

Golden Jackal in Kachchh's Mangroves

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Environment

Why in News?

Recently, a research team detailed the unexpected habitat shift and ecological adaptation of the golden jackal (*Canis aureus*) in Gujarat.

Key Observations

- **Habitat Shift (Grasslands to Intertidal Forest)**
 - Traditionally associated with the semi-arid Banni grasslands and saline mudflats of the Rann of Kachchh.
 - Now, golden jackals were recorded actively navigating dense mangrove thickets (*Avicennia marina*) and tidally inundated creeks.
- **Dietary Plasticity**
 - Scat analysis revealed a notable dietary shift from terrestrial rodents, berries (*Salvadora persica*), and livestock offal to marine and estuarine prey.
 - The jackals' coastal diet includes mudskippers, crabs, stranded marine fish, aquatic birds, and marine turtle eggs, demonstrating an opportunistic transition to marine-subsidised foraging.
- **Adaptation to Tidal Rhythms**
 - Jackals synchronizing their movement patterns with low-tide cycles to forage across exposed mudflats and mangrove roots, seeking elevated dry hummocks during high tides.



Significance

- **Role as an Ecological Bridge** - As mesocarnivores, golden jackals act as vital biological conduits between terrestrial semi-arid ecosystems and marine coastal wetlands, facilitating nutrient transfer across ecotones.
- **Conservation Status** - IUCN Red List Status-*Least Concern*; protected under **Schedule I** of India's *Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972* (as amended in 2022).
- **Key Threats** - Coastal industrial development, port expansions, destruction of mangrove buffers, hyper-salinization, and potential exposure to domestic dog-borne pathogens (such as Canine Distemper Virus and Rabies) along coastal settlements.
- **Implications for Mangrove Management** - Emphasizes that coastal mangrove restoration programs must account for terrestrial and semi-aquatic mammalian carnivores, rather than viewing mangroves solely as marine/fisheries nurseries or avian habitats.

Reference

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