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India to Host First IBCA Summit -- Big Cat Conservation Goes Multilateral

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ENVIRONMENT**IR**

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)**ALSO FROM THE CREATOR****BharatNotes**Free UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**bharatnotes.com →**ADVERTISE****Advertise with Ujiyari**

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India to Host First IBCA Summit -- Big Cat Conservation Goes Multilateral

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WHY IN NEWS

India announced it will host the **first International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) Summit** on **June 1-2, 2026**, in New Delhi. The summit will bring together Heads of State/Government and senior officials from 97 big cat range countries, with the goal of coordinating global conservation and funding.

WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL BIG CAT ALLIANCE?

The **IBCA** is an **inter-governmental international organisation** headquartered in **India**, established in **2023** by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the **50th anniversary of Project Tiger**. It was formally launched at the CITES CoP19 in November 2022 and constituted as a treaty-based body in 2023.

Seven Species Covered

BIG CAT	IUCN STATUS	KEY RANGE COUNTRIES
Tiger	Endangered	India, Russia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan
Lion	Vulnerable	India (Gir), Sub-Saharan Africa
Leopard	Vulnerable	Africa, South Asia, SE Asia
Snow Leopard	Vulnerable	Central Asia, Himalayas
Cheetah	Vulnerable	Africa, Iran
Jaguar	Near Threatened	South/Central America
Puma	Least Concern	Americas

IBCA STRUCTURE AND INDIA'S ROLE

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Founded	2023
Launched	During Project Tiger 50th anniversary
Headquarters	India
Member countries	25 members + 5 observers
Range countries	97
India's funding	Rs 150 crore (2023-2028)
Secretariat	Under Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)

Summit Details

- **Date:** June 1-2, 2026
- **Location:** New Delhi
- **Theme:** "Save Big Cats, Save Humanity, Save Ecosystem"
- **Participation:** Heads of State/Government (Day 1) + Technical sessions (Days 1-2)

PROJECT TIGER – INDIA'S CONSERVATION BEDROCK

Background

Project Tiger was launched in **1973** under PM Indira Gandhi with **9 tiger reserves** and fewer than 1,900 tigers. Today:

- **58 tiger reserves** across India (as of 2025)
- **3,682 tigers** (2022 census average estimate; 3,167 is the minimum estimate)
- India holds approximately **75% of the world's wild tiger population**
- Conservation managed by the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** under MoEFCC

Tiger Reserve Governance

Tiger reserves are notified under the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (WPA)**, specifically under **Section 38V** which mandates:

- **Core area:** No human activity; inviolate zone

- **Buffer zone:** Limited human activity; eco-tourism permitted

Ramsar Connection

Several tiger reserve wetland zones have also been designated **Ramsar sites** (wetlands of international importance), reflecting India's integrated biodiversity approach.

CHEETAH REINTRODUCTION – A SPECIAL CONTEXT

India's **Project Cheetah**, launched in September 2022, brought 8 Namibian cheetahs and subsequently 12 South African cheetahs to **Kuno National Park (Madhya Pradesh)** – the first transcontinental wildlife translocation. The IBCA framework provides international diplomatic support for such translocation cooperation.

GLOBAL BIG CAT CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

- 1 **Habitat loss:** Deforestation, agricultural expansion, linear infrastructure fragmentation
- 2 **Human-wildlife conflict:** Livestock depredation leads to retaliatory killings
- 3 **Poaching:** Illegal wildlife trade in bones, skin, claws (driven by demand in East Asia)
- 4 **Climate change:** Altering prey distribution, increasing habitat stress for snow leopard and tiger
- 5 **Transboundary management:** Big cats do not respect national borders – necessitates multilateral coordination

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 – Environment and Ecology

- Big cat conservation frameworks
- Project Tiger: structure, NTCA, Tiger Reserve governance (WPA Section 38V)
- IUCN Red List categories (Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened)
- Cheetah reintroduction (Project Cheetah)

GS Paper 2 – International Relations

- International conservation diplomacy
- India's role in multilateral environmental organisations

Mains Angles

- 1 Assess India's conservation model for big cats and its potential for replication globally through IBCA.
 - 2 How does Project Cheetah exemplify the challenges and opportunities of wildlife reintroduction in India?
 - 3 Examine the role of the National Tiger Conservation Authority in balancing tiger conservation with the rights of forest-dependent communities.
-

FACTS CORNER – KNOWLEDGEPEDIA
IBCA:

Launched: 2023 (Project Tiger 50th anniversary + CITES CoP19)

7 big cats: Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, Puma

25 members + 5 observers; 97 range countries

HQ: India; under MoEFCC

India's commitment: Rs 150 crore (2023-2028)

1st Summit: June 1-2, 2026, New Delhi

PROJECT TIGER:

Launched: 1973 (9 reserves, <1,900 tigers)

Current: 58 reserves; 3,682 tigers (2022 census average; 3,167 minimum); India = ~75% world population

Governed by NTCA under WPA 1972 (Section 38V)

Core zone: inviolate; Buffer zone: eco-tourism allowed

PROJECT CHEETAH:

Sept 2022: 8 Namibian cheetahs to Kuno NP (MP)

2023: 12 South African cheetahs added

First transcontinental wildlife translocation globally

IUCN STATUS (BIG CATS):

Endangered: Tiger

Vulnerable: Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah

Near Threatened: Jaguar

Least Concern: Puma

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Bharat Choudhary

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[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/daily/2026/05/09/ibca-summit-big-cat-conservation/>

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