Small Cats and its Significance

Why in news?

Recently, Global Tiger Forum (GTF) has launched small wild cats conservation programme in India for the protection of small cats.

To know more about big cats, click here

What are small cats?

- **Evolution** -The evolution of small wild cats started some 35 to 28.5 million years ago.
- **Family** -Small wild cats are member of the cat family (Felidae).
- **Uniqueness** -Small cats are distinguished from the big cats by their ossified hyoid bones.
- The ossification of bones linked to the sound box permits small cats only to “purr” and not roar like their larger relative.
- **Weight** -Small in size with a maximum weight of 25 kg.
- **Gestation period** - 70 to 90 days.
- **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** -The IUCN red listing for India’s small cat species ranges from “least concerned” to “near threatened”.
- **Distribution** -Globally 41 species of small wild cats are recognized and 11 of these are from India.

11 species of small wild cats in India	
Clouded leopard Leopard cat Rusty-spotted cat Asian golden cat Asiatic wild cat	Eurasian lynx Fishing cat Jungle cat Caracal Marbled cat Pallas’s cat (manul)

What is the significance of small cats?

- **Mid position** -In the ecological food web, mid position makes them closer to both plants as well as top predators.
- **Transfer -** Ex-situ to in-situ transfer is easy and effective.
- **Indicators** -Great surrogate indicators of biodiversity.
- **Sentinels of global change** -Recognized as sentinels of global change.
- **Adaptations** - Show all adaptations typical to all felids except clouded leopard which has acrobatic capability for an arboreal mode of life.
- **Unique role** -Their role in ecosystem is equal to apex predator.

- **Ecologically diversity** -Helps in protecting ecological diversity.
- **Habitats and niches** -Have more species diversity as it occupies varied habitats and niches.
- **Stressors** -The short lifespan, shorter gestation and high reproductive rates of small cats respond readily to stressors operating in a habitat.
- **Managerial interventions** -Small cats along with other mesopredators act as a zoom lens for fine-scale managerial interventions.

What factors affect the population of small cats?

- Loss of habitation
- Increasing poaching
- Revenge killing
- Lack of protection by government
- Lack of regulation bodies

What measures were taken for the conservation of small cats?

- **Landscape approach** -Engagement with all stakeholders suck as government as well as non-governmental operating in the envisioned landscape to protect small cats.
- This approach needs mutually-gainful reciprocal commitments based on a master plan.
- This approach will bring in gains to both people and the ecosystem through a centrifugal approach.

Quick facts

Global Tiger Forum (GTF)

- The GTF was formed in 1993 on recommendations from an international symposium on Tiger Conservation in New Delhi.
- It is an international intergovernmental body exclusively set up for the conservation of tigers.
- Out of the 13 tiger range countries, ***7 are currently members*** of GTF which are Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Vietnam besides non-tiger range country U.K.
- The secretariat is based in ***New Delhi, India.***

References

1. The Indian Express | Small Cats
2. Wild Cat Family | Picture



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