Conservation of Bengal Fox and Golden Jackal

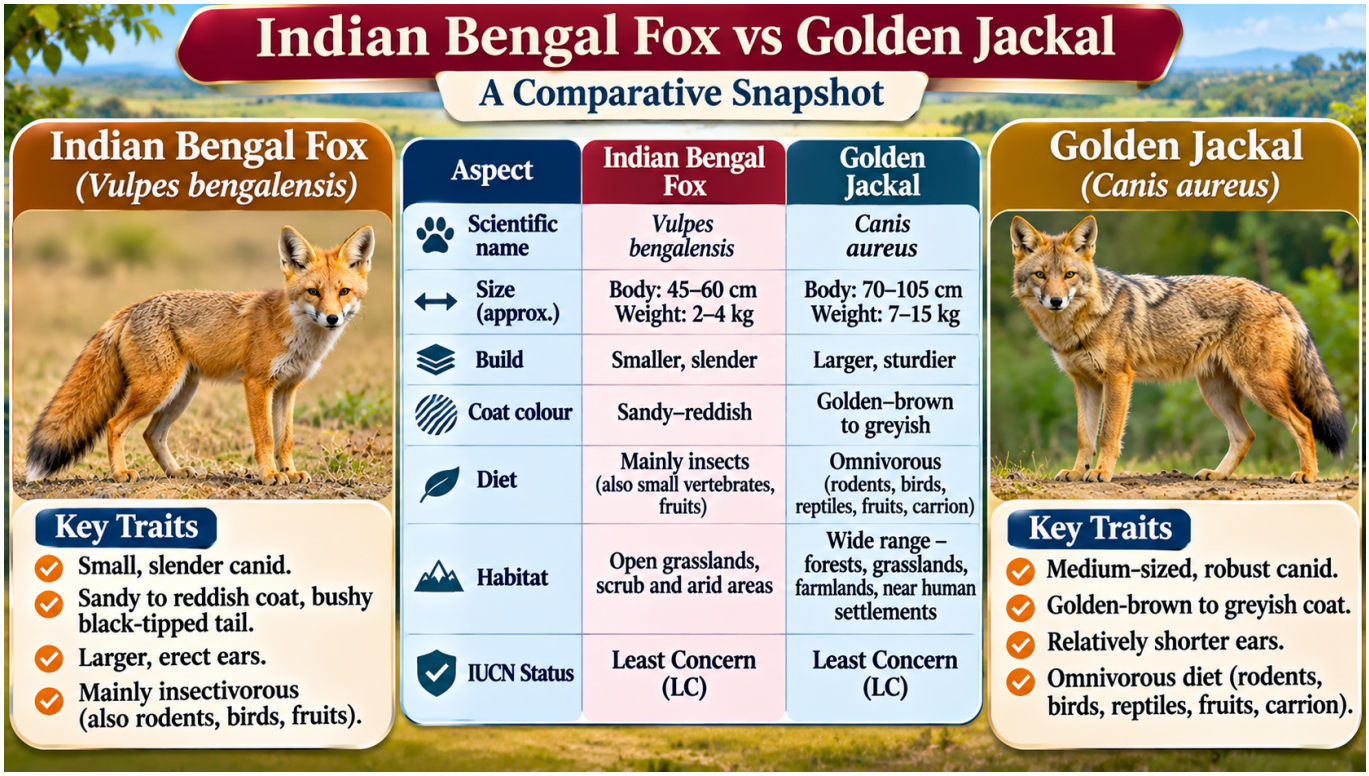
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Why in News?

The Tamil Nadu Government has sanctioned fund to implement a conservation plan for two crucial mesopredator species- the Indian Bengal Fox (Vulpes bengalensis) and the Golden Jackal (Canis aureus).

Key Highlights

- The initiative marks a shift towards protecting **"edge species"** and smaller carnivores that inhabit scrublands, grasslands, and human-dominated agricultural fringes outside traditional protected forests.
- **Comprehensive Conservation Plan-** The scheme focuses on assessing current threats, identifying critical habitats in Protected Areas (PAs) and Reserved Forests, mitigating human-wildlife conflict, and controlling poaching.
- **Ex-situ Conservation -** Proposals include setting up a dedicated **captive breeding and conservation center** at the **Salem Zoo**.
- **Grassroot Community Participation -** Leverages local models like the **"Golden Jackal Ambassadors" programme** (pioneered in the Tenkasi Forest Division), which engages school and college students as local wildlife stewards and rescue volunteers alongside Village Forest Committees.
- **Inter-Departmental Coordination -** Because these canids function as "edge species" occupying agricultural lands, riverbanks, and scrub forests, the plan requires close coordination between revenue, forestry, and agricultural departments.



- **Ecological Role of Mesopredators**
  - Both species function as essential **mesopredators (mid-level predators) and scavengers**.
  - They keep agricultural pest populations in check by preying heavily on rodents, insects, and small reptiles, while also helping clear animal carcasses to prevent disease outbreaks.
- **Major Threats**
  - **Habitat Degradation -** Misclassification and conversion of open natural ecosystems (scrublands/grasslands) into industrial zones or urban "wastelands".
  - **Accidental Mortality & Persecution -** High frequency of roadkills on highways, retaliatory poisoning by farmers, and illegal poaching for traditional folk medicine or bushmeat.
  - **Disease Transmission-** Increased interaction with free-ranging feral dogs leads to high vulnerability to lethal canine distemper virus (CDV) and rabies.

Reference

[The Hindu | Conservation of Bengal fox]

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