# Save the Tiger, Save the Forests - Sariska Relocation

## What is the issue?

- Tiger happens to be at the pinnacle of the eco-system triangle. Saving tigers is much like saving the forests.
- Here is a look at the tiger conservation efforts in India, with particular reference to relocations made in Rajasthan.

## Why are tigers, and conserving them, so significant?

- As top predators, wild tigers play an important role in maintaining the harmony of the planet's ecosystems.
- The tiger moves in a big territory and requires a sizeable forest area.
- So, tiger conservation efforts with landscape connectivity and conservation involve measures in such a large range.
- Consequently, it leads to the betterment and strengthening of the entire biosphere.

## What were the results of Project Tiger?

- At the beginning of the 20th century, the number of Indian tigers was around 40,000.
- After Independence, tigers were killed mercilessly and the 1972 tiger census put their numbers at less than 1500.

- [The tigers were killed and their parts were sold to South-East Asian countries, for medicinal purposes.]

- To preserve the tiger, the Indian government banned their hunting and launched 'Project Tiger' in 1973.
- It created tiger reserves in the country.
- The viable tiger population in their natural habitat was also maintained.
- Starting with nine tiger reserves in 1973, there are now around 50 tiger reserves in India.
- The project totally covers an area of nearly 40000 sq. km.

## What led to the constitution of the NTCA?

- At the beginning of the 21st century, the tiger population again started declining.

- The main Protected Area which was left without tigers due to hunting and poaching activities was the Sariska Tiger Reserve (Rajasthan) in 2004-2005.
- Subsequently, the Panna Tiger Reserve (M.P) faced the same in 2007-2008.
- This led to several inquiry commissions, at national and state levels to find out the reason behind it.
- Subsequently, the government reconstituted 'Project Tiger' and converted it into the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- The NTCA had more power to check poaching and preserve the tiger population.
- Its mandate included setting up Tiger Protection Force and funding the relocation of villages from the protected areas.

## What were the corrective measures taken in Sariska?

- The Rajasthan government took up the challenge to reintroduce tigers in Sariska and set up a task force in June 2008.
- The Wildlife Institute of India and World Wide Fund were approached.
- This was to plan and organize a population estimation exercise in Ranthambhore & Sariska.
- The genetic studies were undertaken to identify tigers suitable for translocation.
- For the first time in the history of tiger conservation, the wild cats were translocated from Ranthambhore to Sariska.
- The tiger population increased at a rapid speed from 1,411, as per the tiger census in 2006, to 2,226 in 2015 and 2,967 in 2018.

## Why was relocation essential?

- Due to the **loss of the forest corridors**, tigers were surviving only in pockets like Sariska, Panna and Ranthambhore Tiger Projects.
- As these pockets were not connected, there was inbreeding of tigers.
- This, in the long run, would have affected their biological fitness, among other issues.
- Another factor important for tiger reserves is to have the right male and female ratio.
- These issues could only be corrected/addressed by relocation.

## What are the other issues to be addressed?

- Every year, more than 100 tigers die due to several reasons (like health factors or poaching).
- Although protected areas are fundamental for their survival, a connecting landscape is also essential as they move between different habitats.

- These areas often have limited protection as many developments, mining, and extraction projects diminish the forest areas.
- It also gives additional opportunities to poachers to kill and hunt tigers and leopards.

**What should be done?**

- Engaging local communities should be a key component of conservation efforts.

**Source: The Indian Express**