



Keoladeo National Park

Why in News?

[Keoladeo National Park](#) in Rajasthan, famously called the '**paradise of birds**', is now emerging as a **vital sanctuary for turtles**.

- It shelters eight of the **ten turtle species found in the state**, making it one of the region's richest habitats for turtles.

Key Points

▪ Keoladeo National Park:

◦ About:

- It is a **wetland and bird sanctuary located in Bharatpur, Rajasthan**. It is a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) and one of the most important bird-watching areas in the world.
 - [Chilika Lake](#) (Orissa) and Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan) were recognized as the first **Ramsar Sites of India** in 1981.
 - Currently, Keoladeo National Park and [Loktak Lake \(Manipur\)](#) are in the [Montreux record](#).
- It is known for its **rich avian diversity and abundance of waterbirds**. The park is home to **over 364 species of birds, including several rare and threatened species**, such as the [Siberian crane](#).
- **Fauna:** Animals such as [jackals](#), **Sambar**, **Nilgai**, [wild cats](#), [hyenas](#), **wild boar**, **porcupine and mongoose** can be found in the region.
- **Flora:** The principal vegetation types are tropical dry deciduous forest dominated by **Babul tree (*Acacia nilotica*)** intermixed with dry grassland.
- **River:** **Gambhir and Banganga** are two rivers that flow through this National Park.

▪ Ideal Conditions for Turtle Habitats:

- The unique blend of water bodies, forest cover, and land within the park creates a near-perfect ecosystem for turtles.
- Deep ponds, marshy areas, and dense vegetation offer optimal conditions for turtle nesting, foraging, and reproduction.

▪ Turtle Species Found in Keoladeo National Park:

- The park is home to hundreds of turtles, with several believed to be over 200 years old.
 - These **ancient reptiles** add to the park's ecological and cultural richness.
- Among the diverse species, the [Indian Softshell Turtle](#) is especially significant.
 - Thriving in ponds and rivers it plays a crucial role in maintaining aquatic health by feeding on aquatic animals and plants.
 - This natural scavenging helps purify water bodies and maintain ecological balance.
- The [Crowned River Turtle](#), a herbivorous species marked by yellow-orange stripes on its face, adds to the park's biodiversity.
- Other rare species include:
 - Indian Flapshell Turtle
 - Indian Tent Turtle
 - Indian Star Turtle

Indian Softshell Turtle (Ganges Softshell Turtle)

▪ About:

- The Indian Softshell Turtle, also known as the **Ganges Softshell Turtle**, is a **freshwater species** native to rivers in northern and eastern India.
- It **belongs to the Trionychidae family**, known for turtles with flexible, leathery shells instead of hard scales.

▪ Natural Habitat:

- This species primarily inhabits major rivers such as the **Ganges, Indus, and Mahanadi**.
- It is also found in lakes, ponds, canals, and other freshwater bodies.

▪ Distinctive Shell Characteristics:

- The **turtle's carapace (upper shell)** is smooth, oval to round in shape.
- Its shell typically appears olive or green, often edged with a yellow border.

▪ Conservation Status:

- **IUCN Red List:** Endangered
- **Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972:** Schedule I
- **CITES:** Appendix I

▪ Other Notable Softshell Turtles in India:

- **Leith's Softshell Turtle:** Endemic to peninsular India and classified as **Critically Endangered**.
- **Peacock Softshell Turtle:** **Listed as Endangered** and found in ponds and temple tanks of northeastern India and Bangladesh.

