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STUDY NOTES

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Science

CHAPTER: 7 Biodiversity and conservation of Flora and Fauna

Today's Topic: National park and Biosphere reserves

India has thirty-seven tiger reserves, which are governed by Project Tiger, a government driven initiative to protect tigers in the country. The objective of this project was to ensure the survival and maintenance of the tiger population in the country. As a large predator, the tiger is at the top of the food chain and plays a key role in maintaining a healthy ecosystem. The ecosystem supplies the environment and people with fresh water, food and several other vital services. Hence, saving the tiger would indirectly mean helping people.

The Royal Bengal tiger, hunted for its body parts, is an endangered species today. In addition, extensive deforestation and encroachment of forest land by people has resulted in the loss in the habitat of tigers. At the turn of the century, there were almost 40,000 tigers in India and by 1972 the number had dropped to 1,827. Sadly, according to the latest count, only 1,411 tigers

remain in the wild in India today. This has been mainly due to illegal poaching even within the tiger reserves.

Biosphere reserves:

The biosphere reserves often include one or more national parks as well as wildlife sanctuaries and help to maintain the biodiversity and culture of people living in those areas.

The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve in the Nilgiri Hill ranges of south India is home to over 100 species of mammals, 350 species of birds, 80 species of reptiles, 39 species of fish, 31 amphibians, 60 species of reptiles, 316 species of butterflies and innumerable invertebrates. Rare animals including tiger, Asian elephant and the Nilgiri tahr are found here.

The flora of this reserve includes 3,300 species of plant of which 1,232 are endemic. They include many medicinal plants and orchids. The Nilgiri tahr is found only here and is endemic to this region.

Tiger reserve: an area especially earmarked to protect the tiger by keeping it free of all human activities.

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