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International Tiger Day 2026: Project Tiger at 50-Plus and the "Beyond Reserve" Challenge

29 July 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GS3

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International Tiger Day 2026: Project Tiger at 50-Plus and the "Beyond Reserve" Challenge

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

India marked International Tiger Day on July 29, 2026, reaffirming its position as home to roughly 70 per cent of the world's wild tigers, more than five decades after Project Tiger's launch in 1973.

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE DAY

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Global Tiger Day established	2010 , at the St Petersburg Tiger Summit
Tiger population, circa 1900	About 40,000 in India
Tiger population, 1972	1,827 , a roughly 95 per cent decline
Project Tiger launched	1 April 1973 , at Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand
Current Tiger Reserves	58 , across 18 tiger-range states
Area covered	About 84,500 sq km , roughly 2.56 per cent of India's geographical area
Statutory authority	National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

The **National Tiger Conservation Authority** was constituted under the **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006**, which inserted Chapter IV-B into the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**. Before 2006, Project Tiger operated as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme without independent statutory backing; the 2006 amendment gave it a dedicated regulator with powers to lay down **normative** standards for tiger conservation, approve tiger reserve management plans, and ensure the integrity of critical tiger and corridor habitats. The NTCA also oversees the **All India Tiger Estimation**, conducted every four years using camera-trap and DNA-based methodology, which is the source of India's official tiger population figures.

INSTRUMENT	ROLE
Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972	Base wildlife protection statute; tiger is a Schedule I species
Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006	Created the NTCA and the statutory basis for tiger reserves
National Tiger Conservation Authority	Statutory body approving management plans, laying down standards
All India Tiger Estimation	Quadrennial population assessment, camera-trap and DNA based

FROM RESCUE TO “BEYOND RESERVE” MANAGEMENT

Project Tiger’s original mandate was straightforward: stop a species heading toward extinction by protecting core habitat from poaching and habitat loss. That mandate has been substantially achieved, evidenced by the sustained recovery from 1,411 tigers in the 2006 estimation to well over 3,000 in the most recent cycles. The policy problem this success has created is different from the one Project Tiger was designed to solve.

As tiger populations recover inside well-managed reserves like Ranthambore, Bandhavgarh and Corbett itself, reserves approach or exceed their carrying capacity, and dispersing sub-adult tigers, particularly males seeking new territory, increasingly move into unprotected forest, agricultural land and, in some cases, human settlements outside reserve boundaries. This is the “beyond reserve” challenge: conservation success at the reserve level generating human-wildlife conflict at the landscape level.

MANAGEMENT ERA	PRIMARY FOCUS
1973-2006	Core habitat protection, anti-poaching, Project Tiger as a scheme
2006-present	Statutory NTCA oversight, reserve management plan standards
Emerging phase	Landscape-level corridor management, human-tiger conflict mitigation outside reserve boundaries

CORRIDORS AND CONFLICT

Tiger corridors, the forested or semi-forested links between reserves that allow genetic exchange between otherwise isolated populations, are increasingly recognised as being as important as the reserves themselves. A tiger population confined to a single reserve without corridor connectivity risks long-term genetic isolation, regardless of how well the reserve itself is managed. India’s landscape-level conservation approach, formalised through documents like the **National Tiger Conservation Authority’s Tiger Conservation Plan** guidelines, increasingly requires States to identify and protect corridors alongside core and buffer zones.

Human-tiger conflict compensation schemes, typically administered at the State level with central assistance, remain the primary tool for managing the social cost of dispersal, but compensation alone does not address the underlying land-use planning gap: corridors that are not legally protected can be lost to infrastructure, agriculture or settlement expansion before a conflict-mitigation framework is even triggered.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, [environmental impact assessment](#); biodiversity and its conservation.

Prelims pointers:

- Global Tiger Day/International Tiger Day: **July 29**, established at the **2010 St Petersburg Tiger Summit**.
- Project Tiger launched **1 April 1973** at **Corbett National Park**.
- NTCA constituted under the **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006**, inserting **Chapter IV-B** into the 1972 Act.
- India has **58 Tiger Reserves** across **18 states**, about **84,500 sq km**.
- **All India Tiger Estimation** conducted every **four years**.
- Tiger is a **Schedule I** species under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

★ FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGE PEDIA**INTERNATIONAL TIGER DAY AND PROJECT TIGER:**

Observed July 29, since the 2010 St Petersburg Tiger Summit.

Project Tiger launched 1 April 1973, Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand.

Population: about 40,000 (c. 1900) fell to 1,827 (1972), a roughly 95 per cent decline.

58 Tiger Reserves, 18 states, about 84,500 sq km (2.56 per cent of India's area).

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK:

NTCA constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006 (Chapter IV-B of the 1972 Act).

All India Tiger Estimation: quadrennial, camera-trap and DNA-based.

Tiger: Schedule I species under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

EMERGING POLICY CHALLENGE:

"Beyond reserve" management: dispersing tigers from at-capacity reserves entering unprotected landscapes.

Corridors link reserves for genetic exchange; loss of corridor connectivity risks genetic isolation.

Human-tiger conflict compensation is State-administered with central assistance.

Sources: PIB, National Tiger Conservation Authority, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

Source: International Tiger Day 2026: Project Tiger at 50-Plus and the "Beyond Reserve" Challenge — Ujiyari.com

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