New sand boa species

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

Why in News?

A new herpetological study has reported the first confirmed record of the Sistan sand boa (Eryx sistanensis) in India.

- It is a ***small, non-venomous, burrowing snake***.
- **Habitat -** Most verified records of the snake place it in *farmlands, scrublands, and compact sandy soils* located close to human habitations.
- **Distribution -** Researchers documented 3 live individuals from the northern Thar Desert in Rajasthan.
- Previously known to inhabit parts of Iran and Pakistan, this discovery officially adds a 4th sand boa species to India's native reptile database.
- **4 distinct sand boa species**
  - Red sand boa (*Eryx johnii*)
  - Rough-scaled sand boa (*Eryx conicus*)
  - Whitaker's boa (*Eryx whitakeri*)
  - **Sistan sand boa (*Eryx sistanensis*)** — *New Addition*
- **Key Characteristics**
  - **Persistent Banding -** It can be clearly distinguished from the common red sand boa by its persistent dark, sooty body bands and a tail that gradually tapers toward the tip.
  - Unlike red sand boas, which lose their distinct body bands as they mature into adults, the Sistan sand boa retains these markings throughout its entire lifespan.
  - **Coloration -** Juveniles are typically buff-colored, while sub-adults and fully grown adults exhibit a tan to tan-brown coloration.
  - **Behavioral Traits -** The species is ***notoriously docile***, exhibits a high tolerance to ambient temperature variations, and has low metabolic maintenance requirements.

- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN Red List -** Not yet evaluated (NE).
  - **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (India)-** Listed under **Schedule II**, granting it high legal protection against hunting, poaching, and commercial trade.
- **Threats**
  - Illegal Wildlife Trade and Exploitation.
  - Ill-Advised Rescues and Ecological Dislocation.
  - Expatriate Herping Tourism and Pet Markets.

Reference

Mongabay | New sand boa species

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