

Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Conservation

Why in News?

The red-crowned roofed turtle is clinging to survival in a shrinking sanctuary.

- It is one of the **3 large freshwater species** in the genus *Batagur* found in India.
- **Scientific Name** - *Batagur kachuga*.
- It is **endemic to North India**.
- It is **one of the most endangered freshwater turtle species** in the world.
- **Habitat** - Large, flowing river channels with high sandbanks and rocky outcrops; prefers deep pools, riffles, and elevated sandy nesting banks.
- **Distribution**
 - **Global level** - Historically distributed across the Ganga River basin; marginal habitat in Bangladesh and Nepal with no confirmed wild populations outside India.
 - **In India** - The **National Chambal Sanctuary** (Chambal River) at the tri-junction of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh remains the only area with a substantial wild population.
- **Sexual Dimorphism** - Males are significantly smaller than females, reaching only about half their length.
- **Striking Appearance** - During the breeding season, adult males develop vivid red, yellow, white, and blue markings on their faces and necks to attract mates and Intraspecific Communication.
- They feature a reddish-orange head with a distinctive black crown.



- **Physical Features -**

- **Carapace (Upper Shell)** - Greenish-brown with yellow markings; it is strongly "keeled" (ridged), particularly in younger individuals.
- **Plastron (Lower Shell)** - Yellow with black patterns.

- **Nesting - Season** - March.

- Unlike marine arribada events, the species nesting is solitary or in small aggregations tied to suitable sandbanks.

- **Diet** - Predominantly *herbivorous*, feeding on aquatic vegetation. It contributes to regulation of aquatic plants and nutrient cycling.

- **Bio Indicator Species** - Population trends of this turtle serve as indicators of river health and freshwater ecosystem integrity.

- **Conservation Status**

- **IUCN** - Critically Endangered.
- **CITES** - Appendix I.
- **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972** - Schedule I.

- **Major Threats - Intensive hunting** of adults and collection of eggs; illegal trade.

- **Habitat degradation** from sand mining, river channel modification, and erratic water releases by dams.

- **Fatal entanglement** in fishing nets and unsustainable fishing practices.

- **Loss and disturbance of nesting banks** due to agriculture and development.

- **Low population size and fragmented distribution** increasing extinction risk.

Reference

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