Elephant Corridors in Odisha

Why in News

Recently, the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has directed **the Odisha government** to prepare an **action plan** for **14 identified elephant corridors.**

Key Points

- **Background:**

  - **NGT's Order in 2017:**

    - The **NGT** had **issued a prohibition order** directing that all such activities which are not permissible to be carried out in a highly **Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ)**, should not be undertaken.
    - The **NGT** also **directed authorities to expedite demarcation of the corridors** within a specific time frame.
  - **Odisha government's Stand:**

    - The Odisha government **had proposed 14 corridors stretching over a total area of 870.61 sq.km. having a length of 420.8 km.** Even after several years, **no tangible progress had been made** on the government's proposal.
- **Elephant Corridors:**

  - They are **narrow strips of land that connect two large habitats of elephants.**
  - They are crucial to **reduce animal fatalities due to accidents and other reasons.**
  - Fragmentation of forests makes it all the more important to **preserve migratory corridors.**
  - This movement of Elephants helps in **enhancing the species survival and birth rate.**
  - **88 elephant corridors** have been identified by the wildlife trust of India **under the National elephant Corridor project.**
  - **Concern:** The all-round development like **human settlements, roads, railway line, electric lines, canal and mining are the main cause of corridor fragmentation.**
  - **Reasons for Protecting the Corridors:**

    - The movement of elephants is essential to **ensure that their populations are genetically viable.** It also helps **to regenerate forests** on which other species, including tigers, depend.
    - Nearly 40% of **elephant reserves are vulnerable,** as they are not within protected parks and sanctuaries. Also, **migration corridors have no specific legal protection.**
    - Forests that have turned into farms and unchecked tourism are blocking animal paths. Animals are thus forced to seek **alternative routes resulting in increased elephant-human conflict.**
    - **Weak regulation** of ecotourism is severely impacting important habitats. It particularly affects animals that have large home ranges, like elephants.

Elephants

- Elephants are **keystone species.**
- There are three subspecies of **Asian elephant – the Indian, Sumatran, and Sri Lankan.**
- The Indian elephant has the widest range and accounts for the **majority of the remaining elephants on the continent.**
- **Conservation Status of Indian Elephants:**

    - Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**: Schedule I**
    - IUCN Red List**: Endangered**
    - CITES**: Appendix I**
- India is home to **50% of the Asian Elephant population, and according to the 2017 elephant census,** there are **27,312 elephants in the country, marking a decrease of nearly 3,000 elephants from the 2012 census.**
- **India's Initiatives for Conservation of Elephants:**

    - **Gaj Yatra**: A nationwide campaign to protect elephants, was launched on the occasion of World Elephant Day **in 2017.**
    - **Project Elephant**: It is a **centrally sponsored scheme** which was launched in 1992.
- **Objectives:**

    - To protect elephants, their habitat & corridors
    - To address issues of man-animal conflict
    - Welfare of captive elephants
- **International Initiatives:**
- **Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme**: It is mandated by the **Conference Of Parties (COP)** resolution of **CITES.** It was **started in South Asia in 2003** with the following purpose –

    - To measure levels and trends in **illegal hunting** of elephants.
    - To determine changes in these trends over time.
    - To determine the factors causing or associated with these changes and to try and assess in particular to what extent observed trends are a result of any decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties to **CITES.**

Way Forward

- Efforts should be to **expand elephant corridors,** using the successful models within the country by **acquisition of lands using private funds** and their transfer to the government. Ending human interference in the pathways of elephants is more a conservation imperative.
- **Sensitization and awareness among people** at large is necessary to stop poaching and illegal trades.
- Technologies such as **Drones and satellites** could be used for better monitoring throughout the corridors.

Source: TH