

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](#)