Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: About the recent status of elephant conservation in India; Elephants reserves in India; Efforts and challenges in their conservation

News: For the first time, Bandhavgarh reserve forest in Madhya Pradesh has a colony of elephants – the same herd of about 40 animals that arrived at the sanctuary around this time last year, and has stayed on.

What’s unique about it?

- This, experts say, is an unusual occurrence in Bandhavgarh, which has, over the years, played host to herds of elephants that arrive to graze and forage and subsequently travel back to neighbouring Chhattisgarh.
- Elephant experts now say the development is a sign not only of a rise in elephant numbers in the country, and the fact that they are travelling, but also that they can thrive at a place given the right conditions.

Why Bandhavgarh is an ideal place for elephants to thrive

- Bandhavgarh is a large reserve forest – they have plenty of food and water here, and may be this is why they stayed on.
- While the reserve has received no new funds for the elephants, certain measures have been taken, such as:

  1. Elephant experts and wildlife officials from West Bengal and Chattisgarh have come to train the staff.
  2. Patrolling teams have been deputed to monitor the elephants round the clock
  3. Conducting awareness and sensitisation campaigns in surrounding villages so that the locals are aware in order to prevent man-elephant conflict, if there arises any.

Measure taken by Union govt.
In October this year, the Union Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted a technical committee to develop a National Elephant Action Plan.

**Significance**

- It is now obvious that if given a healthy habitat, elephants will stay put at a place. This is something that needs to be replicated in Chhattisgarh and other elephant areas.
- Migrating elephants is now a country-wide trend, with the animals moving from South India to North India, and from the country’s east towards the west. The source population is increasing, so the animals are migrating.  
Tiger and elephant ranges in the country are also expanding.

**Elephants in Chhattisgarh**

- Within Chhattisgarh, elephants keep travelling from one place to another, before being hounded out by villagers who are trying to save their crops. Although there is extensive forest cover, it is often patchy and elephants in Chhattisgarh rely on crops a lot, so the human-elephant conflict here becomes inevitable.
- Surguja, in north Chhattisgarh, not far from the MP boundary, there were elephants in that area earlier. There are records of this, and even records of elephants being either hunted or captured and presented to Mughal emperors from Surguja. But in the 1920s, they disappeared entirely for unknown reasons. Then they reappeared in the late-1990s and early-2000s.
- Today, there are 250 elephants in north Chhattisgarh that have mostly come from Odisha and Jharkhand.

**Elephants in India**