Project Tiger

Why in news?

Recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched 5th cycle of India's Tiger Census to mark 50 years of 'Project Tiger'.

Why is tiger so significant?

- 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.**
- As a 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**

What is Project tiger?

- Project Tiger 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 providing central assistance to the tiger States for tiger conservation in designated tiger reserves.
- Focuses on the conservation of big cats and ensures the preservation of their natural habitat as tigers are at the top of the food chain.
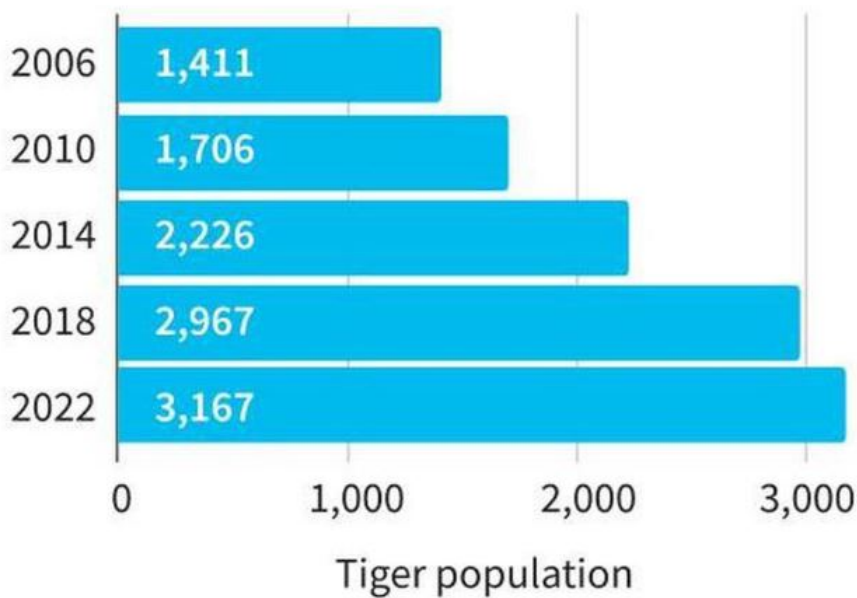
What about the recent tiger estimates?

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.

- As per the All India Tiger Estimation (AITE) 2021-2022, the number of tigers in India has increased by 6.74% from 2,967 in 2018 to **3,167 in 2022.**
- The tiger census is held <u>once in every 4 years</u> by **National Tiger Conservation**

Authority (NTCA) in association with state forest departments and the **Wildlife Institute of India.**

- The current estimate is a part of a larger report and the final tiger estimates for 2022 are likely to be available in the near future.
- According to the 2022 report, the tiger population has increased substantially in the Shivalik and Gangetic flood plains in the north followed by central India.
- But the **Western Ghats** showed a *decline* in tiger population.

Year	Tiger population
2006	1,411
2010	1,706
2014	2,226
2018	2,967
2022	3,167

MSTrIPES (Monitoring System for Tigers: Intensive Protection and Ecological Status) - Uses Global Positioning System (GPS), General Packet Radio Services (GPRS), and remote sensing, to collect information from the field, create a database, analyses the information to provide inferences for better management of tiger reserve.

What is the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)?

- NTCA, a statutory body under the *Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change* was established in 2005.
- It has been constituted under **Section 38 L (1) of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.**
- **Composition**
    - *The Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change* (Chairperson)
    - The Minister of State in the Ministry of Environment and Forests (Vice-Chairperson)
    - Three members of Parliament, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests and other members.
- **Headquarters** - New Delhi
- **Functions** - The NTCA has power to check poaching and preserve the tiger population.
- It sets up a Tiger Protection Force and funding the relocation of villages from the protected areas.

- It also provides statutory authority to Project Tiger.
- The NTCA / Project Tiger conducts the country level assessment of the status of tiger, co-predators, prey and habitat, using the refined methodology, as approved by the Tiger Task Force.

What is International Big Cats Alliance (IBCA)?

