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

Down to earth | Turning Turtle



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