

Mega Species Myopia

What is the issue?

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- So many other small animals are on the verge of extinction.
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- This is due to the flaw in our conservation efforts called, “mega species myopia”.
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What is the present condition?

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- The hog deer were the principal food of the tiger in the grasslands of Corbett National Park in the sixties.
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- There was an abundance of them.
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- Now there may be just 20 of them in Corbett.
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- Great Indian Bustard is the State bird of Rajasthan.
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- It is one of the rarest species and undoubtedly one of the most endangered.
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- They are endemic to Jaisalmer and Pokhran, its habitat was severely damaged by the nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998.
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- The mouse deer can be found in the Sal forests of south India, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal.
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- They raise their young in the hollow of the fallen Sal, but unfortunately these trees are used as fuel wood, endangering their survival.
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- The pangolin is endangered due to supposed medicinal value of their scales and the meat demand in China.
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- Similarly, so many other small animals are on the verge of extinction.

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What is “mega species myopia”?

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- When a tiger dies in a national park, it makes it to the front pages of newspapers.

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- Steps are taken to avert another tiger death.

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- There is similar for death and destruction of habitats of other large mammals like elephants, rhinos, leopards and snow leopards.

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- However, similar concern is not shown for several smaller species like Great Indian Bustard, the house sparrow, the shy Indian pangolin, the caracal, etc.

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- Such an attitude is called “mega species myopia”.

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Why too much focus is on big animals?

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- Protecting big animals like, the tiger, leads to protecting an entire ecosystem.

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- They attract tourists.

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- Much of an outrage is shown immediately by animals in case of threat to these animals due to their popularity.

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Why should other species be protected?

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- Unless similar support is extended to the prey base of bigger animals the ecosystems might collapse.

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- The big cat only dominates the high grasslands.
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- So other ecosystems like the dry grasslands, the mountains might be left unprotected.
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What should be done?

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- We have the expertise to save these small species but lack the political will.
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- It is time we gave priority to animals on the basis of the threat perception to them.
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Source: The Hindu

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