Narwhals (Unicorn of Sea)

Why in News?

Researchers from the Florida University, Canada's Department of Fisheries & Oceans, in partnership with Inuit communities of Canada used drones to provide new insights into narwhal behaviour.

- It is a medium-sized ***odontocete or toothed whale***.
- It is different from all other toothed whales in that it has *no teeth in its mouth*.
    - Scientific name - Monodon Monoceros (one tooth, one horn).
- **Nativity** – It is found *only in Arctic waters*, spend their lives in the Arctic waters of Canada, Greenland, Norway and Russia.
- **Habitat** – Most narwhals winter for up to 5 months under sea ice in the Baffin Bay-Davis Strait area.
- **Coloration** – They change color as they age.
    - Newborns are a blue-gray
    - Juveniles are blue-black
    - Adults are a mottled gray.
    - Old narwhals are nearly all white

*Narwhales coloration contributed to their name **"corpse whale"**, refers to how their skin colour resembles that of a drowned sailor.*

- **Diet** – They *change their diets seasonally*, feeding intensely in the winter and eating little during the ice-free summer season.
- **Tusks** – Some have up to 2 tusks, while others have none.
- The spiralled tusk juts from the head and can grow as long at 10 feet.
    - **Males** – They have a single long, straight tooth (or tusk) that *protrudes 2 to 3 meters* out of the upper left jaw.
    - **Females** – They *almost never have a tusk*.



- **Usage of tusks** – Used to investigate, manipulate and influence the behavior of Arctic char, a prey.
- **Tusking behaviour** – A situation where *2 or more of them simultaneously raise* their tusks almost vertically out of the water, crossing them in what may be a ritualistic behaviour.
- It is to assess a potential opponent's qualities or to display those qualities to potential mates.
- **Threats** – Oil and gas development and climate change pose threats to narwhals.
- **Conservation status**
    - IUCN – Least Concerned

References

1. Down To Earth| Study on Narwhals usage of their Tusks
2. WWF| Narwhals are Unicorns of Sea

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