

TOPIC: PROJECT TIGER AND PROJECT ELEPHANT

LECTURE NO:07

B.SC PART 1

ZOOLOGY(HONS.)-PAPER I-GROUP B

CHAPTER 3

DATE:28TH MARCH 2020

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India's Tiger Poaching Crisis

Evaluation of the tiger's conservation status revealed shattering news in the early 1990s with the discovery of large scale poaching and trafficking for the illegal international trade in tiger parts. The huge demand for tiger bones, destined for use in Oriental traditional medicine outside of India and as a macho supplement, is an added threat to India's tiger population. Practically every part of the tiger, from its whiskers to its tail, is used in traditional Chinese medicine. According to an estimate by the U.S.-based World Watch Institute, people in China and elsewhere in the Far East pay high prices for tiger bones and other tiger parts, with a single tiger's produce fetching up to U.S.\$5 million.

Poaching is done by mafia gangs and is a part of the thriving trade, which is thought to fund, to a great extent, insurgency in north India. In 1993–94, 36 tiger skins and 667 kg (1470 lbs) of tiger bones were seized in north India. Poachers use one of three methods to kill wild tigers: poison,

steel traps, or firearms. The estimated cost for the poachers for each tiger killed is \$1 for poisoning, \$9 for trapping, and \$15 for shooting, distributed among four poachers. If charged and proven guilty, the maximum punishment is three years in jail and/or Rs.25,000 (U.S.\$600) in fines. There is no minimum sentence.

The Wildlife Protection Society of India has made a concerted effort to gather accurate information and document cases of tiger poaching and unnatural deaths of tigers throughout India. Government sources state that 596 tigers are known to have been killed from 1994 to 2002; however, a nongovernment organization puts that number much higher (Table 3). Although international trade in tiger products has been banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), only 8 out of the 14 countries within the tiger's range comply with it.

Table 3. Number of tigers poached in India, 1994-2002.

Year	No. of tigers poached
1994	95
1995	121
1996	52
1997	88

1998	44
1999	81
2000	53
2001	72
2002	43
Total	649

Constraints to Tiger Conservation

New protection measures proposed by the Committee for the Prevention of Illegal Trade in Wildlife, 1994, have been prepared but not implemented, and little effective action has been taken in the field. Eighty percent of the tiger reserves do not have an armed strike force to serve as an effective infrastructure for combating poaching. The forest guards are often out-gunned by poachers. Wildlife crime is the second biggest illegal occupation in the world after narcotics, and it should be recognized as such.

Large developmental projects, such as mining and hydroelectric dams, are also taking their toll on the tiger's habitat. Habitat loss is considered to be the number one threat to the future of wild tigers in India.

The Global Tiger Forum and Achievements of Project Tiger

The International Conference on Tigers was held at New Delhi in March 1990, and was attended by countries within the tiger's range. A majority of the participant countries joined to establish a new organization—The Global Tiger Forum. The main aim of the forum is to protect the tiger from extinction at the global level.

Anywhere that tigers live today is high quality wildlife habitat. The success of Project Tiger has shown that no species, however important, can be conserved in isolation. Active involvement of the local people in the management of parks has made conservation measures more effective, and resource sharing ensures reciprocity of commitment.

Project Tiger has completed more than 30 eventful years as the largest and most successful conservation project of its kind in the world. The project's achievements are as follows:

- Better management of the reserves has improved the status of flora and fauna, and the endangered species have shown signs of recovery. There has also been an improvement in the carrying capacity of the habitat. Biogeographically representative areas of the tiger reserves have shown better signs of ecological security and preservation.
- The project has played a major role in providing education to, and recreation facilities for, the people.

- Enhancement programs include the management of buffer areas and tourism facilities in tiger reserves.

The landscape will continue to change, directly and indirectly, at the hands of humans, and as emphasized earlier, survival of humankind depends on maintaining the ecological balance among the living systems of the earth. New management and research initiatives have started a new era in tiger conservation.

PROJECT ELEPHANT

- Project Elephant is a Central Government sponsored scheme launched in February 1992.
- Through the Project Elephant scheme, the government helps in the protection and management of elephants to the states having wild elephants in a free-ranging population.
- It ensures the protection of elephant corridors and elephant habitat for the survival of the elephant population in the wild.
- This elephant conservation strategy is mainly implemented in 16 of 28 states or union territories in the country which includes Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh Jharkhand, Kerala, Karnataka, Meghalaya,

Maharashtra, Nagaland, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

- The union government provides technical and financial help to these states to carry out and achieve the goals of project elephant. Not just that, assistance for the purpose of the census, training of field officials is also provided to ensure the mitigation and prevention of man-elephant conflict.

Project Elephant – A Successful Scheme For Elephant Conservation

The Indian Elephant is widely seen in 16 of the 28 states of India, especially in the Southern part of the Western Ghats, North-Eastern India, Eastern India, Central India, and Northern India.

The species is included in the list of protected species according to the Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES).

According to recent reports, the elephant population in India is demonstrating a stable trend across elephant reserves in India. The population of elephants in the year 2012, was estimated at 31,368 while it had fallen to 27,312 in 2017. The elephant population of India was 27,682 in 2007. The average population throughout the period was about 26,700.

Differing counts have been attributed to a difference in counting methods. Some states such as Manipur, Mizoram, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Andaman & Nicobar had reported sightings for the first time in 2017.

The following table gives the last estimated population in states where data was available:

State	Elephants (2017-18)
Karnataka	6049
Assam	5719
Kerala	3054
Tamil Nadu	2761
Odisha	1976
Uttarakhand	1839
Meghalaya	1754
Arunachal Pradesh	1614
Jharkhand	679
Nagaland	446
Chhattisgarh	247
Uttar Pradesh	232
West Bengal	194
Tripura	102

Andhra Pradesh	65
Bihar	25
Gujarat	10
Madhya Pradesh	7
Mizoram	7
Maharashtra	6

Environmentalists have studied why are Indian Elephants endangered for a long time. They came to the conclusion that conversion of habitats into farmland, Human-Elephant conflict and an absence of elephant corridors in India were the main reasons for the decline in population of elephants.

Due to the conclusions drawn from these studies, 'Project Elephant' was launched by the Government of India in 1992. The population of these animals was about 15000 when the project was started and has increased since then.
