Smooth-coated Otter

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

Why in News?

A rare sighting of an otter was recently recorded in the Adyar River at Chennai's Tholkappia Poonga eco-park.

- **Smooth-coated otter –** It is a ***sleek, medium-sized otter*** with short limbs, webbed paws, and a flattened tail.
- **Scientific name –** Lutrogale perspicillata.
- **Habitat –** Found in freshwater-rich areas such as rivers, wetlands, lakes, swamps, and rice paddies.
- Prefer shallow and placid waters.
- Though found near coastal saltwater, they require nearby freshwater sources.
- **Distribution –** It is found across India from the Himalayas to southern India. Also, found in the Western Ghats and northeast India, along with other otter species.
- ***India is home to 3 types of otters*** out of the 13 species of otters found worldwide.
    - Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*);
    - Smooth-coated Otter *(Lutra perspicillata*)
    - Small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinereus*).
- **Characteristics –** They are strong swimmers and fish specialists.
- Hunt in groups and often move in a V-formation while fishing.
- **Diet –** They mainly feed on fish.
- **Behavior –** They are shy and sensitive, hence difficult to spot.
- Live in family groups; usually seen in groups of 3 to 15 individuals.
- **Conservation Status –**
    - **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972** – Schedule I.
    - **IUCN Red List** -Vulnerable.
- **Threats –** Loss of wetland habitats due to large infrastructure projects.
- Conversion of wetlands for agriculture and settlements.

- Reduction in fish stocks.
- Water pollution, poaching, and contamination by pesticides.
- **Ecological importance –** Apex predator in riverine ecosystems.
- Helps regulate populations of other aquatic species.
- Presence ***indicates clean rivers*** free from heavy pollution.



References

1. The Hindu | Smooth-coated Otter in Adyar River
2. WWWIndia | Smooth-coated Otter

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