



Gupteswar Forest as Biodiversity Heritage Site

For Prelims: [Biodiversity Heritage Site \(BHS\)](#), ['Biological Diversity Act, 2002](#)

For Mains: Biodiversity-Heritage Site (BHS), Environmental pollution and degradation.

Source: [IE](#)

Why in News?

The pristine Gupteswar Forest, adjacent to Gupteswar Shiva temple in Odisha's Koraput district has been declared as the **4th Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS)** of the state.

What are the Key Points Related to Gupteshwar Forest?

▪ Area and Importance:

- The forest covers **350 hectares of demarcated area** and holds immense cultural significance with its sacred groves, traditionally revered by the local community.

▪ Flora and Fauna Diversity:

- It harbours a **remarkable diversity of flora and fauna**. The forest is home to at least 608 faunal species, including 28 species of mammals.

◦ Significant Species:

- Notable faunal species documented in the forest include the mugger crocodile, **kanger valley rock gecko**, **sacred Grove Bush Frog**, and various avifauna such as black baza, Jerdon's baza, Malaber trogon, common hill myna, white-bellied woodpecker, and banded bay cuckoo.
- The limestone caves within the forest are **home to eight species of bats**, two of which are under the near-threatened category.

- ***Hipposideros galeritus*** and ***Rhinolophus rouxii*** are under the near-threatened category of the [IUCN](#).

◦ Floral Diversity:

- The forest also boasts a rich floral diversity. It includes threatened medicinal plants like the Indian **trumpet tree** and **Indian snakeroot**.

What is a Biodiversity Heritage Site?

▪ About:

- [Biodiversity Heritage sites \(BHS\)](#) are well-defined areas that are unique, ecologically fragile ecosystems with a high diversity of wild and domesticated species, the presence of

rare and threatened species, and keystone species.

▪ **Legal Provision:**

- As per provision under **Section 37(1)** of '[The Biological Diversity Act, 2002](#)' State Governments are empowered to notify in the official gazette, in consultation with '[local bodies](#)', areas of biodiversity importance as Biodiversity Heritage Sites.

▪ **Restrictions:**

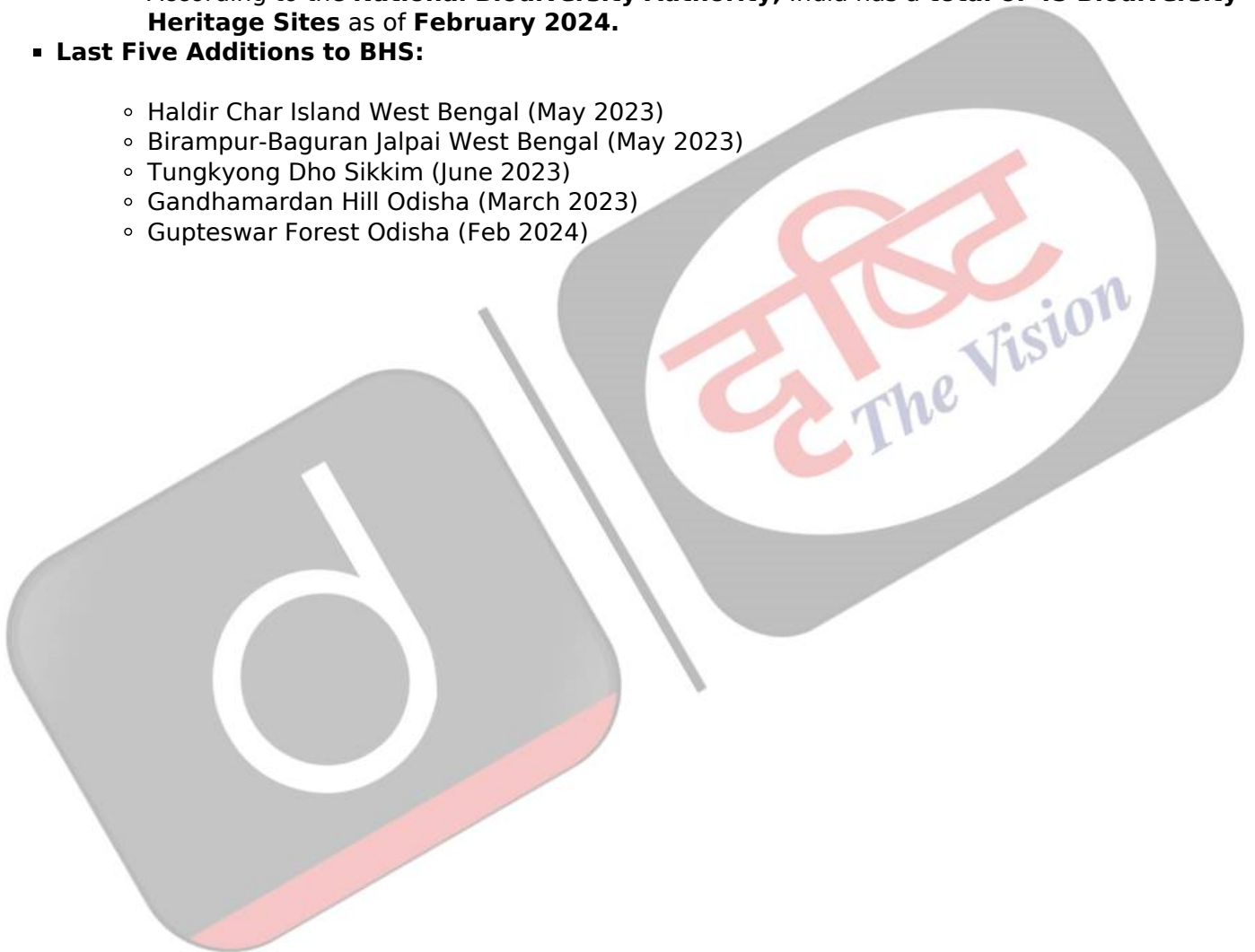
- Creation of BHS may not put any restriction on the prevailing practices and usages of the local communities, other than those voluntarily decided by them. The purpose is **to enhance the quality of life of the local communities** through conservation measures.

