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The Nallamala Hills: Home to India’s Largest Tiger Reserve

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The Nallamala Hills: Home to India’s Largest Tiger Reserve

India’s largest tiger reserve is not Ranthambore or Corbett. It sits in a lesser-known range called the Nallamala Hills.

This lesson covers where the hills are, what the reserve holds, and who lives inside it. It also covers the exam facts that students mix up. Each fact comes from the National Tiger Conservation Authority or the Wildlife Institute of India.

Where are the Nallamala Hills, and what reserve do they hold?

Which range are the Nallamala Hills part of?

The Wildlife Institute of India says the reserve lies in the Nallamala Hills. It calls the hills an **offshoot of the Eastern Ghats**.

The tiger reserve is the Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve, or NSTR. It lies mainly in Andhra Pradesh.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in; ntca.gov.in



> **Quick check 1.** The Nallamala Hills are an offshoot of the Eastern Ghats. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How big is NSTR?

The WII gives the area as **3,728 sq km**, spread over five revenue districts. It calls NSTR the largest tiger reserve in India by size.

An older NTCA brief note gives a larger total of 5,937 sq km. Use 3,728 sq km, the figure in the WII evaluation.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in; ntca.gov.in

How is the area split?

The WII puts the **Critical Tiger Habitat** at 2,444.14 sq km. The buffer area is 1,283.36 sq km.

The Critical Tiger Habitat is the core, kept for tigers. The buffer is a surrounding zone where people and wildlife share the land.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

Quick check 2. NSTR is the largest tiger reserve in India by area. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Core / Critical Tiger Habitat	2,444.14
Buffer	1,283.36
Total	3,728

What is the habitat like, and what lives there?

What is the terrain?

The land has plateaus, ridges, gorges and deep valleys. The forest is **tropical dry deciduous**, with an undergrowth of bamboo and grass.

The NTCA names the forest type as Southern tropical dry deciduous miscellaneous. It splits into teak, miscellaneous and Anogeissus types.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in; ntca.gov.in

Which plants are special?

The NTCA lists endemic plants such as **Andrographis nallamalayana**, Eriolaena lushingtonii and Premna hamiltonii. Endemic means found only in one region.

It records 1,581 plant taxa in 149 families in the Nallamalai. It also lists 29 grass species and 353 medicinal plants.

Sources: ntca.gov.in

Quick check 3. Andrographis nallamalayana is listed as an endemic plant of the Nallamala forests. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Which animals live here?

The NTCA note lists over 80 mammal species and 303 bird species. Top predators are the tiger, leopard, wolf, wild dog and jackal.

Prey animals include sambar, chital, chowsingha, chinkara, mouse deer and wild boar. The Krishna holds mugger crocodiles, otters and turtles.

The same note gave a 2010 tiger estimate of 53 to 67 for the reserve.

Sources: ntca.gov.in

What role does the Krishna River play?

The Krishna is the **perennial water source**. Many streams inside the reserve join it. Wells and ponds also hold water for animals.

The river is dammed at Srisailam and Nagarjunasagar. The WII says these reservoirs lie within the boundaries of the core.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

> **Quick check 4.** The Krishna River is the perennial water source of NSTR. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Who lives inside, and how is the reserve linked to others?

Do people live inside the core?

Yes. The WII evaluation found **16 villages** with about 3,285 people in the core area. Another 69 villages lie in the buffer.

Most core villages are small Chenchu hamlets called **gudems**. Villagers rely on the forest for fuel, fodder and grazing.

Newer news reports quote different family counts. Those figures are not used here.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

Which reserves is NSTR joined to?

NSTR touches the Amrabad Tiger Reserve of Telangana to the north. To the south it links to the Sri Venkateswara National Park near Tirupati.

The WII says these links make it an important tiger-movement landscape. It also notes a link to the Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve through forest patches.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

How long is the southern corridor?

The NTCA note describes a corridor from Sri Venkateswara National Park to Gundlabrahmeswaram sanctuary. It is about **350 km** long. Its area is 2,018.35 sq km.

The note calls this corridor fragmented and disturbed, so it needs recovery work. It also says the Seshachalam hills were declared a Biosphere Reserve in 2011.

Sources: ntca.gov.in

> **Quick check 5.** The WII says NSTR is contiguous with the Amrabad Tiger Reserve. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What pressures does the reserve face, and what is done about them?

How do pilgrims affect the reserve?

Famous temples lie inside the core. They include the Srisaila Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple and the Akkamahadevi Temple. The WII says **2 to 3 lakh pilgrims** come from Karnataka and Maharashtra at Mahasivarathri and Ugadi.

They add vehicle pressure, litter and fire risk. The WII calls controlling the pilgrimage a challenge.

The Dornala-Srisailam highway also passes through the core, which threatens wildlife and habitat.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

> **Quick check 6.** The WII says a highway passes through the core of NSTR. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Why is fishing a concern?

Dams at Srisailam and Nagarjunasagar form large reservoirs inside the core. Illegal fishing in their backwaters is a major concern, says the WII.

Around **1,000 families** depend on fishing in the Krishna within NSTR. Joint patrols by NSTR and Amrabad keep it under control.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

What is the bamboo problem?

Large clumps of **Bambusa arundinacea** stand in the central part of the reserve. The WII calls them a unique ecosystem of the Nallamala Hills.

Clump improvement is not being done. Many clumps are dying from congestion, which raises fire risk.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

How do cattle affect wild animals?

