Caspian Cobra

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Conservation*

Why in News?

A rare Caspian Cobra has been spotted in the upper forest range of Chamba district in Himachal Pradesh, recently.

- **Scientific Name -** Naja oxiana
- **Family -** Elapidae.
- The Caspian Cobra also known as the Central Asian, Oxus, or Russian cobra is ***endemic to Central Asia.***
- **Geographic Distribution -** It is typically found across Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and northern Pakistan.
- **Indian Footprint -** Historically considered exceptionally rare, confined mostly to far northwestern pockets including parts of Jammu & Kashmir and localized ranges in Himachal Pradesh.
- **Preferred Habitat -** The Caspian Cobra thrives in ***arid and semi-arid landscapes***, rocky or stony foothills, embankments, and scrublands.
- **Behaviour -** It is a highly capable climber and swimmer, frequently utilizing holes in embankments or trees for shelter.
- **Key characteristics**
  - Its hood is *elongated and gradually tapering*, quite distinct from the broadly ovoid hood of the Indian Cobra.
  - Adult Caspian Cobras are uniform light to chocolate brown or yellowish and entirely lack any distinct hood markings (spectacle marks) or lateral throat spots.
  - It is characterized by smooth, dull, and strongly oblique dorsal scales, with the outer rows noticeably larger than the rest.
- **Venom Toxicity -** Toxicological studies rank *Naja oxiana* as potentially ***the most venomous cobra species in the world***.
- Its crude venom is exceptionally rich in short neurotoxins and cytotoxins, capable of inducing rapid neuromuscular blockade and cell death.

- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN Red List Status-** Near Threatened (NT).
  - **CITES Status -**Listed under Appendix II.
- **Threats -** Its populations are increasingly vulnerable to intensive habitat fragmentation and economic development in river valleys and piedmont deserts across Central Asia.

Reference

ETV Bharat | Rare Caspian Cobra

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