- **Launched by** - Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2023 at Mysuru, Karnataka, to commemorate 50 years of Project Tiger.
- **Aim -** To conserve 7 big cats namely Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar and Puma
- **Membership** - Open to **_97 range countries_**, which contain the natural habitat of the big cats, as well as _other interested nations, international organisations,_ etc.
- **Features** – Assured support over 5 years with guaranteed funding of over Rs 800 crore
- Rehabilitation of the big cats
- Dissemination of information on benchmarked practices, capacity building, resources repository, research and development, and awareness creation

GENUS PUMA

Closely related to the domestic cat, this genus has **only one extant species,** the cougar.

COUGAR

PUMA CONCOLOR
SIZE: 40-100KG
STATUS: LEAST CONCERN

The Cougar is the **second-largest cat in the Americas;** jaguar is largest. Cougars are also called mountain lion/panther across their range from the Canadian Yukon to the Southern Andes. Concolor is latin: "of uniform colour".

GENUS ACINONYX

This is a unique genus within the cat family, with **only one living member,** the cheetah.

CHEETAH

ACINONYX JUBATUS
SIZE: 20-70KG
STATUS: VULNERABLE

Fastest land mammal; only cat **without retractable claws**— the grip helps it accelerate faster than a sports car (0-100 km/hr in 3secs). They are not aggressive towards humans; they have been tamed since the Sumerian era. They don't breed well in captivity— females play hard to get. Cheetahs are not big; they hunt during the day to avoid competing with other big cats.

GENUS PANTHERA

Large wild cats that roar but can't purr. Among them, the **lion, leopard,** and **jaguar** are more closely related; the other strand has the **tiger** and **snow leopard.** The snow leopard is an exception in that it can't roar.

TIGER

PANTHERA TIGRIS
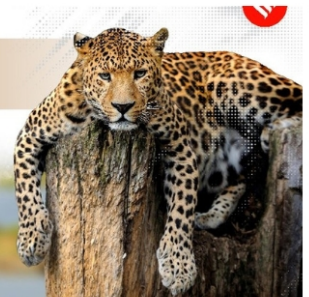SIZE: 75-300KG
STATUS: ENDANGERED

Jim Corbett's "large-hearted gentleman with boundless courage", the **solitary and strongly territorial tiger** is the largest of all wild cats and the most ancient of the Panthera. Primarily a forest animal, its range is the Siberian taiga to the Sunderban delta. It's the **national animal of India,** Bangladesh, Malaysia, and South Korea.

LEOPARD

PANTHERA PARDUS
SIZE: 30-90KG
STATUS: VULNERABLE

Similar in appearance to the jaguar with a rosette patterned coat, the leopard was described by Jim Corbett as "the most beautiful of all animals" for its "grace of movement and beauty of colouring". The **most adaptable of all big cats,** they occupy diverse habitats at all altitudes across Africa and Asia. Like black jaguars, melanistic leopards are called black panthers.

SNOW LEOPARD

PANTHERA UNCIA
SIZE: 25-55KG
STATUS: VULNERABLE

Ghost of the mountains, this smokey grey cat lives above the snow line in **Central and South Asia.** The most elusive of big cats, **it cannot roar,** and has the **longest tail of all**— which comes in handy for balance while hunting along cliffs, and also gives warmth when wrapped around the body. The snow leopard is the state animal of Ladakh and Himachal.

LION

PANTHERA LEO
SIZE: 100-250KG
STATUS: VULNERABLE

Native to **Africa** and **Asia,** the lion is the most social cat, and **lives in groups** called 'prides'. They prefer open forests such as scrubland, and adult males have a prominent mane. The lion is among the most widely recognised of animal symbols— from the pillar of Ashoka to the main entrance of Buckingham Palace to the logo of MGM.

JAGUAR

PANTHERA ONCA
SIZE: 50-110KG
STATUS: NEAR THREATENED

The **largest cat in the Americas,** the jaguar has the **strongest bite** force of all wild cats, enabling it to bite directly through the skull of its prey. Melanistic (black) jaguars are common, and are often called black panthers. Jaguar was a powerful motif in the Mayan and Aztec civilisations.

References

1. [The Indian Express | Project Tiger](#)
2. [Times Now | International Big Cats Alliance (IBCA)](#)
3. [NTCA | About NTCA](#)