The Good and Bad of Indian Zoos

Why in news?

Jaguars, hybrid lions, orangutans, etc. will soon be displayed at one of the world's biggest zoos in Gujarat's Jamnagar city.

Why are zoos so significant?

> *The Marble Palace Zoo established in 1854 in Kolkata is the country's oldest zoo.*

- A zoo is a place where animals live in captivity and are put on display for people to view.
- The word "zoo" is short for "**zoological park**."
- The internationally accepted objectives for zoos and captive animal breeding are
    1. Conservation (programmes that assist the survival of wild populations)
    2. Education (to increase the level of knowledge of the visitors about the animals)
    3. Research (on aspects that are often very difficult or even impossible to conduct in the wild)
    4. Recreation (to give visitors opportunities to observe wild animals up close)
- India amended the Wild Life Protection Act in 1991 to establish the **Central Zoo Authority** as a statutory body of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
- Zoos are regulated as per the provisions of **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972** and are guided by the **National Zoo Policy, 1992.**

What is the significance of zoos?

- **Ex-situ Conservation** - Zoos play a crucial role in the conservation of endangered and threatened species.
- The Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park in Darjeeling, the country's largest high-altitude zoo, was judged India's best zoo by the CZA in 2022 for its conservation breeding programmes for red panda.
- **Centres of learning -** Zoos play an increasingly important role as centres of learning, entertainment and inspiration.
- Example - Nandankanan in Odisha, the Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Chennai are important centres for environmental education.
- A 'zoo educator' is often listed as an option in wildlife careers.
- **Future nature guardians** - Our zoos have free guided tours and programmes.
- Zoos are helping to create a battalion of our future nature guardians, an act of self-perseveration.

- **Recreation** - Zoos provide an opportunity for people to experience a green, quiet place that are an acknowledged tonic for mental health.
- **Conflict mitigation** - Behaviour and biological studies at zoos, such as the Mysore Zoo, help guide conservation policies for the animal in the wild.
- **Tourism** - India's 149 recognised zoos attract millions of visitors every year.

What are the issues with zoos?

- **Stereotypic behaviour** - A study of tigers and leopards in 6 Indian zoos found that 83% of the tigers and 62% of leopards showed stereotypic behaviour — an indication of stress.
- **Following the regulations** - Zoos often do not follow CZA guidelines, undermining the welfare of free-ranging animals such as carnivores.
- **Spread of diseases** - Zoos are increasingly being recognised as places from where zoonotic diseases could spread.

What is the need of the hour?

- **Collection plan** - The CZA and the Wildlife Institute of India should develop a collection plan, or an analysis of their animal collection in order to guide acquisitions and dispositions.
- **Choosing animals** - Species should be chosen based on how they will contribute to the goals of each zoo and which animals they are able to care for.
- Zoos cannot be a random collection of species with unplanned breeding.
- **Knowledge sharing** - Zoos can operate at eco-regional, State, national as well as international levels to enable the sharing of technical expertise.
- **Written policies** - Zoos should have written policies to govern all aspects of the animals.

Quick Facts

The Central Zoo Authority (CZA)

- **Structure** - The CZA is a **statutory body** established by amending the Wild Life Protection Act to regulate zoos across the country.
- It is chaired by the **Environment Minister** and consists of 10 members and a Secretary.
- **Functions** - It can recognize or derecognize a zoo.
- It provides technical and financial assistance to such zoos which have the potential to attain the desired standard in animal management.
- The CZA regulates the exchange of animals of endangered category listed under Schedule- I and II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 among zoos nationally and internationally.

References

1. The Hindu | Indian zoos - seeds of wildlife conservation
2. The Hindu | Indian zoos - just a stamp collection?
3. The Hindu | Indian zoos - the good, bad and ugly
4. CZA | The Central Zoo Authority (CZA)

