Tiger Conservation

Why in News?

Recently National Tiger Conservation Authority gave instructions to states to start the process of relocation from core areas of tiger reserves.

What are the Tiger conservation initiatives in India?

Tiger

• **Tiger** - It is a top predator and is at the apex of the food chain.
• The presence of tigers in the forest is an indicator of the well-being of the ecosystem.
• Tigers are both a Flagship and Umbrella species.
• Flagship species they are important for conservation and as Umbrella species, conservation of tigers leads to conservation of other species.

Conservation Status of Tiger

- IUCN – **Endangered**
- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 - **Schedule I**
- CITES - **Appendix I**



• India is home to around ***75%*** of the global tiger population.
• **Current Tiger Population** – 3700
• Largest tiger population of 785 is in Madhya Pradesh, followed by Karnataka (563) & Uttarakhand (560), and Maharashtra (444).
• Highest number of Tiger is found in Jim Corbett (260) followed by Bandipur (150), Nagarhole (141), Bandhavgarh (135).

- **Project Tiger** – It was launched by the Central government on April 1 1973 in a bid to promote conservation of the tiger.
- First launched at the Jim Corbett National Park.
- Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** - It a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change was established in 2005 to manage tiger reserves and lead tiger conservation efforts.
- **Tiger reserves** - They were set up as a part of Project Tiger initiated in 1973 and are administered by the NTCA.
    - **Number of Tiger Reserves** – 55(As on August 2024)

Andhra Pradesh's Nagarjuna Sagar Srisailam Tiger Reserve is the country's

largest tiger reserve, covering 3,296.31 sq. km and Manas Tiger Reserve in Assam is the second largest with an area of 2,837.1 sq. km.

- Nearly 75% of the world's tiger population can now be found in India and tiger reserves in the country span 75,000 square kilometres.
- **The Tiger Census** - It 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.
- **MSTrIPES** - Monitoring System for Tigers: Intensive Protection and Ecological Status
- It creates a database and analyses the information to provide inferences for better management of tiger reserve.
- **International Big Cats Alliance (IBCA)** - It is an international collaboration to conserve 7 big cats namely Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar and Puma.
- **Tiger Corridors** – It enables the tigers move freely between the protected areas.

What is the Significance of Tiger Conservation?

- **Balancing Ecosystem** - Since Tigers are the apex predators in their ecosystems, their conservation regulates prey populations and helps maintain a healthy balance in the ecosystem.
- **Biodiversity** - Protecting tigers ensures the conservation of a wide range of other species within their habitats, as their presence indirectly supports the survival of many other animals.
- **Habitat Preservation** - Tiger conservation efforts benefitted in conserving sub-Himalayan forests, tropical rainforests, savannahs and mangroves.
- **Ecotourism** - Tiger reserves attract tourists from around the world, generating significant revenue for local communities and the national economy.
- **Sustainable Livelihoods** - Ecotourism can provide alternative livelihoods for local communities, reducing their dependence on activities that might harm tiger habitats.
- **National Symbol -** The tiger is a symbol of India's rich biodiversity and cultural heritage, representing strength, courage, and beauty.

What are the negative impacts of tiger conservation plan?

- **Impact on Other Species** - Altering and manipulating habitats to favour tigers, does not necessarily help other species that share the tiger's habitat.
- **Extinction of Caracal** - Rare caracal of open savannahs and rocky stretches, were silently disappeared in early 2000s form Sariska Tiger Reserve due to the plantation of *vilayati kikar*, an invasive tree.
- **Decline of Antelope** - Neglect of rich microhabitats such as the riverine forest abutting perennial streams, led to the decline of the four-horned antelope.
- **Ecological Change** - Construction of numerous artificial waterholes for improving tiger sightings increased the soil moisture in this naturally dry forest, leading to changes in vegetation.
- **Social Impact** - Local hostility in several tiger reserves due to lose of access to resources and livelihood once the tiger reserve come into place.

- **Loss of Identity** - Local residents became “illegal” overnight when the tiger reserve was established.
- **Legal Ambiguities** - Contradictions between the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and the Forest Rights Act, 2006 undermine the conservation efforts inside protected areas.
- The direction by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to declare critical tiger habitats is considered to be in contravention of the Forest Rights Act.

What are the challenges in Tiger conservation?

- **Development Challenges** – Fragmentation by rampant infrastructure development such as Highways, dams and industries threaten a number of tiger reserves across.
- **River Interlinking impact** - 58 sq. km of savannah in Panna tiger reserve will soon be submerged by the Ken-Betwa Interlinking Project.
- **Hydroelectric projects** – These projects in the vicinity of Dibang tiger reserve will likely affect tigers and their movement.
- **Unplanned development** - It threatens to create habitat islands that will not support most wild species, let alone large carnivores such as tigers.
- **Rural to Urban Transformation** - Rapid rural-to-urban transformation also has consequences for biodiversity.
- **Urban Expansion** - Suburban built-up spaces are closing in on not just tiger reserves, but also other protected areas.
- **Loss of Agri buffer** - Agricultural habitats that once formed buffer habitats between the forest and the city, and aided wildlife dispersal, are fast disappearing.
- **Inadequate Settlements** - Large-scale evictions, without attention to socio-cultural, ecological and economic particularities can only result in continuing the trend of inadequate resettlements.

What lies ahead?

- Consider the long-term sustainability of tiger conservation effort.
- Include Social viewpoints and ecological aspect with the conservation plan.
- Enhance the relocation package, keeping up with the changing needs of livelihood security.
- Increase the participation and absorbing of local tribes into wildlife management.
- Share the tourism proceeds with local villages.

Reference

Hindustan Times | Rising Tiger Numbers

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