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## International Horseshoe Crab Day

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### Why in News

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Recently, the **International Union for Conservation of Nature** (IUCN)'s has decided to observe the **first-ever International Horseshoe Crab Day** on **20<sup>th</sup> June 2020**.

The celebration of the day **aims** to generate greater awareness for these ancient creatures and help in their conservation.

### Key Points

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- **Horseshoe Crab:**



- It is a **marine chelicerate arthropod** living in **shallow coastal waters** on **soft sandy or muddy bottom** and **spawns** (release or deposit eggs) **mostly on intertidal beaches at summer spring high tides.**
  - **Subphylum Chelicerata** is a division within the **Phylum Arthropoda** containing animals such as spiders, scorpions, harvestmen, mites and ticks. Like all arthropods, they have a **segmented body and segmented limbs** and a **thick chitinous cuticle called an exoskeleton.**
  - Other than the marine horseshoe crabs, the Chelicerata are **found primarily in terrestrial environments** worldwide.
- It is regarded as a marine **‘living fossil’.**
- There are **four extant horseshoe crab species:**
  - The American horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) along the **eastern coast of the USA** and in the **Gulf of Mexico.**
  - The tri-spine horseshoe crab (*Tachypleus tridentatus*)
  - The coastal horseshoe crab (*Tachypleus gigas*)
  - The mangrove horseshoe crab (*Carcinoscorpius rotundicauda*)  
The last three are **Indo-pacific species** found in the coastal waters of **India, southeast Asia, China and Japan.**
- **Odisha is their largest habitat in India.**
- **Importance:**
  - They have **existed since the time of the dinosaurs** and are important **ecosystem engineers and predators of small organisms.**
  - Their ecological function is to **lay millions of eggs** on beaches to **feed shorebirds, fish and other wildlife.**
  - Their large **hard shell serves as a microhabitat** for many other species such as sponges, mud crabs, mussels and snails.
  - They are a **critical link to world health, biodiversity and hold cultural importance** across the globe.

- **Threats:**
  - **Overharvesting** for use as **food, bait and biomedical testing.**
  - **Habitat Destruction:**
    - Habitat loss from coastal reclamation and development.
    - **Shoreline alterations** that are engineered to protect beaches from erosion and sea level rise due to climate change also **affect their spawning habitats.**
  - Poachers **kill them for their meat** which is popularly believed to have **aphrodisiac qualities.**
  - Trade in horseshoe crabs is rampant in many Indian states as it is believed that consumption of horseshoe crab **meat can lengthen a person's lifespan,** even though there is no scientific evidence to support this.
  - Its **carapace** (hard upper shell) **is crushed** and mixed with water to prepare a paste, which is **applied onto scars.**
- **Conservation:**
  - It is in the **Schedule IV of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972,** under which the catching and killing of a horseshoe crab is an offence.
  - **IUCN Status:**
    - **American horseshoe crab: Vulnerable.**
    - **Tri-spine horseshoe crab: Endangered.**
    - The two other species are not listed yet.
  - The crackdown on horseshoe crab poachers requires superior, **inter-state coordination among police and wildlife authorities** of Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and other states.
  - The **Zoological Survey of India** has suggested declaring the habitat of horseshoe crabs as **Eco-Sensitive Zones** for their conservation and proper management.

**Source: DTE**