

50 MOST IMPORTANT TOPICS

UPSC CSE 2026

Sundarbans Tiger Reserve

- Expanded by **1,044.68 sq km**
- Total - 3,630 sq km
- **India's 2nd largest TR** (after Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem). Includes Raidighi, Matla & Ramganga ranges.
- The **FAO** granted **Global Technical Recognition** to the Nature Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS)'s Sustainable Aquaculture in Mangrove Ecosystems (**SAIME**) model on October 15, 2025, in Rome.
- The award was presented during the **FAO's 80th Anniversary and the World Food Forum**.
- Sundarbans National Park outlook changed from **"Good with some concerns" (2020) to "Significant Concerns" (2025)**, only Indian site (along with Manas NP) in Asia flagged this way.

Sundarbans Tiger Reserve

- **Ghoramara Island** (southernmost Sundarbans) has shrunk from 8.59 sq km (1969) to 3.83 sq km (2019).
- Overall **Sundarbans lost >250 sq km land** in 50 years.
- Sea-level rise at **3.9 mm/year** (twice global average).

Sunderbans Tiger Reserve

- The Sundarbans comprises hundreds of islands and a network of rivers, tributaries and creeks in the **delta of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra** at the mouth of the **Bay of Bengal** in **India and Bangladesh**.
- **Tiger Reserve and a national park.**
- It is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** and it has been designated as a **Ramsar site** since 2019.
- It is considered as a **World Network of Biosphere Reserve** (Man and Biosphere Reserve) from 1989.
- Spread over parts of **Bangladesh and India**, 40% of the Sundarbans is in India, the remaining 60% is in Bangladesh.

Sunderbans Tiger Reserve

- It is a **vast contiguous mangrove forest ecosystem**.
- It is named after **Sundari trees(EN)** (*Heritiera fomes*) which were once found throughout the area.
- The Sunderbans are the **world's largest mangrove delta**.
- It is the **only mangrove forest** in the world inhabited by **tigers**.

