Smew

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

Why in News?

Recently, the 7th waterbird census at Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve recorded the first-ever sighting of the smew, raising concerns about climate-driven range shifts.

- **Scientific Name – *Mergellus albellus***
- It is commonly known as the **Eurasian Diving Duck.**
- **Family –** *Anatidae* (duck, goose and swan family).
- **Habitat –** Freshwater wetlands, lakes, slow-moving rivers, floodplain beels.
- It prefers fish-rich, sheltered waters during winter.
- **Distribution –** Eurasian taiga (northern Europe & Siberia) and a winter migrant to parts of Europe and Asia.
    - **In India –** A rare winter visitor with ***sporadic sightings in northern and central wetlands*** such as Haiderpur (Uttar Pradesh) and Corbett.
- **Key Identification –** Small, striking diving duck.
    - **Male –** Distinct black mask on a white body (“white nun” appearance).
    - **Female –** Mottled grey-brown body with chestnut head and white throat.
- **Behaviour & Diet –** Usually seen in small flocks.
- Feeds mainly on small fish and aquatic invertebrates.
- **Breeding** -Breeds in taiga forest regions with tree cavities.
- **Conservation Status –**
    - **IUCN –** Least Concern
- **Threats –** Habitat loss and wetland degradation, climate-driven range shifts, hunting pressure, and oil pollution.

7th Kaziranga Waterbird Census

- **Survey –** Spanned 166 wetlands across 10 ranges of the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve.
- **Abundant species –** The *bar-headed goose, northern pintail, and lesser whistling duck.*
- **Ecological Significance –** Reaffirms Kaziranga as a critical wintering ground on the Central Asian Flyway

Ramsar Criterion 5 stipulates that a wetland is considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.

- **Top Wetlands By Population (Count)** –
  - Rowmari Beel (Laokhowa) – 15,661
  - Donduwa Beel – 14,469
  - Katakhal – 4,979
  - Sohola – 3,612
  - Khalihamari – 3,463
- **Top Wetlands By Diversity (Species)** –
  - Rowmari Beel – 77 species
  - Donduwa Beel – 71 species
  - Sohola – 69 species
  - Kawoimari-Bhoisamari-Diffulo – 57 species
  - Ververy – 53 species

References

1. TH | Smew Sighting in Kaziranga Raises Climate Concern
2. ToI | Smew

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