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# Tiger Conservation Roadmap Flags 25 Priority Reserves

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# Tiger Conservation Roadmap Flags 25 Priority Reserves

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## WHY IN NEWS

*In early July 2026, marking the 18th anniversary of tiger reintroduction at Sariska (first translocation in 2008), the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) released a forward-looking Tiger Conservation Roadmap along with a review of lessons from India's reintroduction initiatives.*

## A SHIFT IN CONSERVATION PHILOSOPHY

The central message of the roadmap is a change in emphasis. For years, the headline metric of Indian tiger conservation was the total tiger count, celebrated at each national census. The new philosophy holds that the goal is no longer simply to increase tiger numbers, but to revive depleted reserves where habitat, prey or population have fallen under stress. Reintroduction, physically moving tigers into a landscape, is now treated as a “last resort” to be used only when in-situ recovery is not possible.

India's tiger population stands at about 3,682, which is roughly 75 per cent of the global wild tiger population, making the country the single most important stronghold for the species. The roadmap, built with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), assessed reserves on an index of habitat quality, prey base and tiger population, and flagged 25 priority reserves where at least one of these factors is under stress.

INDICATOR	FIGURE
India's tiger population	About 3,682
Share of global wild tigers	Roughly 75 per cent
Total tiger reserves in India	58
Priority reserves flagged	25
First scientific translocation	Sariska, 2008

## Preconditions for Reintroduction

The roadmap lays down clear preconditions before any tiger is reintroduced into a reserve. These are: suitable habitat, an adequate prey base, strong protection and security, community support, and favourable socio-economics in the surrounding landscape. Treating reintroduction as a last resort, only after these conditions are met, is meant to prevent the failures that follow when tigers are released into landscapes that cannot sustain them.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL BACKBONE

ELEMENT	DETAIL
Project Tiger	Flagship conservation programme launched in 1973
NTCA	National Tiger Conservation Authority, statutory ( <a href="https://ujijari.com/vocab/statutory/">https://ujijari.com/vocab/statutory/</a> ) body under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
NTCA Chairman	The MoEFCC minister, Bhupender Yadav
Total tiger reserves	58, with Madhav National Park notified as the 58th in March 2025
Monitoring system	M-STrIPES (Monitoring System for Tigers, Intensive Protection and Ecological Status)

Project Tiger, launched in 1973, is the foundational scheme that created India's network of protected tiger habitats. The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body constituted under the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** (<https://ujijari.com/legislation/wildlife-protection-act-1972/>), and its Chairman is the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, currently Bhupender Yadav. India now has 58 tiger reserves, with Madhav National Park in Madhya Pradesh notified as the 58th in March 2025.

Reserves are monitored through M-STrIPES, a technology-based system that tracks patrolling, tiger presence and ecological status, and conservation increasingly emphasises corridor connectivity the forest linkages that let tigers move safely between reserves and maintain genetic diversity.

## The Sariska Milestone

Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan is the reference point for the roadmap. After tigers went locally extinct there, the 2008 translocation made Sariska the world's first scientific big-cat translocation into a landscape of local extinction. The first litter was born in 2012, validating the approach. The review released with the roadmap distils lessons from around a dozen reintroduction initiatives across the country, of which Sariska is the earliest and most cited.

## ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

The roadmap marks the maturing of India's tiger story. Having built the world's largest wild tiger population, the country can now afford to move from a numbers-first approach to one focused on the health and resilience (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/resilience/>) of individual reserves and landscapes. Reviving depleted reserves, rather than simply celebrating aggregate growth, addresses the uncomfortable reality that tiger gains have been uneven, concentrated in a few well-managed reserves while others stagnate or decline.

Treating reintroduction as a last resort is scientifically sound. Moving tigers is expensive, risky and pointless if the underlying causes of decline, poaching, prey depletion, habitat loss or human pressure, are not first fixed. The preconditions framework forces managers to secure habitat, prey, protection and community support before any release.

The way forward lies in landscape-level thinking: protecting corridors so populations do not become genetically isolated islands, deepening community support so that people living around reserves see conservation as beneficial rather than costly, and sustaining M-STrIPES-based monitoring for early warning of stress. Human-wildlife coexistence, managing conflict, compensating losses and sharing conservation benefits, is the decisive factor. India's challenge now is not counting more tigers, but ensuring that every one of its 58 reserves remains a viable home for them.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

**GS Paper 3:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; biodiversity and its conservation; government schemes and statutory bodies for wildlife protection.

### Prelims pointers:

- Project Tiger was launched in 1973; the NTCA is a statutory body under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- The NTCA Chairman is the MoEFCC minister, Bhupender Yadav.

- India's tiger population is about 3,682, roughly 75 per cent of the global wild population.
- India has 58 tiger reserves; Madhav National Park was notified as the 58th in March 2025.
- The 2026 roadmap flagged 25 priority reserves and treats reintroduction as a “last resort”.
- Sariska (2008) was the world's first scientific big-cat translocation into a landscape of local extinction; monitoring uses M-STrIPES.

**Mains question:** “India's tiger conservation is moving from a focus on population numbers to the health of reserves and landscapes.” Critically examine this shift with reference to the 2026 Tiger Conservation Roadmap. (15 marks, 250 words)

## FACTS CORNER

### FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

**Trigger:** In early July 2026, on the 18th anniversary of the Sariska translocation (2008), the MoEFCC and NTCA released a Tiger Conservation Roadmap.

**Philosophy shift:** Goal moves from raising tiger numbers to reviving depleted reserves; reintroduction is now a “last resort”.

**Tiger population:** About 3,682, roughly 75 per cent of the global wild tiger population.

**Priority reserves:** 25 flagged (out of 58) where habitat, prey base or population is under stress; index built with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

**Reintroduction preconditions:** Suitable habitat, adequate prey, strong security, community support and favourable socio-economics.

**Project Tiger:** Launched 1973; NTCA is a statutory body under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972; Chairman is MoEFCC minister Bhupender Yadav.

**Tiger reserves:** 58 in total; Madhav National Park notified as the 58th in March 2025.

**Sariska (2008):** World's first scientific big-cat translocation into a landscape of local extinction; monitored via M-STrIPES.

*Sources: National Tiger Conservation Authority (<https://ntca.gov.in/>), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (<https://moef.gov.in/>), Press Information Bureau (<https://pib.gov.in/>), The Hindu (<https://www.thehindu.com/>)*

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