



Living Planet Report: WWF

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Why in News

According to the *Living Planet Report 2020* released by the **World Wide Fund for Nature**, the population of vertebrate species has largely declined in the past half- century.

Vertebrates : Vertebrates are animals that have **backbones or vertebral columns**. They are also characterized by a muscular system consisting primarily of bilaterally paired masses and a central nervous system partly enclosed within the backbone.

World Wildlife Fund for Nature

- It is the world's **leading conservation organization** and works in more than 100 countries.
- It was established in 1961 and is headquartered at Gland, Switzerland.
- Its **mission is to conserve nature** and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth.
- WWF collaborates at every level with people around the world to develop and deliver innovative solutions that protect communities, wildlife, and the places in which they live.

Key Points

- **Methodology:** The Report used the Living Planet Index to calculate the decline in vertebrate species.
 - **Living Planet Index (LPI):** It is a measure of the state of the world's biological diversity based on population trends of vertebrate species in terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats.
 - It is released by **Institute of Zoology (Zoological Society of London)**
 Founded in 1826, Zoological Society of London is an international conservation charity working for wildlife conservation.
 - LPI tracked almost 21,000 populations of more than 4,000 vertebrate species between 1970 and 2016.
- **Findings:**
 - It shows an average **68% decline in global vertebrate species populations**, between 1970 and 2016. In the Asia Pacific the decline stands at 45%.
 - A 94% decline in the LPI for the **tropical subregions of the americas** is the largest fall observed in any part of the world.
 - **Freshwater species populations** have reduced by 84% on average since 1970.
 - Freshwater species populations are being lost faster than terrestrial or marine species. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), almost 1/3rd of freshwater species are now threatened with extinction.
 - Wildlife populations in freshwater habitats suffered a decline of 84%, equivalent to 4% per year, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean.
 - **Megafauna**, or bigger species in terms of size, are more vulnerable because they were subjected to intense anthropogenic threats and overexploitation.
 - For eg. Large fishes are also heavily impacted by dam construction that blocks their migratory routes to spawning and feeding grounds.
 - Since 1970, our **Ecological Footprint** has exceeded the Earth's rate of regeneration.
 - Ecological Footprint measures the ecological assets that a given population requires **to produce the natural resources it consumes** (including plant-based food and fiber products, livestock and fish products, timber and other forest products, space for urban infrastructure) and to absorb its waste, especially carbon emissions.
 - The human enterprise currently demands **1.56 times more than the amount that Earth can regenerate**. It is like living off 1.56 Earths.

- **Threats to Biodiversity:**

- **Changes in Land and Sea Use, including Habitat Loss and Degradation:** This refers to the modification of the environment where a species lives, by complete removal, fragmentation or reduction in quality of key habitat.
- **Species Overexploitation:** Direct overexploitation refers to unsustainable hunting and poaching or harvesting. Indirect overexploitation occurs when non-target species are killed unintentionally.
- **Pollution:** Pollution can directly affect a species by making the environment unsuitable for its survival. It can also affect a species indirectly, by affecting food availability or reproductive performance.
- **Invasive Species and Disease:** Invasive species can compete with native species for space, food and other resources, can turn out to be a predator for native species, or spread diseases that were not previously present in the environment. Humans also transport new diseases from one area of the globe to another.
- **Climate Change:** As temperatures change, some species will need to adapt by shifting their range to track a suitable climate. The effects of climate change on species are often indirect. For eg, change in migratory patterns of birds.

Way Forward

- Research shows the world could start to stabilize and reverse the loss of nature by embracing **bolder, more ambitious conservation efforts** as well as making transformational changes in the way food is produced and consumed, such as making food production and trade more efficient, reducing waste, and favouring healthier and more sustainable diets.
- The report also underscores the need for a global **New Deal for Nature and People** with clear, ambitious goals, to see us on the path to recovery by 2030.
- Diseases like **Covid-19** are one of the many connections between the health of people and the planet. How humanity chooses to recover from the pandemic, and address the looming threats from global environmental change, will influence the health and livelihoods of generations to come.

Source: DTE