

Himalayan Brown Bear

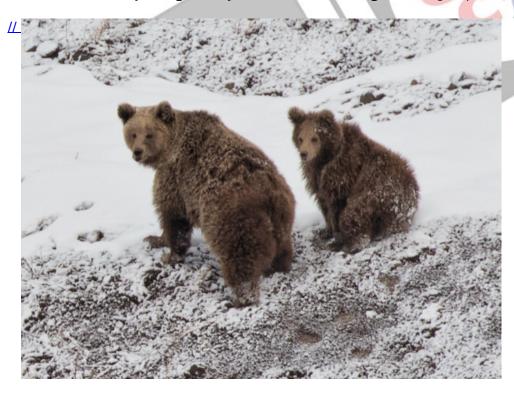
Why in News?

The <u>Himalayan brown bear</u> (*Ursus arctos isabellinus*) population in **Kashmir** is facing numerous challenges that threaten both their survival and human safety.

- Recent incidents of bears entering residential areas and wrecking graveyards have raised concerns among local communities.
- These incidents highlight the urgent need to address the underlying factors causing this behavior and safeguard the habitat of this critically endangered species.

What are Himalayan Brown Bears?

- About:
 - Himalayan brown bears are **a subspecies of brown bears** that inhabit the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas, ranging from Pakistan to Bhutan.
 - They have thick fur that is most often sandy or reddish-brown in color.
 - They can grow up to 2.2 meters long and weigh up to 250 kilograms.



Status:

- IUCN Red List- Critically Endangered
 - Brown bear (Ursus arctos) is listed as Least Concern.
- CITES Appendix I.

- Only the populations of Bhutan, China, Mexico and Mongolia; all other populations are included in Appendix II.
- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 Schedule 1.

Food:

Omnivorous.

Behavior:

 They are **nocturnal**, and their sense of smell is acutely developed and believed to be their principal means of finding food.

Threat:

• Human-animal conflict, rapid habitat loss, poaching for fur, claws, and organs, and, in some rare cases, bear baiting.

Range:

 North-western and central Himalaya, including India, Pakistan, Nepal, the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, and Bhutan.

Challenges:

- Insufficient Food Sources and Altered Behavior:
 - The bears' peculiar behavior of digging up graves and wandering into residential areas can be attributed to insufficient food in their natural habitats.
 - A study conducted by Wildlife SOS, an organization established with the goal of
 making lasting changes to protect and conserve India's natural heritage, forests,
 and biodiversity, revealed that a significant portion of the bears' diet in Kashmir
 consists of scavenged garbage, including plastic bags, chocolate wrappers,
 and other edible waste.
 - This disrupts their natural foraging patterns and alters their behavior, leading to conflicts with humans.
 - Improper disposal of kitchen waste by both local residents and hoteliers near bear habitats has provided easy access to food, leading to frequent interactions between bears and humans.
 - This altered behavior, coupled with complacency in hunting for food, has created a dependence on human-generated waste, further exacerbating conflicts.

Restricted Distribution and Declining Population:

- The restricted distribution of the Himalayan brown bear in the alpine meadows of the Himalayas has made it challenging for researchers to gather comprehensive data on the species.
- Habitat destruction caused by factors like habitat encroachment, tourism, and grazing pressure has contributed to the declining population of bears.
 - With only an estimated **500-750 bears left in India**, urgent conservation efforts are required to ensure their survival.

Future Threats and Conservation Recommendations:

- The Himalayan brown bear's future remains bleak, as a study predicts a **decline of** about 73% of their habitat by 2050 in the western Himalayas.
- <u>Climate change</u> poses a significant risk, necessitating preemptive spatial planning of protected areas to ensure the long-term viability of the species.
- Conservation efforts should focus on habitat preservation, creating biological corridors, and promoting responsible waste management to minimize humanbear conflicts.
- Should Strengthen the legal protection and enforcement by implementing the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 2022 and CITES regulations.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Consider the following fauna: (2023)

- 1. Lion-tailed Macague
- 2. Malabar Civet
- 3. Sambar Deer

How many of the above are generally nocturnal or most active after sunset?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Ans: (b)

- The lion-tailed macaque is not a nocturnal animal. It is an arboreal and diurnal creature, they sleep at night in trees (typically, high in the canopy of rainforest). These macaques are territorial and very communicative animals. **Hence, 1 is not correct.**
- Malabar civet is primarily nocturnal. It is a small, carnivorous mammal that is native to the Western Ghats region of India.
- It has a solitary and secretive nature, making it challenging to observe in the wild. Its nocturnal behavior helps it avoid predators and increases its chances of finding prey in the darkness. Hence,
 2 is correct.

The Vision

- Sambar deer are nocturnal. They more commonly communicate by scent marking and foot stamping. They prefer the dense cover of deciduous shrubs and grass. **Hence, 3 is correct.**
- Hence, option (b) is correct.

Source: DTE

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