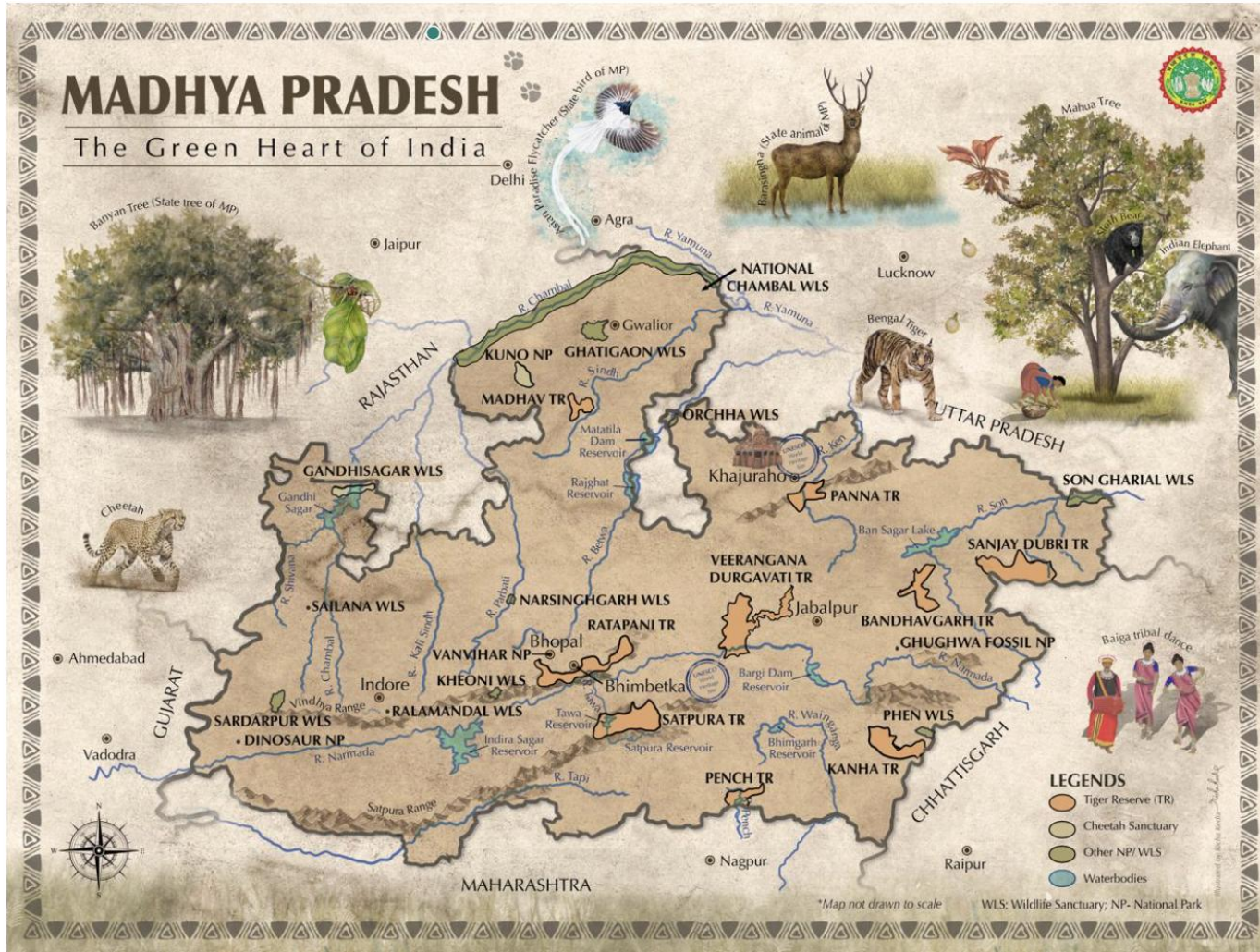


Saltwater Crocodile

- **Saltwater Crocodile Population Rise** as 2025 survey in Sundarbans Biosphere Reserve) shows **213 direct sightings**; estimated population **220-242**.
- **Increase in all age groups**, including rare hatchlings.
- Highlighted **possible gender dimension in human-crocodile conflict** as women crab fishers more vulnerable.
- Largest reptile.
- **Appendix I of CITES and**
- **Schedule I of the WPA, 1972**
- Mangrove ecosystem indicator.



