

## Safety of Elephants

**Mains (GS II & GS III) - Governance: Transparency & Accountability.**

**GS III - Environment and Conservation.**

### Why in news?

A recent poaching incident in Tamil Nadu's Dharmapuri district has revived fears about illegal trade in wildlife products.

### What is the current status of Elephants poaching?

- **Poaching** - It is the *illegal hunting or capture of animals* that are not one's own.
- **Reason for poaching** - In many cases, poaching involves *killing animals* with the intent to acquire their meat, horns, scales, or other body parts.
- **Wildlife trafficking** - In other cases, poaching involves the *live capture of animals*, which are then trafficked for the illegal exotic pet trade, for use in entertainment or tourism, and for other exploitative purposes such as the extraction of bile from bears.
- Elephant poaching is usually driven by a *demand for their tusks*.
- Elephant tusks are *made out of ivory*.
  - Ivory is in high demand in various parts of the world, particularly in Asia, where it is used for *ornaments, jewellery, and traditional medicine*.
- **Status of poaching** - The Forest Department claims that *poaching no longer poses a serious threat* to the wild elephant population.
  - For instances, according to Tamil Nadu's (TN) Elephant Death Audit Framework, poaching accounted for less than 1% of all elephant deaths recorded in Tamil Nadu since 2010.
- **Resurge of population** - According to Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, TN's elephant population dropped from over 4,000 (2012) to under 2,800 (2017), but rebounded to 3,000+ by 2024.
  - This indicates better management of poaching incidents.

### Distribution of Elephants

- Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is the largest terrestrial mammal of India.
- About 60% of the Asian elephant population is in India.
- It is disturbed across South India, North East, Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.
- The requirement of food and water for elephants are very high and therefore their population can be supported only by forests that are under optimal conditions.
- **IUCN Status** - Endangered.
- Schedule I species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, offering it the highest legal protection.

# ASIAN ELEPHANT

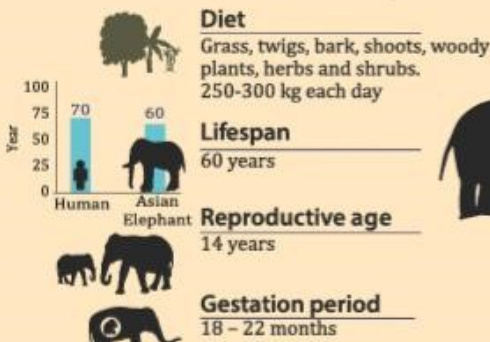


26000 - 29000  
Population in India

**IUCN Status**  
Endangered

## Elephant habitat

Wide range, prefers grass-rich, dry and moist deciduous habitats



Extremely intelligent, can mimic and use tools

Only the male Asian Elephant has tusks. The exceptions are *makhnos*, who are tusk-less males

Uses trunk as tactical contact and for holding

An elephant herd is led by the senior female, who is also called the 'Matriarch'

## DO YOU KNOW?

Needs upto 200 litres of uncontaminated and potable water every day



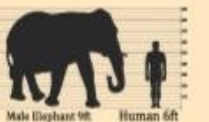
India has a history of captive elephants that dates back to 1000s of years

Shade is essential as it prevents dehydration

Digestion efficiency is only 40%, feeds constantly to compensate

Has no sweat glands, tosses mud on itself and uses large ears as fans to keep cool

## Height:



## Weight

Calf: 100 kg at birth  
Adult female: 2500-4500 kg  
Adult male: 3000-6000 kg



## Important facts



- 1 More than 100 elephants get killed every year in retaliation by people and several others by poaching
- 2 Not all elephants forage on crops. Alternate cropping and temporary elephant-proof barriers (during crop ripening) can be installed to reduce incidents
- 3 Human deaths happen mostly due to surprise encounters or going too close to elephants. Early warnings and avoiding elephants can prevent such incidents
- 4 Deforestation, expansion of agriculture, human encroachment are causing human-elephant conflict



## Migration

Matriarch remember migratory routes clearly. Fragmentation of habitats and obstruction of migratory routes lead to human-elephant conflicts.