▪ **First BHS of India:**

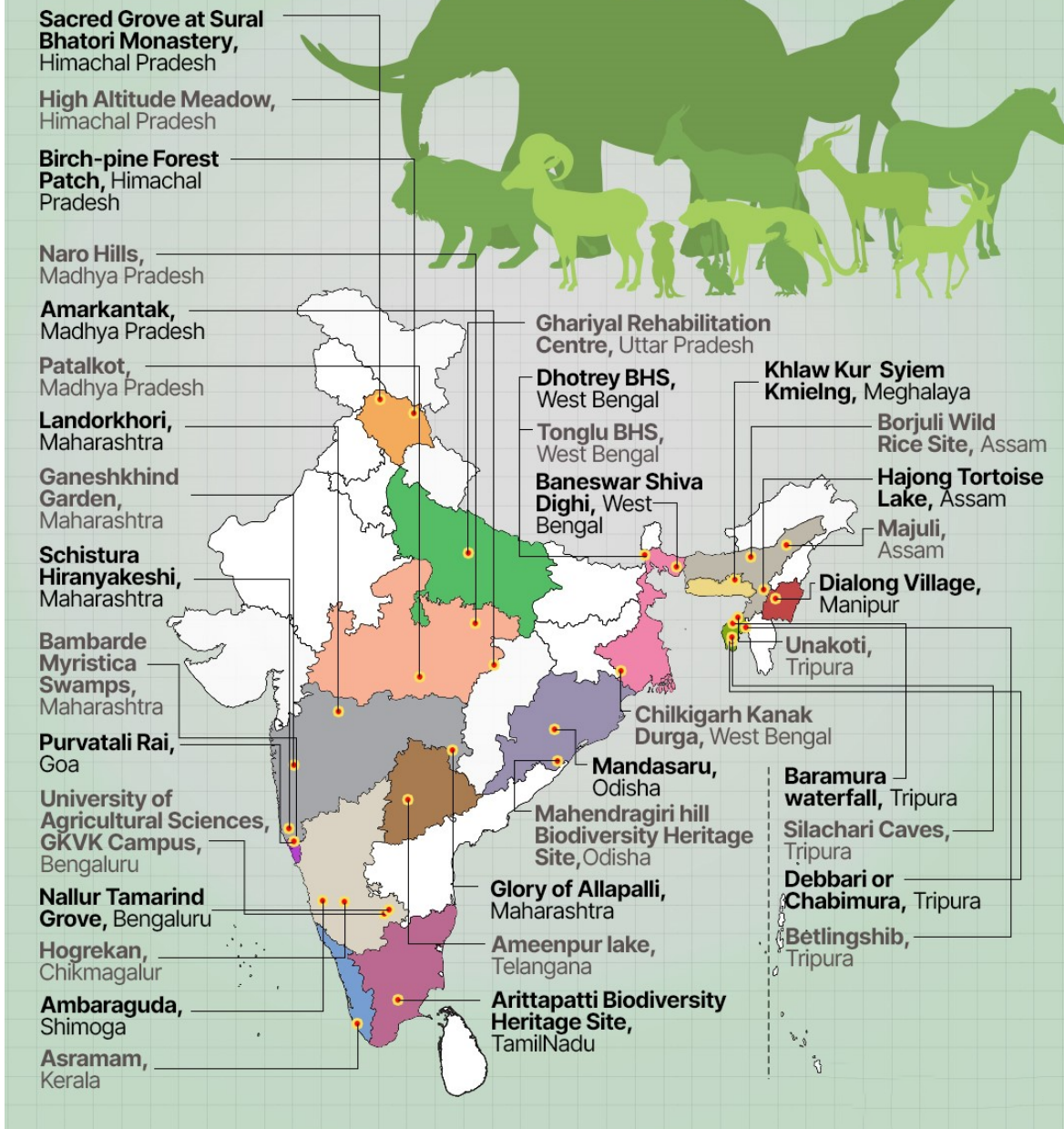
- **Nallur Tamarind Grove in Bengaluru**, Karnataka was the first Biodiversity Heritage Site of India, declared in 2007.
- According to the **National Biodiversity Authority**, India has a **total of 45 Biodiversity Heritage Sites** as of **February 2024**.

▪ **Last Five Additions to BHS:**

- Haldir Char Island West Bengal (May 2023)
- Birampur-Baguran Jalpai West Bengal (May 2023)
- Tungkyong Dho Sikkim (June 2023)
- Gandhamardan Hill Odisha (March 2023)
- Gupteswar Forest Odisha (Feb 2024)



Biodiversity heritage sites in India



UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q1. Two important rivers - one with its source in Jharkhand (and known by a different name in Odisha), and another, with its source in Odisha - merge at a place only a short distance from the coast of Bay of Bengal before flowing into the sea. This is an important site of wildlife and biodiversity and a protected area. Which one of the following could be this? (2011)

(a) Bhitarkanika

- (b) Chandipur-on-sea
- (c) Gopalpur-on-sea
- (d) Simlipal

Ans: (a)

Q2. With reference to India's biodiversity, Ceylon frogmouth, Coppersmith barbet, Gray-chinned minivet and White-throated redstart are (2020)

- (a) Birds
- (b) Primates
- (c) Reptiles
- (d) Amphibians

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. How does biodiversity vary in India? How is the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 helpful in the conservation of flora and fauna? (2018)

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