Declining Habitat of Sea Turtles

Prelims : Current events of National and International Importance | Conservation

Why in News?

Over 50% of sea turtle habitats are expected to disappear by 2050 due to climate change.

- **Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** - It is a landmark international agreement adopted in December 2022 at the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Montreal.
- It aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, safeguarding nature for current and future generations.
- **30x30 target** – It mandates that 30% of marine areas are protected by 2030.
- **Recent Findings -** A new study on sea turtles raises questions about the effectiveness of marine protected areas in protecting marine biodiversity.
- Merely 23% of the world's sea turtle hotspots lie within the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).
- According to the Marine Protection Atlas, over 8% of the ocean is designated as MPAs, but only about 3% are effectively managed.
- The study reveals that climate change is pushing sea turtles away from their traditional habitats toward cooler waters.
- This shift is taking them outside protected areas and into busy shipping zones.
- Many of these new habitats, such as the ***North Sea, Mediterranean, East China Sea, and even waters near the Galapagos Islands***, are high-risk zones with heavy ship traffic.
- This is laying them open to the threat of vessel strikes, which is a leading cause of turtle deaths.
- In the future, the situation is likely to worsen as global shipping is also projected to grow by 1,200% by 2050.
- The analysis covered ***all 7 species of sea turtles found globally***, and also clearly supports what was emphasised at the Third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in June 2025.

  7 recognized species of sea turtles are the Flatback, Green, Hawksbill, Leatherback, Loggerhead, Kemp's Ridley, and Olive Ridley turtles. These turtles inhabit all oceans except for the Arctic.

- **Third UN Ocean Conference** called for urgent action to protect marine biodiversity and the need for a new generation of MPAs.
- These initiatives demonstrate that adaptive, data-driven conservation is both feasible and effective, especially in mitigating risks like vessel strikes.

- To both protect turtles and meet the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's 30x30 goal, the study recommends the following
    1. Expanding MPA coverage in future turtle hotspots, especially within national Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).
    2. Designing dynamic, climate-informed MPAs that can adapt spatially and temporally based on emerging species distributions.
    3. Coupling MPAs with targeted shipping regulations, such as speed reductions in high-risk areas, to mitigate vessel strike risks.

Reference

Down to Earth | Declining of sea turtle habitats

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