

India's First National Park

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Efforts to develop India's first national park began as early as 1879 after forest areas of the Himalayan foothills were declared "reserved" under the Forests Act of 1878.

It was on the advice of British hunter Jim Corbett, who later became a well-known conservationist, that the British government named the reserved forests of the United Province (now Uttar Pradesh) Hailey National Park in 1936. The park was named after the then Uttar Pradesh governor, Sir Malcolm Hailey.

In 1952, the park was renamed Ramganga National Park, after the Ramganga River that flows through most of it. Five years later, it was renamed once again, as Jim Corbett National Park, and is today one of India's most successful tiger reserves.

Spread over 520 square kilometers in the foothills of the Himalayas, the park now lies in Uttarakhand state. Essentially

following the first all-India tiger census in 1972. That survey revealed that the number of tigers had dwindled to a shocking 1,827 from an estimated 40,000 at the turn of the century.

A national ban on tiger hunting was imposed and Corbett was chosen as the venue for the inauguration of the project. India has also, time and again, sought help from other countries, including the United States, in wildlife conservation.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (<http://www.fws.gov/>) funded two significant management-oriented research projects at Corbett in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India based in Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

The first was a research project on relationships among large herbivores, habitat and humans in Corbett and Rajaji National Park, also in Uttarakhand. The 1995-2000 project tracked the vegetation, migration patterns, biotic pressures, man-animal conflict and poaching in the connecting forest corridors between Rajaji and Corbett.

development of signs, displays, interpretive aids and upgrading of the interpretive skills of the park management staff. It also supported streamlining visitor management and sensitizing the local community on conservation issues.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supported and facilitated exchange programs between scientists of the two countries and funded the research and infrastructural components of the two projects to the tune of \$275,000 through Public Law 480 (P.L. 480).

Also known as the Food for Peace Program, P.L. 480 used abundant U.S. agriculture resources to strengthen food security in developing countries. Later, Indian rupees owed to the United States for grain sales were used to fund a variety of wildlife, scientific, technological and educational projects.

Another project that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supported from its Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund was a grant of \$17,594 to the Wildlife Society of India for a study on the tiger-human conflict in the buffer zone of Corbett Tiger Reserve.

The last Tiger Census in 2001-2002 said India had 3,642 tigers.

According to preliminary results from the latest census conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India over the last two years, the Indian government revealed in May this year that despite plunging figures in several reserves, trends from Corbett have offered comfort.

Initial reports have pegged the tiger population at Corbett at a healthy 112 and conservationists say the reserve, along with Kanha in Madhya Pradesh, are the only two major viable "tiger countries" in India.

As for Corbett, it's still very much in the tourist spotlight, with a burdensome 70,000 plus visitors trying to catch a glimpse of the elusive big cat every year.

There are 96 national parks in India. Nine each are in Madhya Pradesh and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

famous as "tiger territory," Corbett also boasts an impressive list of animals and birds including wild elephants, varieties of deer, sloth bear, gharial, leopards, wagtails, storks and great white herons.

The year 1973 was a landmark, not just for the park but also for tiger conservation in India. Project Tiger—an ambitious program aimed at conserving the species—was launched

The outcome of the study has helped in the management of the tiger and elephant population, finding alternate rehabilitation for the dependent human population in the vicinity and setting in place benchmark ecologically important information for future research studies.

The second U.S.-India collaboration was the setting up of an interpretation center in Corbett and in Panna National Park in Madhya Pradesh. The 2000-2005 project invested in

Jim Corbett National Park