Thousands of cattle owned by tribal families wander the forests for fodder. This leaves less fodder for wild herbivores.

Every base camp keeps a register of cattle movement. Regular immunisation programmes are planned.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

> **Quick check 7.** The WII links cattle grazing to a fodder shortage for wild animals. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How is the reserve managed?

One Field Director has unified control of core and buffer. The Tiger Conservation Plan for 2013-14 to 2022-23 was approved by the NTCA in October 2014.

The WII notes the plan was expiring and a new one was needed. The average beat size of 30 sq km is large. The WII suggests 10 to 20 sq km.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

What else does the WII praise?

It praises the Srisailam research lab, which holds museum specimens from plankton to mammals. It also praises the bio-park at Srisailam and an album of identified tigers.

The core is largely the Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, at 36.62% of the core, says the NTCA.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in; ntca.gov.in

Which exam facts do students mix up?

What good practices are noted?

The NTCA lists smart patrolling with the **M-STrIPES** protocol and a camera-trap photo database of tigers. It also lists 60 base camps and the involvement of Chenchu tribes in protection.

The WII adds unified control of the core and buffer under one Field Director.

Sources: ntca.gov.in; mee-tr.wii.gov.in

Which pilgrim place belongs to the Nallamala Hills?

Srisailam, a major Shiva pilgrimage centre, sits in the Nallamala Hills. A past UPSC question tested three pairs of pilgrim place and hill range. Only the Srisailam pair was correct.

Omkareshwar is not in the Satmala Hills. It lies on a Narmada river island. Pushkar is not in the Mahadeo Hills. It lies in the Aravalli range of Rajasthan.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

Which reserve has the largest Critical Tiger Habitat?

A past UPSC question asked which of Manas, Pakke, Nagarjunasagar Srisailam and Periyar has the largest core. The answer is **Nagarjunasagar Srisailam**.

The WII gives its core as 2,444.14 sq km. Learn the ranking, not a single number, because older notes give different figures.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in; ntca.gov.in

What should you remember?

Keep five anchors. The hills are a spur of the Eastern Ghats. NSTR covers 3,728 sq km across five districts.

The core is 2,444.14 sq km and the buffer is 1,283.36 sq km. The Krishna is the perennial river. Chenchu hamlets called gudems sit in the core.

Write each number with its meaning. A bare number is easy to forget.

Sources: mee-tr.wii.gov.in

> **Quick check 8.** Omkareshwar lies in the Nallamala Hills. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Practice MCQs

1. The Nallamala Hills are part of which larger mountain system?

A. The Western Ghats

B. The Aravalli Range

C. The Eastern Ghats

D. The Vindhya Range

See answer ↓

2. Which tiger reserve located in the Nallamala Hills is India's single largest by area?

A. Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve

B. Jim Corbett Tiger Reserve

C. Bandipur Tiger Reserve

D. Ranthambore Tiger Reserve

See answer ↓

3. Approximately how large is the Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve?

A. 8,000 sq km

B. 500 sq km

C. 3,728 sq km

D. 1,500 sq km

See answer ↓

4. Which river flows through the Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve for about 270 km?

A. The Godavari

B. The Krishna

C. The Cauvery

D. The Tungabhadra

See answer ↓

5. What type of forest dominates the Nallamala Hills, with an undergrowth of bamboo and grass?

A. Tropical dry deciduous forest

B. Mangrove forest

C. Tropical evergreen forest

D. Montane temperate forest

See answer ↓

6. Telangana was formed in 2014.

Which state's tiger reserve list now carries Nagarjunsagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve? (Amrabad is a separate Telangana reserve.)

A. Telangana

B. Karnataka

C. Andhra Pradesh

D. Tamil Nadu

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** The Nallamala hills are an offshoot of the Eastern Ghats. The reserve's website and the authority's brief note both say so. ↑ Q1
2. **A.** The Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve (NSTR) is India's largest tiger reserve by area. NTCA lists it at about 3,296.31 square kilometres, made of 2,595.72 core and 700.59 buffer. Older sources give 3,728, which is a different, earlier boundary. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** NSTR covers about 3,728 square kilometres, making it India's largest tiger reserve. ↑ Q3
4. **B.** The Krishna flows through the reserve for about 270 kilometres, says the reserve's website. The tiger report of 2022 says 130 kilometres run through the critical habitat. ↑ Q4
5. **A.** The Wildlife Institute of India and the NTCA brief note describe tropical dry deciduous forest with bamboo and grass below. Of the options, tropical dry deciduous fits best. ↑ Q5
6. **C.** Nagarjunsagar-Srisailam is the Andhra Pradesh reserve. Telangana notified its part as Amrabad Tiger Reserve in 2015. Amrabad is a separate reserve. ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** Both the WII and NTCA describe them that way. ↑ 1
2. **True.** The WII evaluation calls it the largest, at 3,728 sq km. ↑ 2
3. **True.** The NTCA brief note lists it among the endemic species. ↑ 3
4. **True.** The WII evaluation names the Krishna as the perennial source. ↑ 4
5. **True.** The evaluation says NSTR is contiguous with Amrabad TR in the north. ↑ 5
6. **True.** The Dornala-Srisailam highway passes through the core. ↑ 6
7. **True.** It says cattle wandering in the forests leave less fodder for wild animals. ↑ 7
8. **False.** Srisailam is the pilgrim place in the Nallamala Hills. Omkareshwar is on a Narmada river island. ↑ 8

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