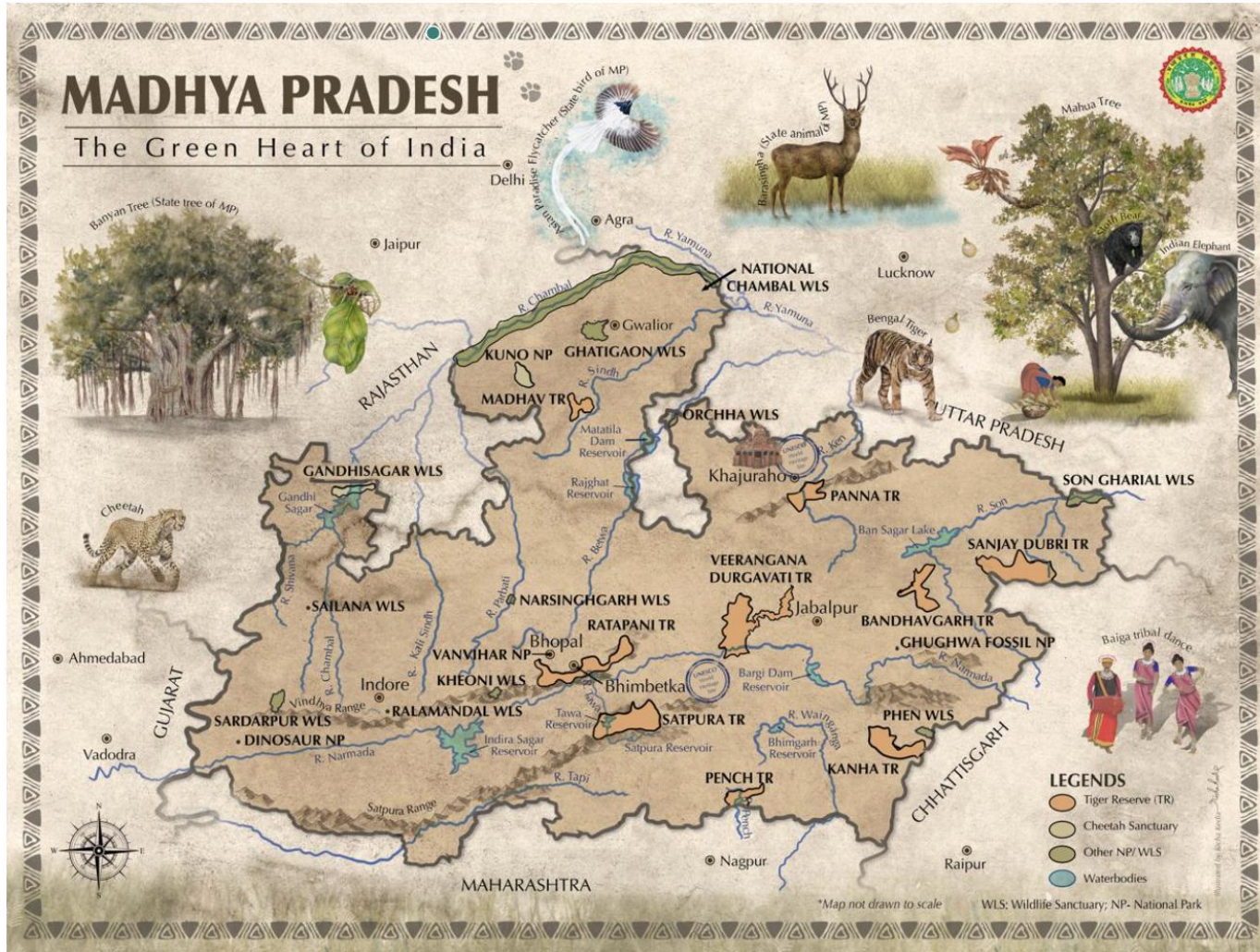
Madhav Tiger Reserve



Madhav Tiger Reserve

- Madhav National Park, located in the Chambal region of MP, has been declared **India's 58th Tiger Reserve**.
- **9th Tiger Reserve** of MP.
- **Upper Vindhyan hills**.
- **Oldest NP**
- Connects **Ranthambore and Panna**
- **Sakhya Sagar** – Ramsar site.
- **Marsh Crocodiles** are in abundance in Sakhya Sagar lake.
- Due to this, the lake looks like a "**Crocodile Safari**" and attracts special attention of tourists.
- **Madikhera dam** is situated in the North Western part of the Park

Madhav Tiger Reserve



Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve

- The MP State cabinet has given **in-principle approval** to develop the **Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve**, located at Nauradehi in Sagar district, as the **third habitat in the State for the world's fastest animal**.
- **Seventh tiger reserve** of Madhya Pradesh.
- It could become **India's first Tiger Reserve** hosting tigers + leopards + cheetahs together and is a part of **MP's aggressive push to become India's cheetah capital**.
- The **first cheetah habitat** was opened at the **Kuno National Park (KNP)** in Sheopur in September 2022, and the **second one at the Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary** in Mandsaur in April 2025.
- The previously **notified eco-sensitive zone of Nauradehi and Veerangana Durgavati sanctuaries** and the surrounding forest areas have been included in the notified buffer area.



The 11.96-km Hiran-Sindoor section of National Highway 45 between Bhopal and Jabalpur passes through the Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary and the Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve | Himanshu Tyagi/X

Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve

- A **chequered highway** has come up in **Madhya Pradesh**, designed to improve connectivity and protect wildlife in the surrounding forests.
- The **11.96-km Hiran-Sindoor** section of **National Highway 45** between **Bhopal** and **Jabalpur** passes through the **Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary** and the **Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve**.
- National Highways Authority of India has constructed **25 underpasses** along this stretch to help animals move safely under the road with minimal disturbance to their habitat.



Cold Desert Biosphere Reserve

- India's **first high-altitude cold desert biosphere reserve** and one of the **coldest and driest ecosystems** in UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves.
- Spanning 7,770 square kilometres at altitudes between 3,300 and 6,600 metres, the site covers **Pin Valley National Park and its surroundings, including Chandratal, Sarchu and Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary.**
- Located in the **Trans-Himalayan region.**
- It features windswept plateaus, glacial valleys, alpine lakes and rugged high-altitude deserts.

