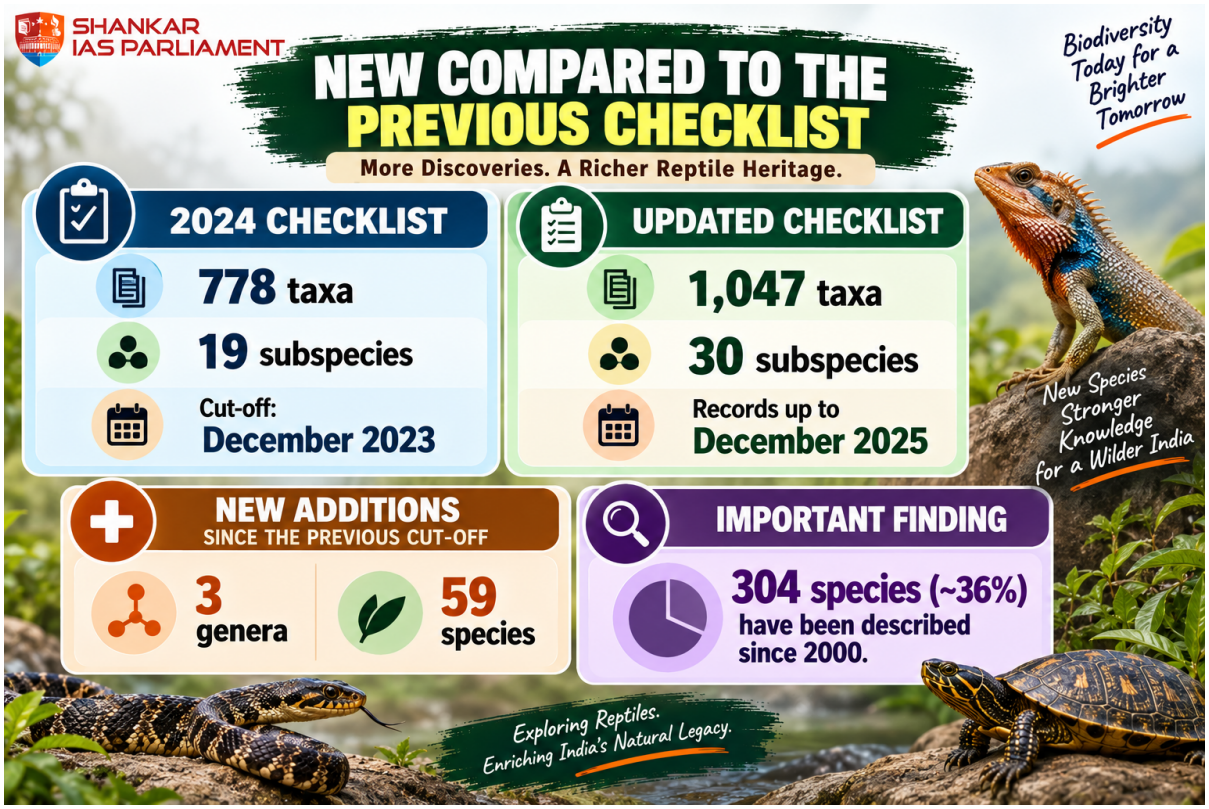
Indian Reptile Diversity & Scientific Names

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

Why in News?

A recent study published in Zootaxa provides an updated checklist and a comprehensive analysis of the scientific nomenclature of Indian reptiles.

- **New study –** The checklist encompasses **267 years of zoological records**, spanning from **1758 to December 2025**.
- India currently possesses 1,047 recognized reptile taxa, comprising the following:
  - 839 species
  - 30 subspecies
  - 178 genera
- This study is significant as it investigates the etymology, specifically the **origin and meaning, of Indian reptile names**.



1758: The beginning of modern zoological nomenclature

• The publication of the **10th edition of *Systema Naturae*** by **Carl Linnaeus** is widely recognized as the origin of modern zoological nomenclature.
• **Carl Linnaeus**
  - Swedish naturalist
  - He developed the foundation of modern biological classification.
  - He is also associated with the development of **binomial nomenclature**.

Binomial Nomenclature

• A scientific name generally consists of two components: **Genus and species**
• For example: **Ophiophagus hannah**
  - *Ophiophagus* refers to the genus.
  - *Hannah denotes the species epithet.*

*A **toponym** refers to a name that originates from a specific geographical location.*

*An **eponym** denotes a name that is derived from an individual.*

- **Local Indian Languages in Scientific Nomenclature –** Scientific nomenclature is not exclusively based on Latin or Greek origins.
- The study identified instances where scientific names have origins in local Indian languages, specifically in:

    - 19 genera
    - 34 species
- Examples
- **Naja**
    - Genus representing cobras.
    - The name is derived from the Sinhala term "naya," which means cobra.
- **Daboia**
    - This genus is believed to have a Hindi origin.
    - It is associated with the Hindi word 'dabohiya,' which can be interpreted as:
        - "that lies hidden"
        - "the lurker"
- **Chitra**
    - The term is derived from the Sanskrit word "chitra."
    - It means variegated or multicoloured.
    - The term refers to colour patterns.
- **Batagur kachuga**
    - The term 'kachuga' is derived from the Hindi word 'kachua'.
    - It means turtle.
- **Ahaetulla laudankia**
    - The name is derived from the vernacular term used in Odia.
    - This is associated with the snake's resemblance to dried stems of the following plants:
        - bottle gourd
        - lau

Reference

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