

# JOINT COUNT OF ELEPHANT AND BIG CATS

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According to the last count in 2017, there are 29,964 elephants in India.

The Union government will for the first time this year present a unified count of the tiger, leopard and elephant populations of the country, according to officials in the Union Environment Ministry.

The tiger survey is usually held once in four years and elephants are counted once in five years. According to the most recent 2018-19 survey, there are 2,967 tigers in India. According to the last count in 2017, there are 29,964 elephants.

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav, on August 12, 2021 made public the population estimation protocol to be adopted in the all-India elephant and tiger population survey in 2022.

Elephant numbers would be estimated by States based on DNA analysis of their dung droppings and statistical techniques.

Tigers are counted by deploying camera traps, identifying individuals based on stripes, as well as statistical analysis.

## Obsolete methods

Tiger scat and its DNA analysis is usually used only when camera traps are impractical to deploy say, in difficult terrain, said Y. Jhala, wildlife scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, and an expert on wildcat surveys. Because elephants number more than tigers and are hard to tell apart from camera-trap images alone, it is more economical and feasible to use their dung for identification.

The 'head count' method, or one currently deployed to count elephants, was "obsolete" and frequently led to double-counting, he added.

"Resources, time and energy will be saved from having a common estimate. This is the first time that a robust scientific method based on statistical techniques will be implemented," said S.P. Yadav, Director of the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

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