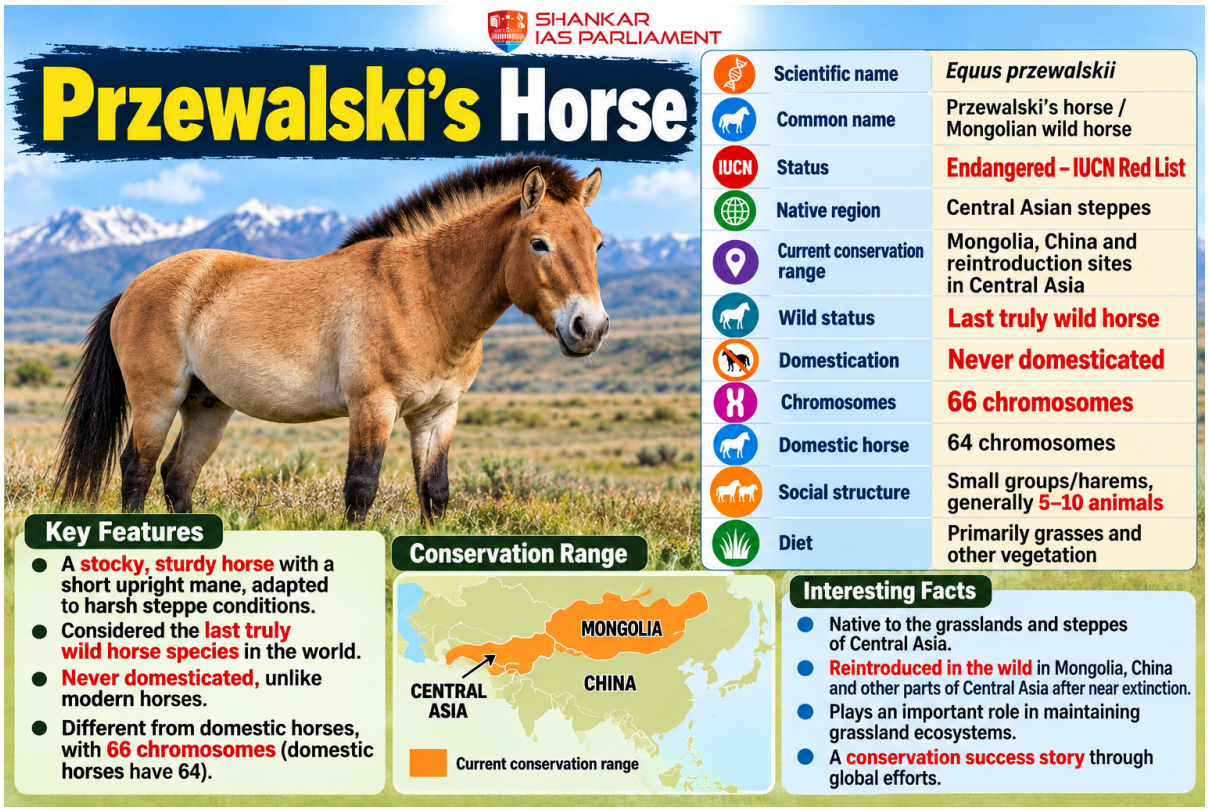
Przewalski's Horse

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

Why in News?

Recently, 2 Przewalski's horse foals were born in the steppe region of Kazakhstan.

- These foals are considered the **1st Przewalski's horses** to be born in Kazakhstan's grasslands in almost 2 centuries.
- It represents a significant milestone in the ongoing **rewilding and ecological restoration efforts within Kazakhstan's steppe ecosystems**.



> ***"Last Truly Wild Horse"*** *refers to the unique status of Przewalski's horse.*

- Przewalski's horse has **never undergone domestication**.
- This characteristic distinguishes Przewalski's horse from **feral horses,** such as **mustangs**, which are descendants of domesticated horses that have reverted to a wild state.
- It represents a **distinct lineage within the equine family**.

Historical Decline

- The species was once widely distributed across the **Central Asian plains**.
- Major threats to the species included:
    - Hunting,
    - Agricultural expansion,
    - Habitat loss,
    - And competition with livestock.
- The last known wild individual was observed in **1969 in the Gobi Desert**.
- The species persisted through populations maintained in **European zoos** and captive-breeding programs.

Reintroduction in Kazakhstan

- **Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative**
- **Began in – 2005**.
- **Aim –** To restore approximately 75,000 square kilometers of degraded **steppe and semi-desert**.
- The project addresses degradation resulting from the following factors:
    - Overgrazing
    - Unsustainable farming
    - Climate change
- It is recognized as a **UN World Restoration Flagship**.

Przewalski's Horse Reintroduction

- Since **2024**, **22 Przewalski's horses** have been transferred from European zoos to Kazakhstan.
- The **Alibi Reintroduction Centre** serves as the main facility for this effort.
- The animals are gradually acclimated to survive in natural conditions.

Ecological Significance

As a large herbivore, the Przewalski's horse plays a critical role in grassland ecosystems.

- **Grazing –** It regulates vegetation growth and may reduce the risk of wildfires.
- **Movement of their hooves –** It disturbs and loosens the topsoil, promoting soil aeration.
- **Dung –** It contributes essential nutrients to the soil.
- **Grazing and movement –** It helps to sustain healthy grassland ecosystems.
- Therefore, the reintroduction of Przewalski's horses supports broader ecosystem restoration rather than solely focusing on species recovery.

Conservation Target

- Kazakhstan has set a target to establish a population of **40 Przewalski's horses by 2029**.
- **Long-term objective**
    - To establish a stable, free-ranging population.

- To reduce dependence on human intervention.

Reference

Down to Earth | Przewalski's Horse

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering