Sea Lions

Prelims – *Current events of national and international importance| General issues on Environmental ecology, Bio-diversity.*

Mains (GS III) – *Conservation.*

Why in News?

Recently, a toxic algae bloom on Southern California's coast sickened dozens of sea lions and caused them to become aggressive.

- **Sea lions** – They are ***large marine mammals*** belonging to the clad *Pinnipeds*.

  Pinnipeds *are a group of aquatic, fin-footed mammals that include seals, sea lions, and walruses.*

- **Scientific name –** *Otariinae*, means “little ear” in Greek, refers to their small external ear flaps.
- **Species of sea lion**
  - Australian sea lion
  - Galapagos sea lion
  - New Zealand sea lion
  - Steller sea lion
  - South American sea lion
  - Californian sea lion
- **Distribution** – Pacific Ocean, Bering Sea to southern South America, Falkland Islands in the southern Atlantic Ocean, and others living around Australia and New Zealand.
- **Habitat** – They live on both land and the sea, resting and mating on rocky islands, bays, and coastal beaches.
- **Morphology** – They have a blunt snout, small tail, excellent eyesight, coarse hair and small external (outside) ears with fur seals.
- Their colour ranges from golden brown to dark brown but often looks darker when wet.



- **Characteristics –** They are ***generally social, non-aggressive animals*** and cool off in the ocean during warm weather.
- **Diet** – Feed on fish and large animals like great white sharks, hammerhead sharks, blue sharks, and killer whales.
- **Major threat - Toxic algal blooms** – It is commonly referred to as ***red tides***.
- These blooms produce ***domoic acid***, a neurological toxin that makes its way up the food chain and into the diets of marine animals.

Domoic acid (DA) *is primarily produced by specific diatoms in the genus Pseudo-nitzschia.*

- When sea lions consume these marine animals, the neurotoxin affects their neurological functions.
- They get the effects of Difficulty breathing, seizures, and stargazing, in which sea lions unnaturally tilt their heads backwards with closed eyes.
- They act erratically, even aggressively, resulting in attacks on swimmers and surfers.

The Marine Mammal Care Center in Los Angeles facing an unprecedented crisis and treating 240 animals so far in 2024.

- **Conservation status**
  - **IUCN –** Endangered.

References

1. The Times of India| Toxic Algal Blooms threat Sea Lions
2. IFAW| Sea lions



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