

India's tiger population 'on the rise'

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India's tiger population has increased for the first time in decades, according a newspaper report which cited a national tiger census report slated to be released next week.

India's tiger population has increased for the first time in decades, a newspaper said on Saturday, citing a national tiger census report slated to be released next week.

According to the 2009-10 tiger census report, the number roaming India has jumped to 1,510-1,550 from 1,411 in 2004-05, The Indian Express newspaper said.

The newspaper report came ahead of an international tiger conservation conference due to open on Monday in the Indian capital New Delhi.

India is home to more than half of the world's rapidly dwindling wild

[tiger population](#), but its conservation programme, said by the government to be the world's most comprehensive, has been struggling to halt the big cat's decline.

Tiger conservationists welcomed the news and said that the population increase was due to the authorities surveying more areas to conduct the census and creating more tiger reserves.

Tito Joseph, programme director at the Wildlife Protection Society of India, said "the latest census included some of the areas they left out last time because of problems accessing the terrain, like the Sunderbans" which is home to hundreds of tigers.

The Sunderbans mangrove forest straddles the borders of India's West Bengal state and Bangladesh and lies on the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta.

"They have also set up more tiger reserves. In 2004 there were only 28-33 tiger reserves, now there are 39 reserves, so that's obviously helped," Joseph told AFP.

"It's a good strategy, because tigers need space above all, and if you can create inviolate space their numbers will naturally go up," he said.

The current tiger population still remains a long way off the numbers registered in 2002 when some 3,700 tigers were estimated to be alive in the country.

There were estimated to be around 40,000 tigers in India at the time of independence from Britain in 1947.

Authorities across Asia are waging a major battle against poachers and other man-made problems such as destruction of the tigers' habitat due to industrial expansion.

A major poacher trafficking route begins in India and ends in China where tiger parts are highly prized as purported cures for a range of ailments and as aphrodisiacs.

"Tiger skins fetch anywhere around 11,000-21,000 US dollars and bones are sold for about 1,000 US dollars in China," said Rajesh Gopal, chairman of National [Tiger Conservation](#) Authority in New Delhi.

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