3 Nov – International Day for Biosphere Reserves: India has 18, 13 in UNESCO's network; 797 in 145 countries worldwide

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News

The International Day for Biosphere Reserves is observed every 3 November to highlight the role of biosphere reserves under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme. The UNESCO General Conference proclaimed it at its 41st session (2021); it was first observed in 2022. With 14 new reserves in 14 countries added on 5 June 2026 (World Environment Day), the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) now has 797 sites in 145 countries. India has 18 national biosphere reserves, 13 of them in the WNBR. The latest is Himachal Pradesh's 'Cold Desert' (27 Sep 2025).

Key facts

Day	3 Nov – UNESCO General Conference, 41st session (2021); first observed 2022
MAB	Intergovernmental scientific programme launched by UNESCO in 1971
World network	797 sites, 145 countries (June 2026); first-timers in 2026 – Montenegro, Timor-Leste, Aruba
India	18 national reserves (first – Nilgiri, 1986); 13 in WNBR
Cold Desert	Himachal (Lahaul–Spiti); 7,770 sq km; 3,300–6,600 m; Pin Valley NP, Kibber WLS, Chandratal, Sarchu; snow leopard

Largest	Great Rann of Kutch (Gujarat, 12,454 sq km) – India's largest reserve

Background

- Zoning of a biosphere reserve: (1) core – legally protected, no human interference; (2) buffer – compatible uses such as research and education; (3) transition – settlements, farming and sustainable economic activity. Its three functions are conservation, development and logistic support (research and education).
- History: the 2nd World Congress at Seville, Spain, in 1995 adopted the 'Seville Strategy' and the 'Statutory Framework of the WNBR'. Then came the Madrid Action Plan (2008–2013) and the Lima Action Plan (2016–2025). The 5th World Congress at Hangzhou, China, in Sep 2025 adopted the 'Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan 2026–2035'. Sites are designated by the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB-ICC) and stay under national sovereignty.
- India's 13 WNBR sites (UNESCO year): Nilgiri (2000), Gulf of Mannar, Sundarbans (2001), Nanda Devi (2004), Nokrek, Pachmarhi, Similipal (2009), Achanakmar–Amarkantak (2012), Great Nicobar (2013), Agasthyamala (2016), Khangchendzonga (2018), Panna (2020), Cold Desert (2025). Not on the UNESCO list: Manas, Dibru–Saikhowa (Assam), Dihang–Dibang (Arunachal), Kachchh (Gujarat), Seshachalam (Andhra). In India reserves are notified by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Tamil Nadu link: all three of Tamil Nadu's reserves – Nilgiri, Gulf of Mannar and Agasthyamala (shared with Kerala) – are in the UNESCO network (details in Part 1). Nilgiri was both India's first biosphere reserve (1986) and the first Indian one on the UNESCO list (2000).

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