The State of India's Birds 2020 (SoIB)

Why in News?

The State of India's Birds 2020 (SoIB), a new scientific report on bird species was released recently.

What is the significance of this report?

- It is the **first such assessment** of long-term trend, current trend, distribution range size and overall conservation status of 867 birds.
    a. Adequate data on how birds fared over a period of over 25 years (long-term trend) are available only for 261 species.
    b. Current annual trends are calculated over a five-year period.
- This report jointly released by **10 organisations** is based on the observations contributed by the birdwatchers on eBird platform.

What are some findings?

- This assessment raises the alarm that several birds face a growing threat from loss of habitat due to human activity, widespread presence of toxins, hunting and trapping for the pet trade.
- It warned that diminishing population sizes of many birds because of one factor brings them closer to extinction because of the accelerated effects of others.
- For every bird species that was found to be increasing in numbers over the long term, 11 have suffered losses, some catastrophically.
- Of 101 species categorised as being of **High Conservation Concern**, endemics such as the Rufous-fronted Prinia, Nilgiri Pipit and Indian vulture were confirmed as suffering current decline.
- All these species except 13 had a restricted or highly restricted range, indicating greater vulnerability to man-made threats.

On what basis, the health of the avifauna is looked on?

- The health of avifauna is looked at based on scientific groupings such as raptors (birds of prey), habitat, diet, migratory status and endemicity (exclusively found in an area).
- The analysis concludes that **raptors overall are in decline**, with some 'open country' species such as the eagle suffering the most.

- Migratory shorebirds, along with gulls and terns, seem to have declined the most among water birds.
- Within India, the losses suffered by resident water birds, particularly in the past five years, calls for detailed investigation, it adds.
- From a **dietary viewpoint**,
    1. Meat-eater birds' populations have fallen by half,
    2. Birds depend on insects exclusively have also suffered over the long term.
    3. There has been some stabilisation for omnivores, seed and fruit eaters in recent years.
- **Habitat impacts** have decimated 'specialist' birds, which need specific environmental conditions to survive, particularly those dependent on forests.
- This is followed by declines in numbers of grassland, scrubland and wetland species calling for urgent investigation into the causes.

What are some suggestions in the report?

- Forward-looking actions suggested by the report include an **update to the IUCN Red List** of endangered species using the SoIB.
- There should be a **collaborative research** by scientists and citizens aided by policy with special emphasis on removing gaps in data.
- An urgent **emphasis on habitats** of species of high concern, notably grasslands, scrublands, wetlands and the Western Ghats.

What is the way forward?

- Resolute steps to protect forests and other habitats will confer multiple benefits, protecting other myriad species too.
- It is essential to revive the Great Indian Bustard, now pushed to precariously low numbers.
- Coursers and floricans need help with their delicate habitat.
- Bird diversity in India must be protected to improve the health of forests, wetlands, open country habitat and high mountains.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering