

Important Vocab For the Editorial

1. **burning bright** (phrase) – someone's escape to the countryside after the annihilation/elimination of a place.
2. **peer review** (noun) – the evaluation of creative work or performance by other people in the same field in order to maintain or enhance the quality of the work or performance in that field.
3. **put behind** (phrasal verb) – to stop focusing on something.
4. **fiasco** (noun) – failure, mess/disaster, catastrophe.
5. **wipeout** (noun) – a complete/total destruction, elimination, extinction.
6. **add to** (phrase) – increase, enhance, boost.
7. **conservation** (noun) – preservation, protection, restoration.
8. **marvel** (noun) – wonder, amazing/wonderful thing, miracle.
9. **populous** (adjective) – densely populated.
10. **heritage** (noun) – tradition, inheritance, bequest.
11. **amid** (preposition) – in the middle of, surrounded by; during.
12. **fast-paced** (adjective) – developing very quickly.
13. **assessment** (noun) – opinion, analysis, evaluation.
14. **assert** (verb) – declare, state, claim.
15. **abundance** (noun) – the quantity of something.
16. **ground** (noun) – reason, factor/cause, basis.
17. **rigorous** (adjective) – meticulous, careful, thorough.
18. **scrutiny** (noun) – observation, inspection, examination.
19. **aid** (verb) – help, assist, support.
20. **staggering** (adjective) – astonishing, amazing, surprising.
21. **revive** (verb) – regenerate, resuscitate, revitalize.
22. **charismatic** (adjective) – strong in character, captivating, fascinating.
23. **landscape** (noun) – countryside, land/terrain, environment.
24. **marked** (adjective) – noticeable, significant, substantial.
25. **imperative** (adjective) – necessary/essential, crucial, critical.
26. **species** (noun) – a group/breed/family of living organisms (animals & plants) with the individual having the same quality & can breed.
27. **habitat** (noun) – (natural) environment/territory, home.
28. **open up** (phrasal verb) – make available (to create/start developing new opportunities).
29. **carnivore** (noun) – an animal that gets food from killing and eating other animals.
30. **prey animal** (noun) – the term prey refers to an animal that is sought, captured, and eaten by a predator. A predator is an animal that hunts and kills other animals for food.

Burning bright: on India's tiger census

Peer review and scientific publication can make India's tiger census a global model

If India has increased its population of tigers to an **estimated 2,967 individuals in 2018-19**, putting behind fiascos such as the Sariska wipeout 15 years ago, it adds to its global

standing as a conservation marvel: a populous country that has preserved a lot of its natural heritage even amid fast-paced economic growth. Since the majority of the world's wild tigers live in India, there is global attention on the counting exercise and the gaps the assessment exposes. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has asserted in its report, 'Status of Tigers in India 2018', that 83% of the big cats censused were individually photographed using camera traps, 87% were confirmed through a camera trap-based capture-recapture technique, and other estimation methods were used to establish the total number. Previous estimates for periods between 2006 and 2010 and then up to 2014 indicated a steady increase in tiger abundance. Such numbers, however, are the subject of debate among sections of the scientific community, mainly on methodological grounds, since independent studies of even well-protected reserves showed a lower increase. It is important to put all the latest data, which are no doubt encouraging, through rigorous peer review. Conservation achievements — and some failures — can then be the subject of scientific scrutiny and find a place in scientific literature to aid efforts to save tigers.

There are several aspects to the latest counting operation — a staggering exercise spread over 3,81,400 sq km and 26,838 camera trap locations — that are of international interest, because some tiger range countries are beginning their own census of the cats. Moreover, even developed countries are trying to revive populations of charismatic wild creatures such as wolves and bears through a more accurate outcome measurement. For India's tigers, not every landscape is welcoming, as the official report makes clear. The less accessible Western Ghats has witnessed a steady increase in numbers from 2006, notably in Karnataka, and Central India has an abundance, but there is a marked drop in Chhattisgarh and Odisha; in Buxa, Dampa and Palamau, which are tiger reserves, no trace of the animal was found. It is imperative for the NTCA to analyse why some landscapes have lost tigers, when the entire programme has been receiving high priority and funding for years now at ₹ 10 lakh per family that is ready to move out of critical habitat. Ultimately, saving tigers depends most on the health of source populations of the species that are estimated to occupy a mere 10% of

the habitat. The conflict in opening up reserves to road-building has to end, and identified movement corridors should be cleared of commercial pressures. Hunting of prey animals, such as deer and pig, needs to stop as they form the base for growth of tiger and other carnivore populations. As some scientists caution, faulty numbers may hide the real story. They may only represent a 'political population' of a favoured animal, not quite reflective of reality.