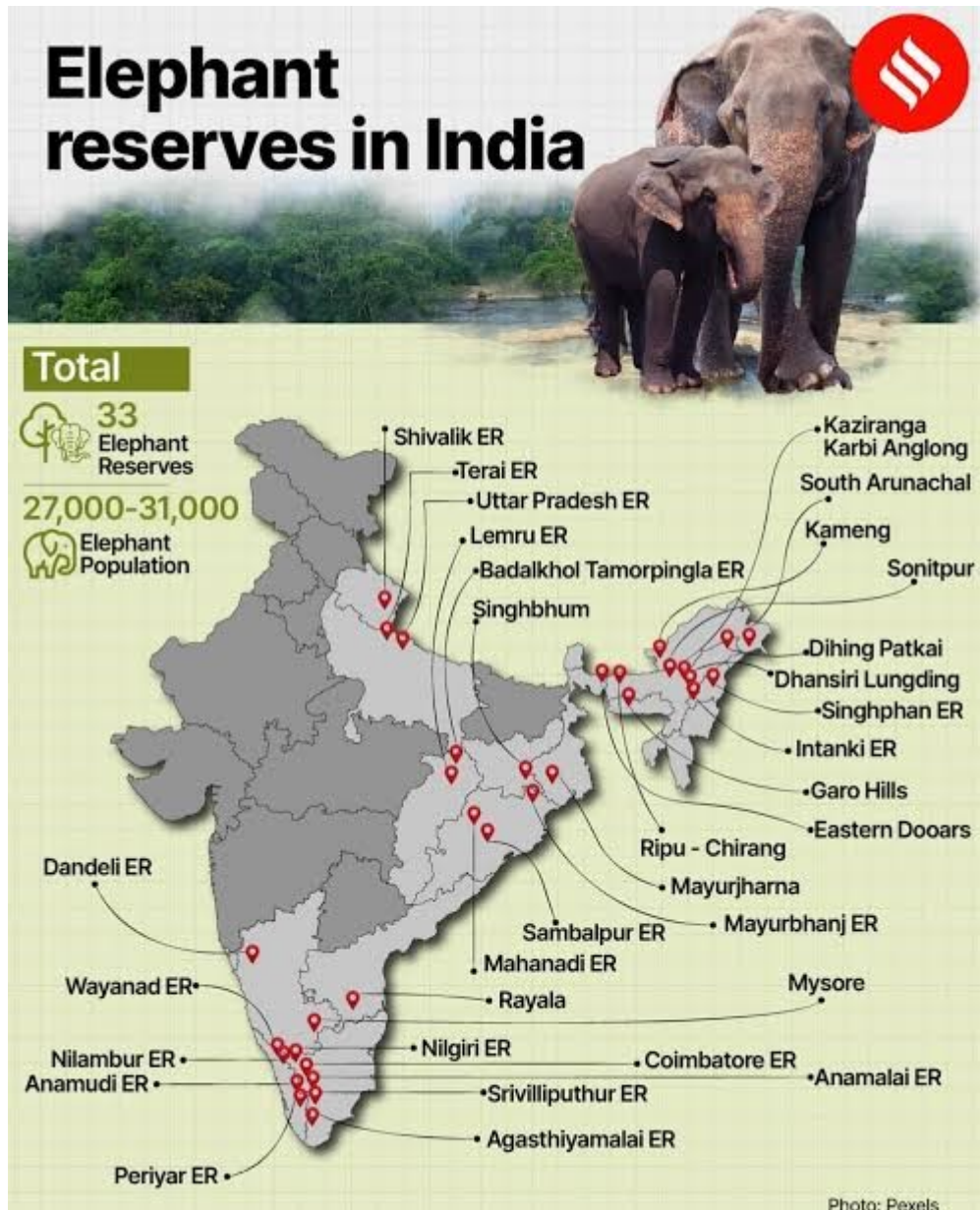


## What are the concerns regarding elephants poaching?

- **Resurgence of poaching threat** - Recent killing of an elephant in Dharmapuri indicates that illegal wildlife trade is still active and dangerous.
  - There are fear that poaching gangs may become more active again as elephant populations recover.
- **Underreporting and Investigation Lapses** - Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (2019 report) pointed to failures in investigation of poaching cases in forest divisions.
- **Transparency and accountability** - Although poaching officially accounts for <1% of elephant deaths since 2010, it still forms 7.5% of unnatural deaths.
- **Habitat Vulnerability** - Poaching hotspots like Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve are ecologically sensitive due to their terrain and connectivity to multiple forest patches.

## What are government initiatives to conserve wild Elephants?

- **Elephant Corridors** - Mapped across India to ensure safe migration and reduce human-elephant conflict.
- **Gaj Yatra** - Nationwide awareness campaign celebrating elephants and promoting coexistence.
- **MIKE Programme (CITES)** - Monitors trends in elephant poaching to inform global conservation efforts.
- **Project Elephant (1992)** - Flagship scheme for protection, habitat conservation, and conflict mitigation.
- **Elephant Reserves** - 33 notified reserves across India for long-term conservation.



## What lies ahead?

- Encouraging *structural improvements* in the Forest Department could enhance transparency.
  - For example: establishing clear protocols for investigating wildlife deaths.
- *Gentle upskilling of field staff* may support better handling of cases.
- *Strengthening legal procedures* might help avoid undue pressure during investigations.
- *Continued coordination with neighbouring states* can aid in curbing poaching networks.
- Revisiting past cases thoughtfully may help build public confidence.
- Sustained conservation efforts and regular monitoring could further support elephant safety.

## References

1. [The Hindu | Safety of Elephants](#)

2. [Vikaspedia | Distribution of Elephants](#)

