



# Ambergris

## Why in News

Recently, the Mumbai Police has arrested five people and seized nearly 9 kg of **Ambergris**.



## Key Points

### ▪ About:

- Ambergris, French for **grey amber**, is generally **referred to as whale vomit**.
- It is a solid waxy substance **originating in the intestine of the sperm whale**.
  - Ambergris is produced only by an estimated **1% of sperm whales**.
- Chemically, ambergris contains **alkaloids, acids**, and a specific compound called **ambreine, which is similar to cholesterol**.
- It **floats around the surface of the water body** and at times settles on the coast.
- Because of its high value it is **referred to as floating gold**. **1 kg of ambergris is worth Rs 1 crore** in the international market.

### ▪ Use:

- It is used in the perfume market, especially to **create fragrances like musk**.
  - It is believed to be in **high demand in countries like Dubai that have a large perfume market**.
- **Ancient Egyptians used it as incense**. It is also believed to be used in **some traditional medicines** and as a **spice**.

### ▪ Smuggling:

- Due to its high value it has been a target for smugglers especially in coastal areas.

- There have been **several cases where the coastline of Gujarat has been used for such smuggling.**
- Since the **sperm whale is a protected species**, hunting of the whale is not allowed. However, **smugglers are known to have illegally targeted the fish** in order to obtain the valuable Ambergris from its stomach.

## Sperm Whale

### ▪ About:



- Sperm whale, (Physeter catodon), also called **cachalot**, the **largest of the toothed whales**, easily recognized by its enormous square head and narrow lower jaw.
- The sperm whale is **dark blue-gray or brownish, with white patches on the belly**. It is **thickset and has small paddle-like flippers** and a series of rounded humps on its back.

### ▪ Habitat:

- They are found in **temperate and tropical waters throughout the world.**

### ▪ Threats:

- The greatest threats to sperm whales are those of **habitat impacts including noise pollution and [climate change](#).**
- Other threats include **entanglement** in fishing gear, **collisions with ships**, and proposals to allow for a **commercial hunt** once again.

### ▪ Protection Status:

- [IUCN Red List](#): Vulnerable
- [CITES](#): Appendix I
- [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#): schedule I

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