Eastern Imperial Eagle

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

Why in News?

Wildlife enthusiasts have recently confirmed the presence of an Eastern Imperial Eagle visiting the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) in Tamil Nadu during the winter migratory season.

- **Scientific name** – Aquila heliacal.
- **Family** – Accipitridae.
- It is a large, powerful bird of prey found across Eurasia, known for its majestic appearance and historical reverence as a "sacred bird" or "cross-bearing eagle.
- **Habitat –** They prefer forests with *tall isolated trees for nesting*, also found in steppes, open landscapes, agricultural areas, semideserts and wetlands (especially in winter).
- **Geographic Range** – They are native to southern Europe, central Asia, and Siberia. In winter, they migrate to northeast Africa (Egypt–Kenya), India, and southeast China.
- **Size –** It can grow to a length of about 0.92 m, and it can have a wingspan approaching 2.14 m and have a mass of about 3.6 kg.
- **Appearance –** Similar to Golden Eagle but with a shorter tail and white shoulders that can be hard to spot.
- The underwings are dark with low contrast.
- **Adults** are dark brown with a golden crown/nape and white scapular “braces.”
- **Juveniles** are paler, streaked, and often confused with other spotted eagles, but larger and more robust.



- **Physical Adaptations –** They have strong legs and feet with long, curved talons that they use to seize, kill, and carry prey.
- **Reproduction –** They begin breeding at around four years of age, forming lifelong

monogamous pairs.

- **Lifespan –** Up to 56 years in the wild and captivity.
- **Behaviour –** They are mostly solitary, migrate in loose flocks, travel 8,000 km, and fly with heavy wingbeats but are swift when hunting.
- **Diet –** They are ***carnivorous***, their prey includes small mammals (rabbits, ground squirrels), reptiles (including snakes), birds (ducks, magpies) and occasionally carrion (dead lambs).
- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN Red List** - Vulnerable
  - **CITES** - Appendix I
  - **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972** - Schedule I
- **Threats –** Habitat loss, hunting, disturbance, reduced food availability, poison ingestion, and electrocution from power lines.

References

1. The Hindu | Rare Imperial Eagle spotted in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve
2. Animal Diversity Web | Eastern Imperial Eagle

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