Cold Desert Biosphere Reserve

- According to the state government's release, the reserve harbours 655 herbs, 41 shrubs and 17 tree species, including **14 endemic and 47 medicinal plants central to the traditional Sowa Rigpa or Amchi healing system.**
- Its wildlife includes 17 mammal species and 119 bird species.
- The **snow leopard(VU)** is the flagship species, supported by more than **800 blue sheep(LC)** that provide a strong prey base.
- Other species found here are the **Tibetan wolf, red fox, Himalayan ibex, golden eagle, Himalayan snowcock and bearded vulture.**

São Tomé and Príncipe

- São Tomé and Príncipe (island country of Central Africa) becomes the first state to have its **entire territory** designated as a **biosphere reserve**.
- Six countries saw the designation of their first biosphere reserves in 2025: **Angola, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Iceland, Oman and Tajikistan**.
- With nearly **thirty new designations in 2025**, World Network of Biosphere Reserves has reached a major milestone, now protecting 5 per cent of the planet.



Similipal Tiger Reserve

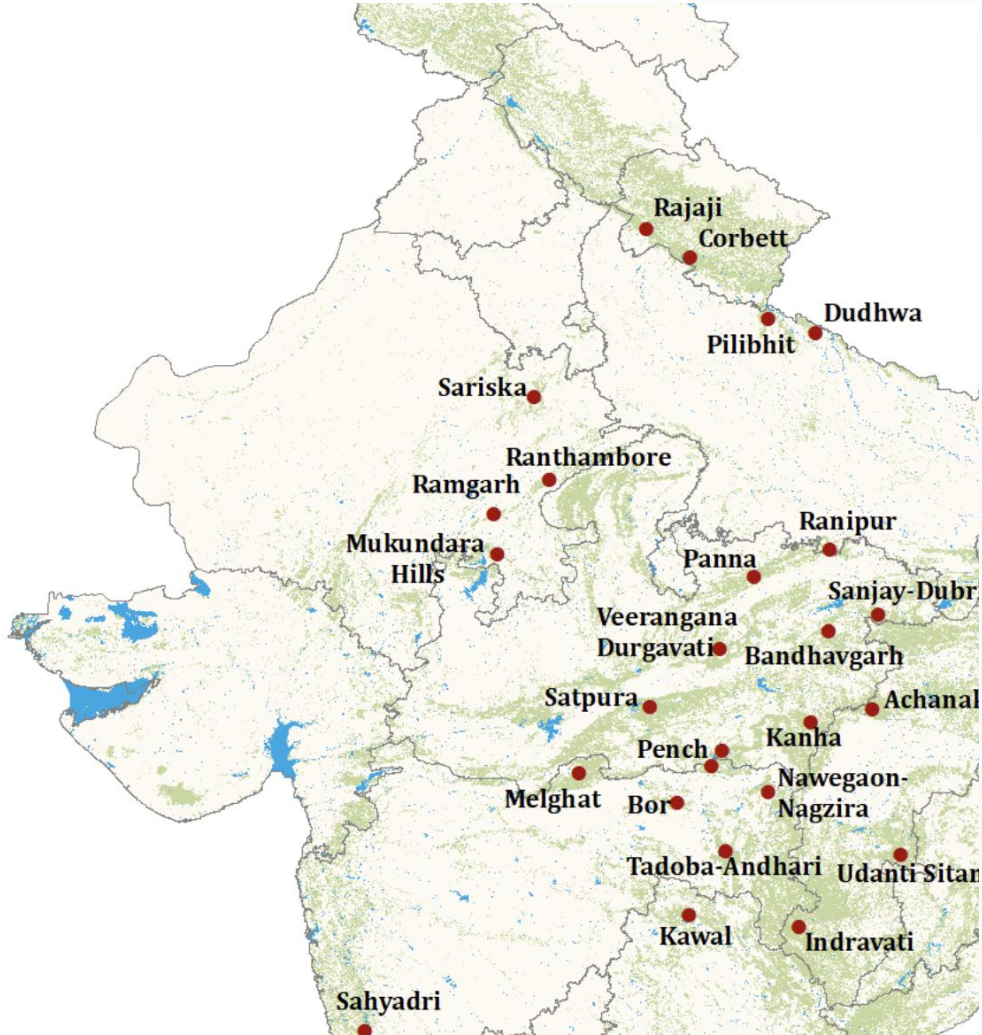
- Odisha has declared a portion of the Similipal Tiger Reserve as a **National Park**.
- Of the reserve's total area of **2,750 sq km**, an area of **845.70 sq km** has now been designated as a National Park, making it the **largest** in the state, surpassing Bhitarkanika.
- With this notification, it becomes *India's 107th National Park and the second in Odisha* after Bhitarkanika.
- 32 tigers (highest in recent years), of which 19 are **pseudo-melanistic (nearly 60%, world's only such population)**.
- Similipal is a "**living laboratory of genetic mutation**" due to inbreeding.
- Both a "**unique success story**" and a "**warning sign**" of isolation.
- 100-150 **AI-enabled TrailGuard cameras** installed for real-time alerts and poaching incidents dropped sharply.

Similipal Tiger Reserve

- Located in the **Mayurbhanj district** of Odisha within the broader **Chottanagpur plateau region**.
- **Key Rivers:** The forest landscape is drained by several rivers, including the **Burhabalanga, Palpala, Bandan, Salandi, Kahairi, and Deo**.
- **Protection Status:**
 - Declared a **Wildlife Sanctuary**
 - Recognized as a **Tiger Reserve** under *Project Tiger*
 - Notified as a **Biosphere Reserve** under UNESCO's *Man and the Biosphere Programme* since **2009**
 - Forms a crucial part of the **Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve**

Ranthambore Tiger Reserve

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has built the country's first dedicated wildlife corridor on a national highway.
- It is 12-kilometre stretch that blends wildlife conservation with modern infrastructure, is part of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway and passes through the buffer zone of the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve.
- The stretch is strategically located between **Ranthambore and the Chambal Valley**, an ecologically rich region teeming with tigers, bears, antelopes, and other species.



Ranthambore Tiger Reserve

- Ranthambore National Park was established as the Sawai Madhopur Game Sanctuary in 1955, initially covering an area of 282 km² (109 sq mi).
- It was declared one of the Project Tiger reserves in 1974.
- It was declared as a national park in 1980.
- It takes its name from the **historic Ranthambore Fort**, which stands within its boundaries.
- It is bounded to the north by the **Banas River** and to the south by the **Chambal River**.

Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary

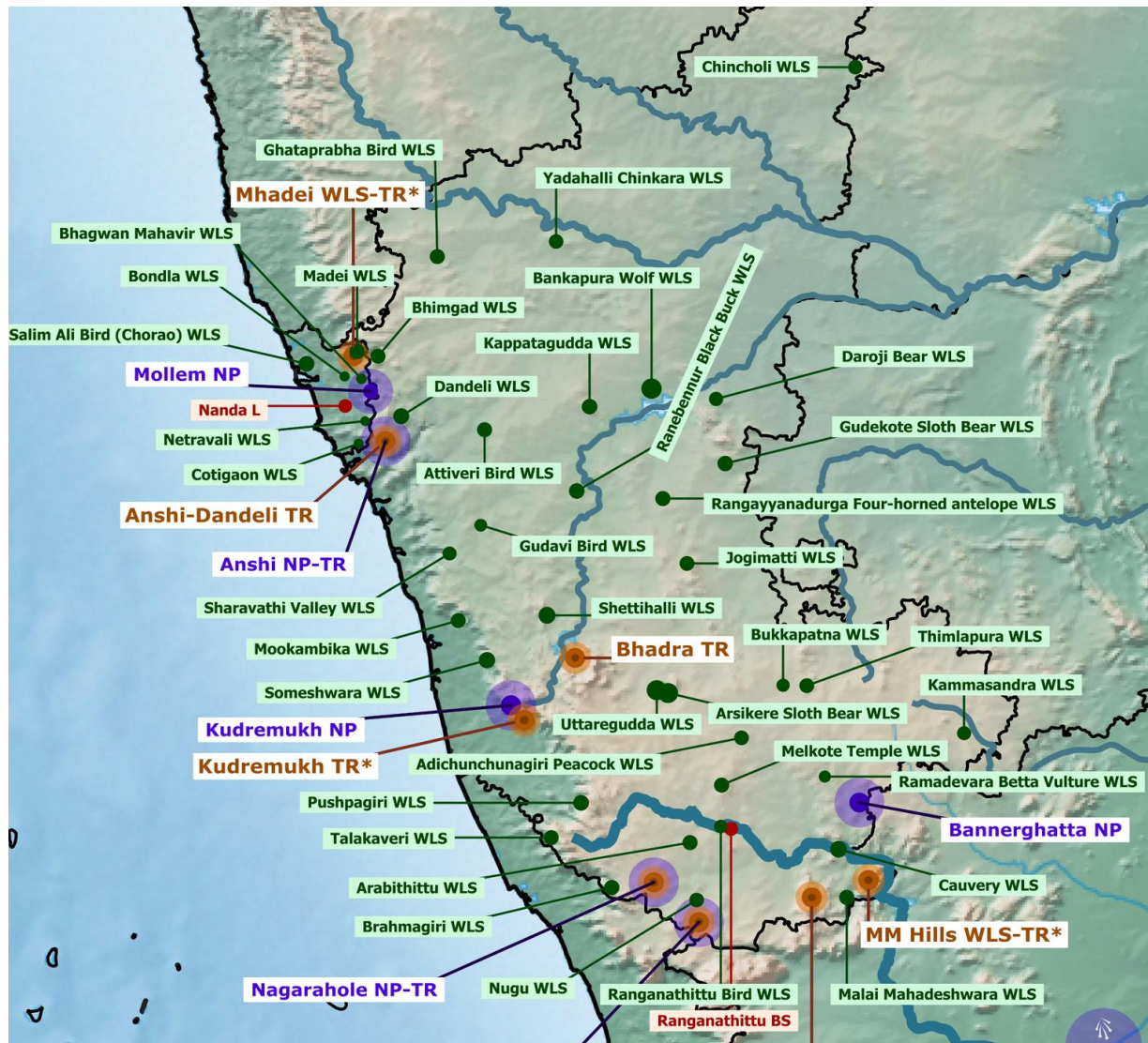
- After being extinct in Gujarat for decades, a tiger has returned and was first seen nine months ago in **Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary in Dahod.**
- With this, Gujarat has become a state with a presence of three out of four big cats – **lions, tiger and leopard**
- This area was declared as a wildlife sanctuary in March 1982. The sanctuary falls on the **border of Gujarat with Madhya Pradesh.**
- The actual habitat of the **Sloth bear**, therefore, extends into Madhya Pradesh.
- The forests of Ratanmahals form the catchment of **river Panam**, a major river of Central Gujarat.

