Hawksbill Turtle

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

Why in News?

A juvenile hawksbill turtle stranded on the Tamil Nadu coast was rehabilitated for over two months and released in the Gulf of Mannar.

- It is a ***small to medium-sized marine reptile*** easily recognized by its narrow, pointed beak resembling that of a bird of prey and its strikingly beautiful, patterned shell.
- **Common Name –** Hawksbill Turtle.
- **Scientific Name –** Eretmochelys imbricata.
- **Genus –** Eretmochelys.
- **Kingdom –** Animalia.
- **Family –** Cheloniidae.
- **Habitat –** Tropical coral reefs and seagrass beds.
- Strongly associated with **coral reef ecosystems** and shallow coastal waters.
- **Distribution –** Tropical and subtropical oceans across the Atlantic, Pacific, and **Indian Oceans.**
    - **In India** - They are found in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, and occasionally near the Gulf of Mannar.
- **Morphology –**
    - Medium-sized marine turtle.
    - **Beak –** Narrow (Hawk-like shape).
    - **Carapace –** Overlapping serrated scutes (tortoiseshell pattern) only sea turtle species with a truly "imbricate" or overlapping shell pattern.
    - **Weight –** 45–70 kg as adults.
    - **Shell lengths –** 60–90 cm.



- **Diet – Spongivorous –** Primarily sponges, algae, seagrass, and small invertebrates.
- **Conservation Status –**
  - **IUCN Red List –** Critically Endangered.
  - **CITES –** Appendix I (trade strictly prohibited).
  - **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (India) –** Schedule I.
- **Threats –** Entanglement in fishing gear, illegal trade for tortoise-shell, coral reef degradation, and climate change affecting nesting beaches together pose severe threats to the survival of hawksbill turtles.

Reference

The Hindu | Hawksbill Turtle

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