elephants due to familiarization with trained 'kunkis', and improved success rates of translocation efforts.

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)

Source: IE

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/translocation-of-elephants>

