

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](#)