Peacock Tarantula

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

Why in News?

The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department has started a conservation status survey for the unique and rare Peacock Tarantula in the Nagarjunasagar Srisailam Tiger Reserve (NSTR).

- **Scientific Name** – Poecilotheria metallica, the only blue color *spider species* of this genus.
- **Common Name** – It is also called the Gooty Sapphire or Metallic Tarantula.
- **Family** – Theraphosidae
- **Habitat** – It is an *arboreal spider*, meaning it lives in mature trees, hiding in crevices and holes in old deciduous forests.
- **Distribution** – It is found only in a small patch of deciduous forest in *Andhra Pradesh (endemic),* limited to less than 100 square kilometres in the Eastern Ghats.
- **Discovery** – First recorded in 1898, and later rediscovered in places like the Seshachalam hills.

Key Features

- **Size** – Adult spiders belonging to the species can reach about 15–20 cm in leg span.
- **Appearance** – It is known for its beautiful *metallic blue colour* and intricate yellow and white patterns covering its body.



- **Behaviour** – It is skittish and nocturnal, preferring to flee or hide unless provoked, where it may adopt a defensive posture.
- **Diet** – It preys on insects, small reptiles, and other arthropods.
- **Predator type** – The tarantula is also called an *ambush predator* that waits for insects to pass by and gets the jump on them to complete its hunt.
- **Ecological role** – The loss of mature trees not only reduces shelter but also affects the broader microhabitats that sustain the tarantula's prey.
- Because the spider depends on mature, old-growth trees, even small changes in the forest can harm its survival.
- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN** - Critically Endangered
- **Population** – The spider's exact population size is not well known, but experts believe it is significantly declining.
- **Threats** – Habitat loss due to logging, firewood collection, and forest degradation, & Illegal collection for the international pet trade.

References

1. The Hindu | Peacock Tarantula in spotlight after Pawan Kalyan post
2. India Today | An Old World rare blue spider catches attention in Andhra



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