Rhino and Elephant Conservation

Why in news?

Greens worldwide has called the Kaziranga National Park the greatest conservation success story and much of it is attributed to a rhino protection force that shoots alleged poachers at sight.

What is the picture of one-horned rhino?

> *Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam has the highest concentration of endangered one-horned rhinos in the world.*

- **Scientific name** - *Rhinoceros unicornis*
- **Location** - The Greater one-horned rhino can be found in India and Nepal, particularly in the foothills of the Himalayas.
- **Habitat** - Greater one-horned rhinos are semi-aquatic and often take up residence in swamps, forests and riversides.
- **Sociability** - Greater one-horned rhinos are usually solitary, except for females with small calves.
- **Population** - The population of the one-horned rhino was about a dozen when Kaziranga became a protected area in 1905.
- According to the State of Rhino Report 2022, the poor-sighted herbivore's number in Kaziranga is an estimated 2,613.

How have Anti-poaching measures helped in rhino conservation?

- **Key threats**
  - Poaching for horn
  - Habitat loss and degradation
  - Alien invasive plant species grabbing the key grassland habitats
- **Anti-poaching mechanism** - The anti-poaching mechanism have been strengthened by including more manpower, capacity-building of frontline staff and equipping forest guards with better fighting.
- The sentiments of local people attached to the rhino have been a factor in the sharp drop in the number of rhinos killed.

What about the picture of Asian elephants?

> *More than 60% of the world's elephant population is in India., Karnataka has the highest number of elephants (6,049), followed by Assam (5,719) and Kerala*

(3,054).

- Elephants are the **natural heritage animal** of India.
- The Asian elephant is the largest mammal living on the land of Asia.
- **Scientific name** - *Elephas maximus*
- **Gestation period** - 22 months
- Elephant calves are able to walk within one or two hours of birth.
- IUCN Red List – **Endangered**
- Wildlife Protection Act 1972 - **Schedule I**
- CITES – **Appendix I**
- **Population** - there are about 50,000-60,000 Asian elephants in the world.
- The number of elephant reserves in India is 32 with the latest addition being the Agasthyamalai Elephant Reserve in 2022.
- About 101 elephant corridors have been identified in the country which need to be secured for conservation of elephants.

What are the challenges in elephant conservation?

- **Poaching** - The incidents of poaching for ivory have come down but the human-elephant conflict has been increasing.
- **Man animal conflict** - On average, about 500 humans and 100 elephants are killed every year across the country in such confrontations.
- **Habitat loss** - The fragmentation of elephant habitats and the construction of railways and roads and power infrastructure have led to many elephant deaths.
- The change in land use (bringing erstwhile forested areas under agriculture) has aggravated the conflict.

*The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change launched **Project Elephant in 1992** to ensure the long-term survival of elephants in their natural habitats.*

References

1. The Hindu | Are rhino and elephant conservation efforts a success?
2. Savetherhino | Greater one-horned rhino

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