Ginkgo-Toothed Beaked Whales

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

Why in news?

A team of scientists has spotted the rare ginkgo-toothed beaked whales for the first time in the wild along the coast of Baja California in Mexico.

- **Scientific name –** Mesoplodon ginkgodens
- **Common Name –** Japanese Beaked Whale.
- **Family –** Ziphiidae (Beaked Whales).
- **Discovery –** 1st described in 1958.
- **Distribution –** ***Tropical and temperate waters*** of the Indo-Pacific from Sri Lanka and India through Japan to California.
- **Indian Records –** May inhabit the waters around India - near Colombo, Sri Lanka (1957 specimen), other suspected capture off Trincomalee.

Key Features

- **Diversity –** It is one of 24 species of beaked whales, which are second most diverse group of cetaceans after dolphins.
- **Size –** The maximum length is believed to be about 5 m long.
- **Weight –** About estimated as 1.5 and 3.6 tons.
- **Appearance –**
  - They have a robust body, a distinct beak, and a small dorsal fin located far back on the body.
  - Long, pointed beak with no teeth in the upper jaw.
  - Adult males have one pair of large teeth shaped like ginkgo leaves (or onions).
  - Teeth are broad at the base (up to 10 cm) and pointed at the tip.
  - Two V-shaped throat grooves, typical of beaked whales.
- It is the ***deepest-diving mammals*** on Earth which spend most of their lives in deep oceans.



- **Coloration –** Dark grey/blue-grey/black dorsally, pale grey ventrally. Skin turns black rapidly after death.
- **Diet –** Primarily fish and squid.
- **Behavior –** It is rarely observed at sea; little is known about its social or diving habits.
- **Conservation Status –**
  - **IUCN** – Data Deficient.
  - **CITES** – Appendix II.

References

1. Indian Express | Ginkgo-Toothed Beaked Whale
2. Marine Mammal | Ginkgo-Toothed Beaked Whale

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