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MAGAZINE NOTES

Down to Earth June 2026 - Success Trap (India's Tiger Crisis)

15 June 2026 ·

ENVIRONMENT

POLITY

GS2

GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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Down to Earth June 2026 - Success Trap (India's Tiger Crisis)



Down to Earth

June 2026 (1-15 June issue)

GS2

GS3



Down to Earth

CSE · Fortnightly

EDITION

June 2026 (1-15 June issue)

MAINS:

GS Paper 2

GS Paper 3

Down to Earth's June 1-15, 2026 issue, themed **"Success Trap"**, argues that Project Tiger's numerical triumph has become a management crisis: a few flagship reserves are overcrowded while many stand nearly empty, funding has fallen in real terms, and human-wildlife conflict is rising.

[This is distinct from the State of India's Environment 2026 report on Lantana and tigers covered in the June 12 daily edition; the DTE package is about reserve management, carrying capacity and funding.]

COVER PACKAGE

- 1 **India must now manage its conservation success** (Ravi Chellam, June 4) - the case against fortress conservation; tigers thrive in human-dominated landscapes too
- 2 **Rethinking conservation: Project Tiger expanded but funding has not kept pace** (DTE Staff, June 2) - real-terms budget decline and reserve understaffing

THE NUMBERS THAT FRAME THE CRISIS

INDICATOR	FIGURE
Tigers	1,411 (2006) to 3,682 (2022); India holds 70-75 percent of the world's wild tigers
Tiger reserves	9 (1973) to 58 now (~84,488 sq km)
Distribution skew	5 reserves had zero tigers; 10 had fewer than 10 each (2022)
Tigers outside protected areas	35-40 percent
Project Tiger budget	Rs 290 crore (2025-26 BE), worth only ~Rs 95 crore in 2008-09 terms
Understaffing (NTCA 2024)	20 reserves short of anti-poaching staff; invasive species in 40 reserves

KEY CONCEPTS

TERM	MEANING
Fortress conservation	Exclusionary model walling wildlife off from people via relocation
Carrying capacity	The maximum tiger density a habitat can sustain before dispersal and conflict rise
Source-sink dynamics	Productive “source” reserves seed near-empty “sink” reserves through dispersal
Tiger corridors	Connected habitat enabling gene flow between reserves
NTCA	National Tiger Conservation Authority, statutory body under the WPA 1972 (created 2006)

PRELIMS POINTERS

- Project Tiger launched 1973 with 9 reserves; now 58 reserves over ~84,488 sq km
- NTCA created by the 2006 amendment to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, after Sariska’s 2004 local extinction (Panna lost its tigers by 2008)
- Tigers: 1,411 (2006) to 3,682 (2022)
- 35-40 percent of India’s tigers live outside protected areas

UPSC GS RELEVANCE

- **GS3:** conservation, protected-area management, scheme financing
- **GS2:** statutory bodies (NTCA), implementation gaps
- **GS4:** ethics of conservation versus displacement of forest-dwelling communities

1 Chapters in this Edition

1

The Success Trap: When Saving Tigers Becomes a Management Crisis



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