Bats in Plantations

Why in news?

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A recent study shows that tea plantations in the Western Ghats hosts less-diverse bat communities than those found in coffee estates and forests.

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What are the findings of the study?

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- Forests in Western Ghats have changed drastically.
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- The study examined bat diet, echolocation, body size and wing morphology in different habitats in Valparai, Western Ghats.
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- In Valparai tea and coffee plantations have fragmented natural forests.
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- It found that tea plantations fared badly.
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- Only few insectivorous bats that could adapt to highly modified habitats thrived here.
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- Coffee plantations did better because of native tree presence which is required for coffee growth.
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- Protected areas and forest fragments were the most ‘functionally’ rich, by being home to bats with diverse morphologies.
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What is the significance of bats?

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- Bats perform important ecological functions.
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- They are important insect controllers, pollinators and seed-dispersers.
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- Different bat species can perform these varied ecological functions due to the physical features they have evolved.
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- e.g Bats with short, broad wings are better suited to plucking off large insects on the wing, in densely-vegetated patches like the forests of the Ghats.
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What should be done?

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- Tea plantations will never be as rich for wildlife as coffee plantations.
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- But it can be more biodiversity-friendly if small changes in land use practices is implemented.
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- Bats and other fauna could benefit if tea plantations have a buffer of native trees on both sides of every river.
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- Protecting existing forest fragments and extending them wherever possible could also help.
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Source: The Hindu

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