

India plans more tiger reserves as big cat numbers jump

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New tiger reserves will be set up in existing national parks in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Orissa states

India is planning more tiger reserves across the country, bolstered by a recent survey that shows the big cats' numbers are growing, an official said Wednesday.

Environment minister Prakash Javadekar announced in parliament on

Tuesday that three more reserves have been approved in central and eastern India, taking the total number to 50.

The reserves will be set up in existing national parks in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Orissa states where villagers will no longer be allowed to live or work, while buffer zones will be established around them.

"We will be adding three more reserves taking the number to 50," H.S Negi, inspector general of the government's national tiger conservation authority, told AFP.

"Reserves have proved to play an important role in the conservation of tigers," he said.

India currently has 39,000 square kilometres (15,000 square miles) under [tiger reserves](#) across 18 states. Another 30,000 square kilometres are designated as [buffer zones](#), where villagers are allowed to live.

India announced in January that 2,226 tigers had been counted across the country, a 30 percent increase in the population from 2010, when the figure was 1,706.

At the beginning of the 20th century, India was home to an estimated 100,000 tigers but widespread hunting reduced the numbers to 1,411 in 2006.

India faces intense international scrutiny over its conservation efforts because it is home to more than half of the world's [tiger population](#).

Authorities across Asia are waging a major battle against poachers, who often sell tiger body parts to the lucrative traditional Chinese medicine market, as well as other man-made problems such as habitat loss.

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