



World Turtle Day

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Why in News

Recently, World Turtle Day was observed on 23rd May to increase attention on conservation of Turtles and Tortoises.

The theme for the **World Turtle Day 2020** is '**Adopt, Don't Shop**'.

Key Points



- World Turtle Day is an **annual event** that has been taking place **since 2000**.
- It is being organised by the nonprofit organisation namely, **American Tortoise Rescue (ATR)**.
- It aims to protect the turtles and tortoises from illegal smuggling, exotic food industry, habitat destruction, global warming and pet trade.
- The day was observed in India by the **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)**, along with the **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)**.

Turtle and its Significance

- **Description:**

- Turtles are the reptiles of the order **Testudines**, characterized by a special bony or cartilaginous shell developed from their ribs and acting as a shield.
- It can reside inside **freshwater or saltwater**.
- **Tortoise** are distinguished from other turtles by being **land-dwelling**, while many (though not all) other turtle species are at **partly aquatic**.
- Turtles are cold-blooded species.
 - Cold blooded species** have a higher range of body temperature and move between environments to make themselves warmer or cooler. E.g. Insects, arachnids, fish, reptiles, and amphibians.
- They have very **slow metabolism** and can survive without food and water for a long time.
- According to the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** most of the species of turtles and tortoises are **vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered**.

- **Significance:**

- Turtles play an important role in the river by scavenging dead organic material and diseased fish by controlling the water pollution.
- They also help in maintaining healthy fish stocks in the water by giving them habitat over their body.
- Turtle populations could improve seagrass ecosystem health by removing seagrass biomass and preventing sediment formation.
- Turtles are also transporters of nutrients and energy to coastal areas.

Turtle Conservation in India

- There are five species in Indian waters i.e. **Olive Ridley, Green turtle, Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Leatherback**.
 - The **Olive Ridley, Green Turtle and Loggerhead** are listed as **endangered** in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species
 - The **Hawksbill** and the **Leatherback** are listed as **critically endangered**. They are protected in **Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972**, under Schedule I.
- Turtles have been protected in India under the **Biodiversity Conservation and Ganga Rejuvenation** programme.

Way Forward

Turtles play an important role in ocean ecosystems by maintaining healthy seagrass beds and coral reefs, providing key habitat for other marine life. It also helps to balance marine food webs and facilitate nutrient cycling from water to land. Thus, conservation of turtles will help to conserve biodiversity and to maintain natural balance.

Source: PIB