GUJARAT



Male Mahadeshwara (MM) Hills Wildlife Sanctuary

- On 26 June 2025, a tigress and her four cubs (total 5 tigers) were found dead in **Hoogyam forest range** (southern boundary, Chamarajanagar district) in **Karnataka**.
- Suspected retaliatory poisoning (phorate pesticide traces in stomachs), linked to **livestock depredation** conflicts.
- Key connectivity corridor linking **Biligiri Ranganatha Swamy Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve (Karnataka)** with **Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary** (and indirectly Satyamangalam TR in Tamil Nadu).
- Proposal to upgrade TR pending since 5 years got fresh momentum post-June deaths.
- Locals (tribals like Soliga, Jenu Kuruba) strongly opposed due to **relocation fears and livelihood impacts** (collection of NTFP, grazing).



Tsarap Chu Conservation reserve

- **Himachal Pradesh** notified the Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve by issuing a notification under Section 36A(1) of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.
- Tsarap Chu joins Darlaghat, Naina Devi, Potter Hill, and Shilli as **Himachal Pradesh's fifth conservation reserve**.
- Located in the Lahaul-Spiti region, will become **India's largest reserve** designated to protect high-altitude wildlife like **snow leopards, Tibetan wolves and ibex**.



Tsarap Chu Conservation reserve

- It is one of select areas in Himachal Pradesh with a **high density of snow leopards**.
- This area is also the catchment area of the Charap Nala and is an important wildlife corridor connecting the **Kibber and Chandratal sanctuaries**, which is extremely important for biodiversity.

Ramsar Sites

- As of early 2026, India has **98 Ramsar Sites**.
- These are wetlands designated as being of international importance under the Ramsar Convention (which India joined in 1982).
 - **Tamil Nadu: 20**
 - **Uttar Pradesh: 11**
 - **Bihar: 6**
 - **Odisha: 6**
 - **Punjab: 6**

Ramsar Sites

- **New additions -**
 - Sakkarakottai & Therthangal Bird Sanctuaries (Ramanathapuram, TN)
 - Khecheopalri Wetland (Sikkim)
 - Udhwa Lake (Jharkhand)
 - Patna Bird Sanctuary (Etah, UP)
 - Chhari-Dhand (Kutch, Gujarat)

Kaziranga National Park

- In the Golaghat and Nagaon districts of Assam, India
- **UNESCO World Heritage Site**
- This park which hosts **2/3rd of the world's one-horned rhinoceroses.**
- It is also a **tiger reserve.**
- Along with Karbi Anglong, it forms **Kaziranga Karbi Anglong Elephant reserve.**
- It is located on the **Brahmaputra River.**
- **Alluvial grasslands and savanna woodlands, and tropical moist deciduous and semi-evergreen forests.**



Kaziranga National Park

- One-Horned rhinoceros (vulnerable), Royal Bengal Tiger, Asian elephant, wild water buffalo (endangered) and swamp deer are collectively known as the '**Big Five**' of Kaziranga.
- Fishing cat, small Indian civets, sloth bear, Chinese pangolin, Indian pangolins.
- Spear grass, elephant grass, common reed, cotton tree, and elephant apple.
- Recently, a survey has been conducted **in Kaziranga National Park which finds 40% of Northeast's amphibian and reptile species** are found here, it also have 108 herpetofaunal species.
- The **first-ever grassland bird census in 2025** recorded 43 grassland bird species, emphasizing the link between avian diversity and tiger/habitat conservation.
- **Rowmari-Donduwa Wetland Complex** is located in the Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary (part of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve) in Nagaon district, this complex is being advocated for Ramsar status due to its rich biodiversity

Saranda Forest

- Honourable Supreme Court in November 2025 directed the Jharkhand government to declare 31,468.25 hectares of the Saranda forest area as a wildlife sanctuary, balancing biodiversity protection with sustainable iron ore mining.
- Asia's largest sal forest.
- West Singhbhum district — borders Odisha/Chhattisgarh;
- Saranda forest division also accounts for 26% of India's iron ore reserves.



