Caracal in Thar Desert

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Why in News?

Recently, Officials have confirmed the sighting of rare caracals in the Shahgarh region of Rajasthan's Jaisalmer, near the India-Pakistan border, through camera traps and radio-collaring.

- **Common Name –** Caracal (*locally known as Padang*).
- **Scientific Name –** *Caracal caracal*.
- **Family –** Felidae.
- **Kingdom –** Animalia.
- **Habitat –** They inhabit savannas, semi-deserts, scrublands, and arid woodlands.
- **Distribution –** Plains of Africa, the Middle East, and central and southern Asia.
    - **India –** North western India (Rajasthan and Gujarat).

Caracal population now reduced to 50 individuals in India, more than 95% loss due to habitat loss and retaliatory killings. (Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

- **Morphology**
    - **Coat –** A solid reddish-tan or sandy-brown (rufous) coat that provides stealth in arid scrublands and semi-deserts.
    - **Ear Tufts –** Their most iconic feature is 4.5–5 cm (1.8–2 in) long, black ear tufts (pencil ears).
    - **Lifespan –** Up to 19 years
    - **Weight –** 8-14 kg
    - **Length –** 62-82 cm
    - **Shoulder Height –** 40-50cm
    - **Tail Length –** 23-32 cm short
    - **Litter Size –** 1 - 6 kittens.



- **Behaviour –** It is generally solitary, highly secretive predators primarily active at night (nocturnal).
- **Diet –** Carnivorous.

Conservation Measures

- **Scientific Monitoring**
  - **Camera traps (motion Sensing Cameras) –** Weatherproof PIR (Passive Infrared) Sensor camera traps capture images instantly when animals with distinct heat signatures move across the sensor.
  - **Radio-collaring –** It is a wildlife tracking method where a soft neck collar with a tiny radio transmitter sends signals to help scientists monitor an animal's movement and behaviour.
- **Pilot Projects** – Wildlife Trust of India involving local communities in conservation efforts and reduce human-wildlife conflict.
- **Habitat Protection** – Identifying critical refuge zones in Thar Desert.
- **Community Participation** – ***Goat Bank*** model by WII compensates livestock loss with goats.
  - **Problem** – Caracals sometimes prey on villagers' goats.
  - **Solution** – Affected families receive replacement goats from a community-managed "goat bank" instead of harming the predator.
  - **Sustainability** – Families later return a kid goat to the bank, keeping the system self-replenishing and conflict-free.

Conservation Status	
Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972	Schedule I species (highest protection).
IUCN Red List	Least Concerned.
Cites	Appendix I (Asian population including India) Appendix II (African populations)

Reference

- **The Hindu | Caracals**

