

Project Tiger

- **Purpose:** A major wildlife conservation program launched to save the Bengal tiger from extinction.
- **Crisis:** Initiated after the tiger population dropped from ~40,000 (1900) to a critical low of ~1,800 (1972) due to hunting and habitat loss.
- **Launch Date:** April 1, 1973.

Core Objectives

1. To maintain a viable population of tigers in India for their scientific, economic, aesthetic, cultural, and ecological values.
2. To preserve areas of biological importance as a natural heritage for the benefit, education, and enjoyment of the people.

National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

- **Role:** The main governing body for Project Tiger.
- **Established:** December 2005.
- **Legal Status:** Became a **statutory authority** under the **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 2006**.
- **Key Functions:** Approves state conservation plans, sets guidelines, provides funding, coordinates anti-poaching efforts, and monitors reserves.

Tiger Reserve Structure

- **Declaration:** Notified by the **State Government** on the recommendation of the NTCA.
- **Zones:**
 - **Core Zone:** Critical tiger habitat, kept free from human activity for undisturbed breeding. *(Note on Tribal Rights: Relocation from core areas is legally protected by the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and can only be done voluntarily with a full rehabilitation package.)*
 - **Buffer Zone:** Surrounds the core area. Promotes co-existence through eco-tourism and community participation to reduce pressure on the core zone.

Growth & Monitoring

- **Initial Reserves (1973):** Started with 9 reserves.
- **Current Reserves (2025):** **58 notified reserves**. The latest is the Madhav Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh.
- **Tiger Census:** The All India Tiger Estimation is conducted every four years.
 - **Traditional Method:** Pugmark Census Technique (analyzing footprints).
 - **Modern Methods:** Camera trapping (identifying unique stripe patterns) and DNA analysis of scat.
- **Latest Population (2022 Census):** **3,682** tigers in India.

Key Facts

- **Scientific Name:** *Panthera tigris*.
- **Unique Stripes:** No two tigers have the same stripe pattern.
- **Behavior:** Largely solitary animals.
- **Global Standard: Conservation Assured | Tiger Standards (CA|TS)** is a global accreditation for high standards of tiger conservation, awarded to several Indian reserves.