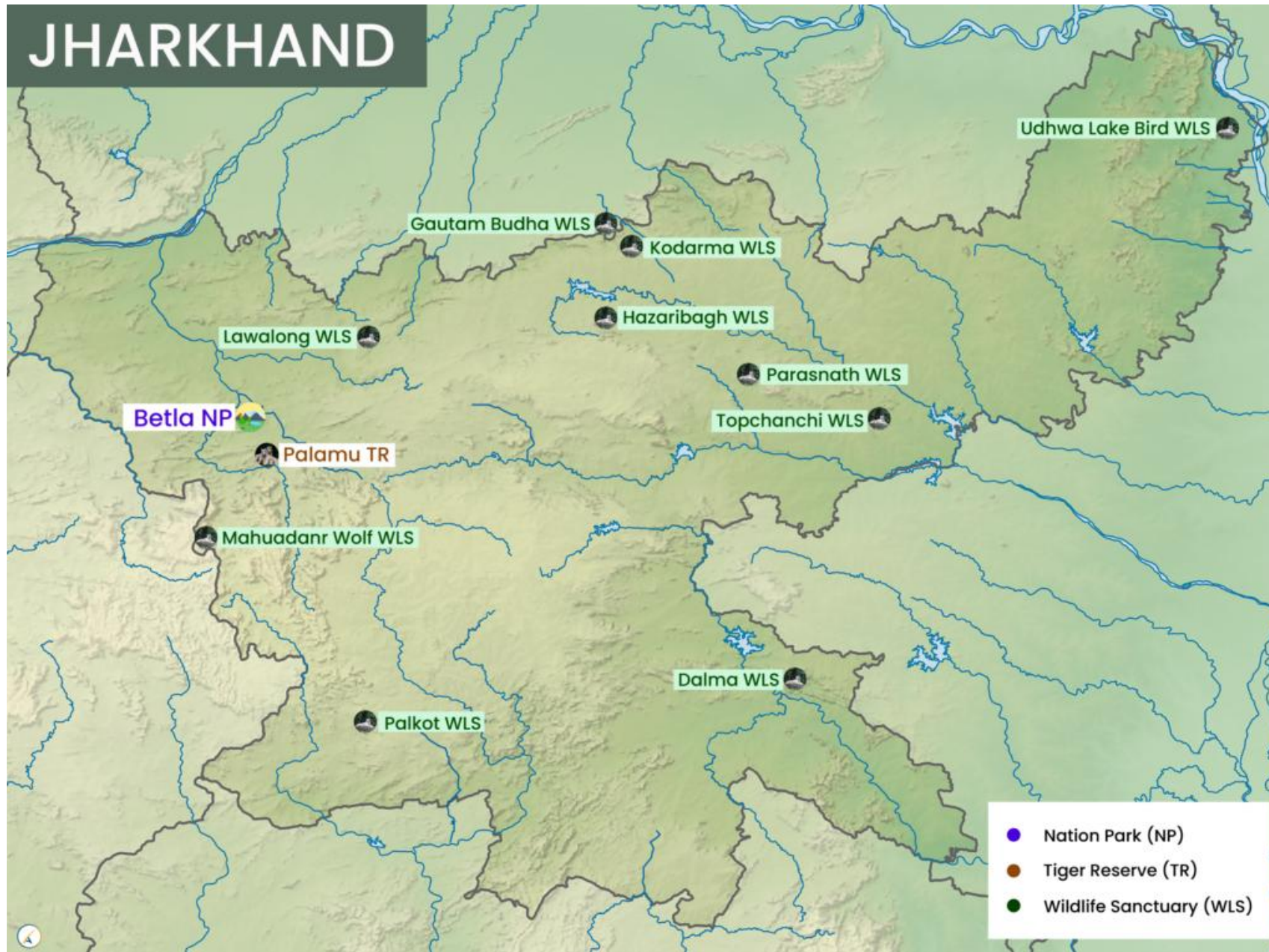
Saranda Forest

- Critically endangered & endemic **Sal Forest Tortoise**.
- Part of **Singbhum Elephant Reserve** core.
- Inhabited by **Ho, Munda, Uraon**, and allied Adivasi communities.
- Mining within a national park and wildlife sanctuary and within an area of **one kilometre from the boundary** of such national park and wildlife sanctuary shall not be permissible.

Mahuadanr Wolf Sanctuary

- **India's First and Only Dedicated Wolf Sanctuary.**
- Established in 1976 for **Indian grey wolf** (*Canis lupus pallipes*, IUCN **Least Concern** but regionally threatened).
- Located in Latehar district, entirely within **Palamau Tiger Reserve (PTR)** buffer.
- Local Adivasi communities (Oraon, Korwa, etc.) follow **Sarna faith** (nature-worshipping indigenous religion).
- They revere **Sal trees** (*Shorea robusta*) as sacred and observe a **seasonal avoidance of Sal forests during winter months** (November–February), considering it the "rest period" for trees, land, and spirits.
- This tradition perfectly **overlaps with the Indian grey wolf's denning/breeding season** (winter), reducing human disturbance, livestock grazing, and poaching pressure in prime den sites (steep slopes with dense Sal & shrub cover).

JHARKHAND



Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park

- Darjeeling, West Bengal.
- Has become **India's first zoo** to preserve **DNA samples of wildlife found exclusively in snowy regions.**
- The initiative is a collaboration with **the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad.**
- **India's first "frozen zoo"** - a genetic ark preserving the DNA of Himalayan wildlife
- World Association of Zoos and Aquariums for the 2024 WAZA Conservation & Environmental Sustainability Awards finalist.

Kasampatty Sacred Grove

- **Tamil Nadu government** has notified Kasampatty (Veera Kovil) sacred grove as a **Biodiversity Heritage Site**.
- The Forest Department has officially published the notification in the Government Gazette to mark the site's recognition under the Biological Diversity Act of 2002.
- Kasampatty, located near Alagarmalai Reserve Forest in Dindigul district, now joins **Arittapatti** in Madurai as the **second officially designated Biodiversity Heritage Site in Tamil Nadu**.
- The sacred grove, nestled in the heart of Kasampatty village in Rediyapatty panchayat, spans 4.97 hectares.

Kasampatty Sacred Grove

- Surrounded by **fertile mango plantations**, it serves as a crucial ecological bridge, maintaining environmental balance and supporting local wildlife.
- Home to a **rich variety of flora and fauna**, the Veera Kovil sacred grove is a biodiversity hotspot.
- It hosts 48 plant species, 22 shrubs, 21 lianas, and 29 herbs, contributing to its **genetic richness**.
- The grove also provides shelter to over 12 species of birds, small mammals, reptiles, and an array of insects.

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