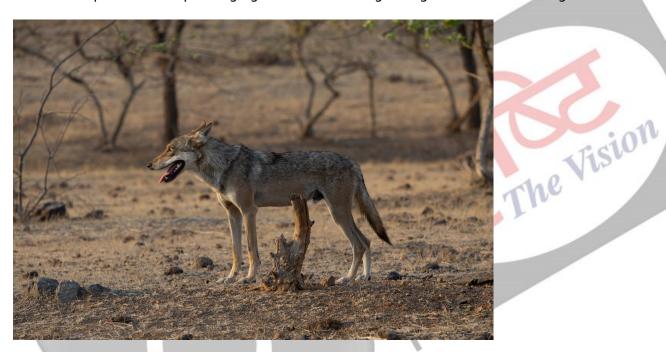


Indian Grey Wolf

Why in News?

In the **Kadbanwadi grassland** of the Deccan Plateau in **Pune, Maharashtra**, **Indian grey wolves**—apex predators crucial to the health of grassland ecosystems—are **facing a sharp decline**, driven by habitat disruption from expanding agriculture and the growing menace of feral dogs.



Key Points

- Indian Grey Wolf:
 - About:
 - Indian grey wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*) is a subspecies of grey wolf found across Southwest Asia and the Indian subcontinent.
 - It lives in smaller packs and is less vocal compared to other wolf subspecies.
 - It is **primarily nocturnal**, hunting from dusk to dawn.
 - These wolves are distinguishable by **brown coats with black-and-white markings** on their backs.
 - Habitat:
 - It is an apex predator in India's **scrublands**, **grasslands and <u>semi-arid agroecosystems</u>**. Thrives in regions with warmer temperatures.
 - Conservation Status:
 - IUCN: Endangered (population in India: 2,000 3,000 individuals).
 - CITES: Appendix I.
 - Wildlife Protection Act. 1972: Schedule I.

Kadbanwadi Grassland:

- It spans approximately 2,000 hectares and surrounds Kadbanwadi village, located about 276 km from Mumbai atop a hill in Indapur tehsil.
- The **Shegar Dhangar**, a pastoralist community, has long coexisted with local wildlife.
- Key species include the <u>Bengal fox</u>, <u>striped hyena</u>, and Brahminy kite.
- The Indian grey wolf is seen as the **"guardian" of the grassland**, playing a vital role in **maintaining ecological balance**.

Rising Threats to the Wolf Population:

- **Habitat loss** due to agriculture and semi-urban expansion.
- Free-ranging dogs, which spread diseases and cause genetic hybridisation.
- Disease Transmission from Dogs:
 - Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) is a highly contagious and fatal disease for wolves, transmitted through direct contact or contaminated surfaces.
 - <u>Canine Parvovirus</u> and <u>Rabies</u> pose serious threats to wolves, spreading through bites, saliva, or scratches.

Genetic and Behavioural Risks:

 Cross-breeding between stray dogs and wolves leads to genetic dilution, disrupts wolf pack dynamics, and creates hybrids with unpredictable behaviour and health problems.

Rapid Decline in Wolf Numbers:

- In 2016, Kadbanwadi had around 70 adult wolves.
- By December 2024, the count had fallen to 11.
- The most recent tally recorded just six wolves in the region.

Challenges:

- Officials can remove or kill stray dogs in protected areas like Kadbanwadi grassland, a reserve forest, under Maharashtra Forest Rules (2014).
- However, officials hesitate to act due to potential backlash from animal rights groups.
- Vaccination of dogs is under consideration, but capturing them remains a challenge.



Dhangar Community

About:

- The Dhangars are a traditional shepherd community spread across several Indian states.
- Besides Maharashtra, they also reside in Gujarat, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.

Legal and Social Status:

- In Maharashtra, the Dhangars are listed under the Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribes (VJNT) category.
- They typically lead a secluded life, migrating through forests, hills, and mountainous regions.

Population:

- Dhangar households are **small**, **tightly-knit**, **and family-centric**.
- The community's estimated population is around 1 crore, making up approximately 9% of

Maharashtra's total population.

• The tribe includes nearly **20 sub-castes and clusters**, each with unique customs and cultural practices.

Livelihood and Lifestyle:

- Their primary occupation is sheep and goat herding.
- They follow a mix of **nomadic pastoralism, semi-nomadic living, and agriculture-based livelihoods** in rural landscapes.

Seasonal Migration:

• Every year, after the bajra harvest ends in October, Dhangars begin their **seasonal migration to find new grazing grounds** for their livestock.

Cultural Practices:

- They honour their ancestors through rituals conducted during their migratory journeys.
- Singing traditional songs, especially at night, is a key aspect of their culture.
- These songs, known as **Sumbaran, form a rich oral tradition** that preserves the history, values, and identity of the Dhangar community.

