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National Award for Excellence in Forestry

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Why in News

- The **National Award of Excellence for Outstanding Research in Forestry for the year 2019** has been awarded to Kannan C S Warriar, a scientist at **Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB)**.
- This award is conferred by the **Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)**.

ICFRE is an apex body in the national forestry research system. ICFRE was recently declared as the **Centre for Excellence** in addressing issues related to **land degradation** by the Prime Minister.

Key Points

- The award has been awarded to Kannan C S Warriar for releasing **three salt-tolerant productive clones of *Casuarina*** that are suitable for **salt-affected soils**, for the first time in the country.
- India has 6.73 million hectares of salt affected land and is also the largest producer of *Casuarina* in the world which makes the production of these clones a significant achievement.

Casuarina

- *Casuarina*, also known as **kattadi and savukku**, is a plant genus with over 17 species with *Casuarina equisetifolia* being introduced in India in the 19th century.
- They have a role in **nitrogen fixation** in symbiotic association with bacteria Frankia.
- They provide fuel wood, pulp for paper making and of late is a preferred choice for biomass-based power generation.
- They are also used at construction sites for scaffolding.
- They are used as shelterbelts in coastal areas and windbreaks for protecting agricultural crops and banana plantations.

- They also play a key role in reclaiming mined areas and afforesting nutrient-poor sites.

Warrier has also done extensive work on the **conservation of endangered sacred groves** in Alappuzha district of Kerala.

Sacred Groves

- Sacred groves are **communally protected forests** which usually have a significant **religious connotation** for the protecting community.
- In India, there are over a lakh sacred groves across different states called by different names like ***Kaavu* in Malayalam, *Koyil kaadu* in Tamil, Orans in Rajasthan, Devara kaadu in Karnataka, and *Sernas* in Madhya Pradesh.**
- Many **rare and endemic species**, and **species having medicinal and economic value** can be found here, thus making them Biodiversity Hotspots. They house gene pools of some critically endangered plant species.
- They are often associated with religious beliefs and felling of trees in sacred groves is considered taboo.
- Sacred groves have been legally protected under '**community reserves**' in the **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002.**
- Some **common threats** to Sacred Groves are:
 - **Disappearance** of the **traditional belief systems**, which were fundamental to the concept of sacred groves.
 - The **transformation** of the primitive forms of nature worship into formal temple worship.
 - **Rapid urbanization** and developmental interventions such as roads, railways tracks, dams including commercial forestry.
 - Invasion by **exotic weeds**.
 - Pressures due to **increasing livestock** and fuelwood collection.

Source: TOI