

Concerns over Increase in Tiger Population

Why in news?

The all-India figures published by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) indicate that the number of big cats has grown in the State.

Why are tigers so significant?

Global Tiger Day is celebrated on July 29th. It was founded in 2010, when 13 tiger range countries came together to create Tx2 - the global goal to double the number of wild tigers by the year 2022.

- **Ecological balance**- Tigers serve as top predators in their ecosystems, playing a pivotal role in maintaining ecological balance by regulating prey species' populations.
- **Ecological integrity**- They prevent over-grazing by limiting herbivore numbers.
- **Keystone species**- Tigers have a profound impact on their environments, making their preservation crucial for overall ecosystem health and diversity.
- **Conservation icon**- It is a flagship species, tiger conservation is a litmus test that ensures the well-being of our forested ecosystems and the biodiversity they represent
- **Umbrella species**- Tigers are solitary and have large home range providing space for variety of other species to flourish



What is the status of tiger population in India?

The tiger census is held once in every 4 years by National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in association with state forest departments and the Wildlife Institute of India.

- The 2022 all-India tiger estimation revealed a notable increase in tiger occupancy from 2,967 in 2018, and 3,167 in 2022.
- India harbours almost 75% of the global tiger population and has honour of the **largest tiger range country** in the world.
- More than 3/4th of the tiger population is found within protected areas.
- **States**- The largest tiger population is in Madhya Pradesh (785), followed by Karnataka (563) & Uttarakhand (560), and Maharashtra (444).
- **Tiger reserve**- There are 53 tiger reserve in the country with the highest population of tiger in

Tiger reserve	Location
Corbett tiger reserve	Uttarakhand
Bandipur tiger reserve	Karnataka
Nagarhole tiger reserve	Karnataka

- **Increase in numbers** - Central India and the Shivalik Hills and Gangetic Plains witnessed a notable increases in tiger population, particularly in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra.
- **Decline** - There is a dip in tiger numbers in Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, parts of Northeast India and the Western Ghats.
- Approximately 35% of the tiger reserves urgently require enhanced protection measures, habitat restoration, ungulate augmentation, and subsequent tiger reintroduction.

Initiatives to Conserve Tiger Population

Global level

- **St Petersburg tiger summit**- It was conducted in 2010, the tiger range countries resolved to double the tiger population in the wild with popular slogan "T*2".
- **Global Tiger Forum**- It was founded by World Bank which is the only inter-governmental platform of tiger range countries since 1993 consolidating Tiger Action Plans of the range countries.

National level

- **MSTripES** (Monitoring System for Tigers: Intensive Protection and Ecological Status) - It creates database from the field using Global Positioning System (GPS), General Packet Radio Services (GPRS), and remote sensing.
- **National Tiger Conservation Authority** -It is a statutory body constituted under Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- It conducts country level assessment of tiger population, co-predators, prey and habitat.
- **International Big Cats Alliance**- It was launched by India in 2023 at Mysore, Karnataka, to commemorate 50 years of Project Tiger.
- It aims to conserve 7 big cats namely Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar and Puma
- **T*2 Award**- It was given to Pench tiger reserve spread across Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and to Satpura Tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh for doubling the tiger population.
- **Project Tiger** - It was first launched at the Jim Corbett National Park on April 1 1973.
- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme that focuses on the conservation of big cats and ensures the preservation of their natural habitat as tigers are at the top of the food chain.

What are the issues with the growth in tiger population?

- **Skewed growth**- Nearly 78% of tigers in tiger reserves are concentrated in Bandipur and Nagarhole, both these areas enjoy protection since 1950s.
- **Man animal conflict**- Bandipur has 136 villages in a radius of 1 km and further increase in tiger population would escalate the man animal conflict.
- **Lack of high prey base**- This increases the range of the resident tigers and their propensity to stray into human habitats.
- **Artificial manipulation**- Increase in tiger population beyond carrying capacity of the

habitat could adversely impact the population of other co-predators such as leopards and dholes.

- **Lack of political will-** The Malai Mahadeshwara Hills Wildlife Sanctuary is ideal to absorb the surplus tiger population, but it is yet to be declared as a tiger reserve.
- **Connectivity issue-** A 2021 study revealed that genomic variation of Indian tigers continues to be affected by connectivity issues.

What lies ahead?

- **Strict implementation of eco sensitive rules-** This would provide viable wildlife habitat and create additional space for tigers.
- **Increase the forest propensity-** This will reduce the range of the resident tigers and their propensity to stray into human habitats.
- **Reduce anthropogenic pressure-** There is a need for awareness to the local population regarding fear of displacement will reduce the pressure on existing habitats

References

1. [PIB-All India tiger estimation](#)
2. [The Hindu-Big concern over big cats](#)
3. [Indian Express-Views on tiger census](#)

