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Jim Corbett National Park

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Jim Corbett National Park

A hunting ground became a national park, and then a tiger nursery.

That is the short story of Corbett. It is also the story of how India began to protect its tigers.

This lesson follows the park from its start in 1936 to its tiger count and its newest rules.



A Bengal tiger in Jim Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Where is Corbett and how big is it?

Where does Corbett lie?

Corbett sits in the foothills of the Outer Himalaya and the Shivaliks. Its headquarters are at **Ramnagar**, in Nainital district.

The land rises from about 400 m to 1,210 m above sea level.

The **Ramganga** river drains the area. It is a tributary of the Ganga and flows from east to west.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in; keybiodiversityareas.org



Nainital district, Uttarakhand, home to Jim Corbett National Park. Map: Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

How big is the park and the reserve?

The park itself is the **core area**. It covers 520.82 sq km.

A **buffer** of 797.72 sq km surrounds it. Together they make the tiger reserve, at 1,318.54 sq km.

The buffer came in 1991. It holds reserve forests and the Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in

Quick check 1. The 520.82 sq km core area is the national park. The buffer around it was added in 1991. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How did Corbett become India's first national park?

Who started it, and when?

It became India's first national park on **8 August 1936**. At first it was called **Hailey National Park**.

It was named after Sir Malcolm Hailey. He was then governor of the United Provinces.

So the colonial governor gave the park its first name, not the man it is named after today.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in

How many names has the park had?

The park has had three names. It began as Hailey National Park.

After Independence it was renamed **Ramganga National Park**.

It then became **Corbett National Park**, in memory of Jim Corbett. One source dates that change to 1957.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in; keybiodiversityareas.org

Who was Jim Corbett?

Jim Corbett was a hunter who became a conservationist. He helped decide where the park's boundaries would run.

So the park carries his name for more than one reason. He knew the forest and he helped draw its edges.

He was not the administrator who founded it. That was Hailey's role.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in; keybiodiversityareas.org

Quick check 2. Corbett National Park has been known by three different names. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 3. The man the park is named after founded it in 1936. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Why is Corbett the home of Project Tiger?

What happened here in 1973?

Project Tiger was launched from Corbett in 1973. It was India's plan to save the tiger and its habitat.

Corbett was one of the nine tiger reserves created at the launch.

That is why exam questions often call it India's first tiger reserve.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in; keybiodiversityareas.org

How many tigers does Corbett hold?

The 2022 All India Tiger Estimation counted **260 tigers** within the Corbett Tiger Reserve. That was the highest of any reserve.

Bandipur came next with 150, and Nagarhole had 141.

One analysis of the same census gave the park alone about 231 tigers. The two figures count different areas.

Sources: insightsonindia.com; downtoearth.org.in

Is Corbett crowded with tigers?

A 1997 report says the park is "reputed" to have the highest density of tigers in the world.

Officials now link the relocation programme to this crowding. They want a better spread of tigers.

That programme is described below.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in

> **Quick check 4.** In the 2022 estimate, Corbett held more tigers than any other reserve in India. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What did the Ramganga dam do?

The Ramganga was dammed at Kalagarh in 1974. This was at the south-western end of the reserve.

The reservoir drowned about 40 sq km of rich grassland.

The land on the western side of the lake is now the **Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary**.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in

What kind of forest and wildlife does Corbett have?

What trees grow in Corbett?

Sal trees cover more than 75% of the reserve. Some stands are almost pure sal.

The reserve has up to 110 kinds of trees, 51 kinds of shrubs and over 33 kinds of bamboo and grasses.

The weed **lantana** has spread across many parts of the forest. It is a major nuisance.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in; keybiodiversityareas.org

Why do the grasslands matter?

The open grasslands are called **chaurs**. They are covered with tall grasses.

Such grasslands are vital for animals like the hog deer.

Staff carry out controlled burning during winter.

Sources: keybiodiversityareas.org

Which animals live in Corbett?

A 1997 survey listed 582 bird species and 50 mammal species. It also listed 26 reptile species and 7 amphibians.

The reserve is rich in raptors. Of 69 diurnal raptor species in the subcontinent, 51 occur here.

The survey also noted leopards, elephants, sambar, chital and gharial.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in; keybiodiversityareas.org

> **Quick check 5.** Sal is the dominant tree in Corbett, covering more than 75% of the reserve. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What is new at Corbett?

Why are phones banned on safari?

In November 2025 the Supreme Court restricted mobile phones in the core tourism zones of tiger reserves.

In January 2026 Corbett announced it would enforce the ban. Visitors must deposit their phones at the entrance gate.

Cameras such as DSLRs are still allowed.

Sources: etvbharat.com; openthemagazine.com

Why were tigers moved to Rajaji?

The **Tiger Reinstatement Project** began in 2020. It followed a sharp fall in tiger numbers in Rajaji National Park.

The first phase moved two male and three female tigers to Rajaji's eastern zone.

The fifth and last tiger, a five-year-old male, left in late April 2025. It came from the Sanwalde area of the Bijrani range.

Sources: etvbharat.com

What comes next?

In September 2026 officials said the NTCA had cleared a second phase of the programme.

Five more tigers will move, taking the total to ten.

Each animal gets a radio collar and a **soft release**. That means it is kept in a controlled enclosure first, then allowed into the wider forest.

The second phase will release tigers in Rajaji's western zone.

Sources: etvbharat.com

> **Quick check 6.** In 2026 mobile phones were still allowed on Corbett safaris, but cameras were banned. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What should you remember for the exam?

