



Elephant Poaching in Tamil Nadu

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Why in News?

A recent [elephant](#) poaching incident in Tamil Nadu has reignited concerns about the re-emergence of [wildlife crime](#) as an existential threat to the survival of wild elephants.

- As per the [Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change \(MoEFCC\)](#), the elephant population in Tamil Nadu dropped from over 4,000 (2012) to <2,800 (2017) but recovered to 3,000+ (2024).

What are the Key Facts About Elephants?

- **About:**
 - Elephant is a **National Heritage animal** of India.
 - They are **matriarchal**, living in groups led by females.
 - They are considered "**Keystone Species**" for playing a critical role in maintaining the balance and health of forest ecosystems.
 - As **ecosystem engineers**, elephants **facilitate seed dispersal and create access to water sources** for other species.
- **Species:**
 - [Asian Elephants](#) (*Elephas maximus*)
 - [African Elephants](#):
 - **African Savannah Elephants** (*Loxodonta africana*)
 - **African Forest Elephants** (*Loxodonta cyclotis*)
- **Population in India:**
 - Indian elephants are a **subspecies of Asian elephants** native to the Indian subcontinent that represent around **60%** of all Asian elephants.
 - According to the **elephant census conducted in 2017**, India is home to approximately 29,964 elephants.
 - **Karnataka had the highest number** of elephants followed by **Assam and Kerala**.
 - In terms of protected areas, [Sathyamangalam forest division](#) has the highest number of elephants.
- **Threats:**
 - [Ivory trade](#), [human-animal conflict](#), inter-state and transnational wildlife trafficking, etc.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - [Convention of the Migratory Species \(CMS\)](#): Appendix I
 - [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#): Schedule I
- **Related Initiatives:**
 - **India:**
 - [Project Elephant](#): Launched in 1992 to safeguard elephants and their natural habitat in India.
 - **Elephant Reserves & Corridors**: There are 33 [elephant reserves](#) and 150 elephant corridors in the country.

- **Project RE-HAB:** Aims to **prevent elephant-human conflicts** by installing bee-fences, thereby minimising both conflicts and retaliatory killings.
- **Global:**
 - **World Elephant Day:** It is observed annually on **12th August** to raise awareness about the urgent need to protect and conserve elephants.
 - **Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme:** It is an international initiative that tracks elephant mortality trends to **support conservation efforts in Asia and Africa.**

Difference Between Asian and African Elephants:

Feature	Asian Elephant	African Elephant
Geographical Range	▪ 13 countries across South & Southeast Asia (including India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, etc.)	▪ Sub-Saharan Africa (Savannahs & Rainforests)
Size	▪ Smaller in size with proportionally smaller ears	▪ Larger in size (largest land animals on earth)
Tusks	▪ Most males have tusks; females are usually tuskless or have tiny tusks	▪ Both males and females have large visible tusks
Trunk	▪ They have just one 'finger-like projection' at the tip of their trunk	▪ They have two 'finger-like projections' at the tip of their trunk
Skin Texture	▪ Smoother, may have pinkish freckles (depigmentation)	▪ Wrinkled skin that retains moisture (adaptation to dry climates)
Conservation Status (IUCN)	▪ Endangered	▪ African Forest Elephant: Critically Endangered ▪ African Savannah Elephant: Endangered

Elephant reserves in India



Total

33
Elephant
Reserves

27,000-31,000

Elephant
Population

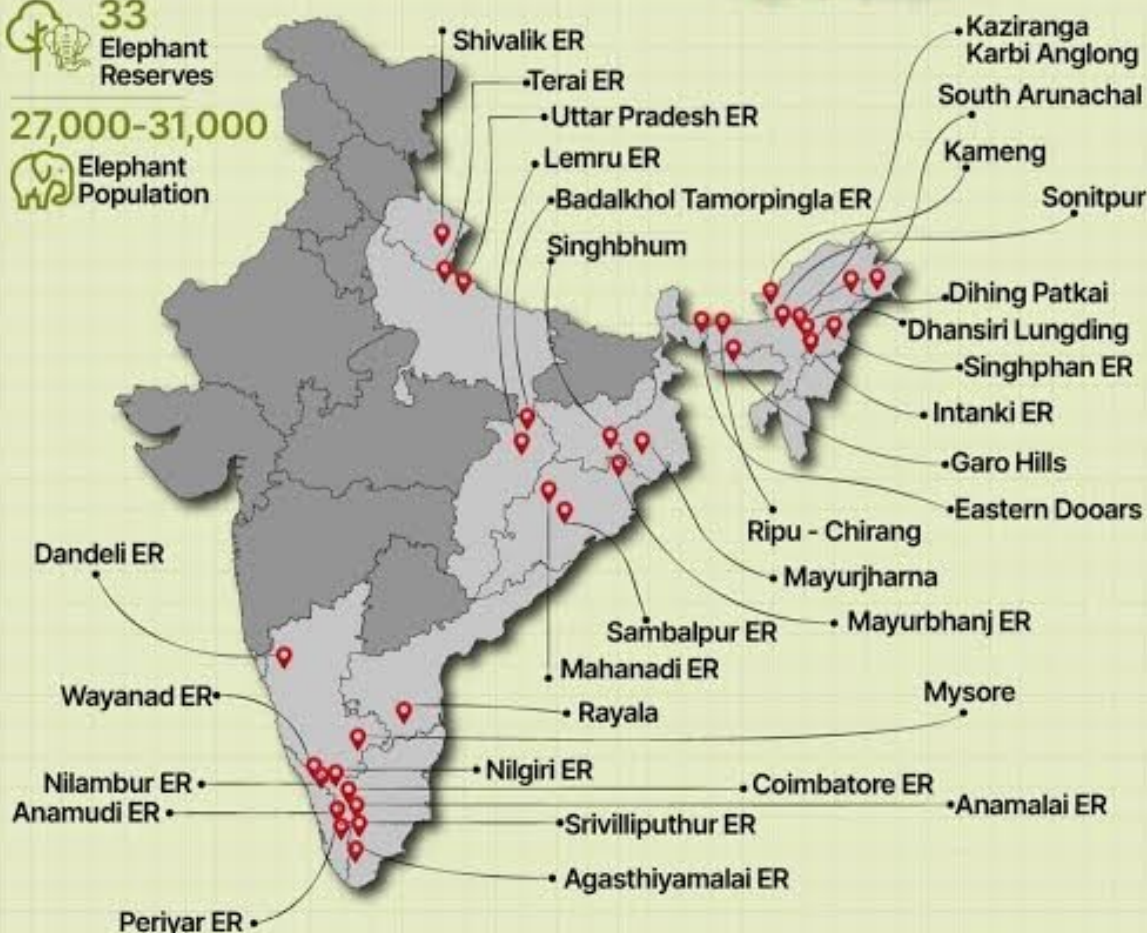


Photo: Pexels

Note: Elephant Reserves **lack legal protection** unless they fall within existing Reserve Forests or Protected Areas.

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)

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