Which tiger reserve lies furthest north?

A past UPSC question asked for the north-to-south order of Corbett, Sariska, Simlipal and Periyar.

The answer is **Corbett, Sariska, Simlipal, Periyar**. Their latitudes are about 29.6° N, 27.4° N, 21.9° N and 9.4° N.

Corbett is in Uttarakhand, Sariska in Rajasthan, Simlipal in Odisha and Periyar in Kerala.

Sources: keybiodiversityareas.org

Corbett	About 29.6° N
Sariska	About 27.4° N
Simlipal	About 21.9° N
Periyar	About 9.4° N

What are the key pointers?

Corbett became India’s first national park on 8 August 1936, as Hailey National Park.

It was renamed Ramganga, and then Corbett. Project Tiger began there in 1973.

The 2022 estimate gave it 260 tigers, the most of any reserve. The core area is 520.82 sq km.

Phones are banned on safari. A second tiger relocation phase to Rajaji was cleared in 2026.

Sources: ncra.tifr.res.in

Practice MCQ

Practice MCQs

1. In which year was India's first national park (then called Hailey National Park) established?

A. 1926

B. 1974

C. 1936

D. 1950

See answer ↓

2. On what date was Project Tiger launched at Corbett National Park, making it India's first tiger reserve?

A. 26 January 1972

B. 1 April 1973

C. 15 August 1974

D. 2 October 1975

See answer ↓

3. Corbett National Park is named after Jim Corbett, who was best known for which of these?

A. The Governor of the United Provinces who founded the park

B. A hunter of man-eating tigers and leopards who became a conservationist and author

C. The first Director of Project Tiger

D. A colonial forest administrator who never visited the park

See answer ↓

4. The May 2025 tiger relocation from Corbett to Rajaji's western zone was driven mainly by which factor, and approved by which body in 2016?

A. Corbett's high tiger density and a shortage of tigers in western Rajaji, approved by the NTCA

B. A tiger disease outbreak at Corbett, approved by the Uttarakhand High Court

C. Corbett's low tiger density needing reinforcement from Rajaji, approved by the NTCA

D. A Supreme Court order on habitat carrying capacity, approved by UNESCO

See answer ↓

5. According to the 2022 All India Tiger Estimation, how many tigers did Corbett hold, the highest of any reserve in India?

A. 180

B. 310

C. 220

D. 260

See answer ↓

6. What was the original name of Jim Corbett National Park when it was set up in 1936?

A. Ramganga National Park

B. Hailey National Park

C. Kanha National Park

D. Periyar National Park

See answer ↓

7. Which of these tiger reserves lies furthest north?

A. Simlipal

B. Sariska

C. Corbett

D. Periyar

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.**
   Corbett became India's first national park on 8 August 1936. It was first called Hailey National Park, after Sir Malcolm Hailey.
   Sources: Corbett Tiger Reserve Report 1997: basic information · KBA: Corbett factsheet.
   ↑ Q1
2. **B.**
   Project Tiger was launched from Corbett in 1973. Corbett was one of the nine tiger reserves created at the launch. The date in the options, 1 April 1973, is the date commonly given for the launch.
   Sources: Corbett Tiger Reserve Report 1997: basic information · KBA: Corbett factsheet.
   ↑ Q2
3. **B.**
   Jim Corbett was a hunter who became a conservationist, and he helped draw the park's boundaries. He did not found it. Sir Malcolm Hailey did, as governor, in 1936.
   Sources: KBA: Corbett factsheet · Corbett Tiger Reserve Report 1997: basic information.
   ↑ Q3
4. **A.**
   Tigers were moved from Corbett to Rajaji under a programme that began in 2020. The first phase sent five tigers to Rajaji's western zone. The NTCA has since cleared a second phase of the same programme.
   Sources: ETV Bharat: fifth and last tiger shifted to Rajaji · ETV Bharat: second phase of Corbett-Rajaji translocation.
   ↑ Q4
5. **D.**
   The 2022 All India Tiger Estimation counted 260 tigers within the Corbett Tiger Reserve. That was the highest of any reserve. Bandipur was next with 150.
   Sources: Insights on India: All India Tiger Estimation 2022 · Down To Earth: India's uneven tiger tale.
   ↑ Q5

6. **B.**
   The park began as Hailey National Park, after Sir Malcolm Hailey. It was later renamed Ramganga and then Corbett.
   Sources: Corbett Report 1994: history · Corbett Tiger Reserve Report 1997: basic information.
   ↑ Q6
7. **C.**
   Corbett lies at about 29.6° N. Sariska is at about 27.4° N, Simlipal about 21.9° N and Periyar about 9.4° N.
   Sources: KBA: Corbett factsheet · KBA: Sariska.
   ↑ Q7

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** The core area is the park. The buffer of 797.72 sq km was added in 1991. ↑ 1
2. **True.** It was Hailey National Park, then Ramganga National Park, then Corbett National Park. ↑ 2
3. **False.** Sir Malcolm Hailey was governor when the park began in 1936. Corbett helped draw its boundaries. ↑ 3
4. **True.** Corbett had 260 tigers within the reserve. Bandipur was next with 150. ↑ 4
5. **True.** A survey records sal over 75% of the area, with almost pure stands in places. ↑ 5
6. **False.** It is the other way round. Phones go in lockers at the gate, but cameras such as DSLRs are allowed. ↑ 6

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