UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 30-12-2024

Fishing Cat

Why in News?

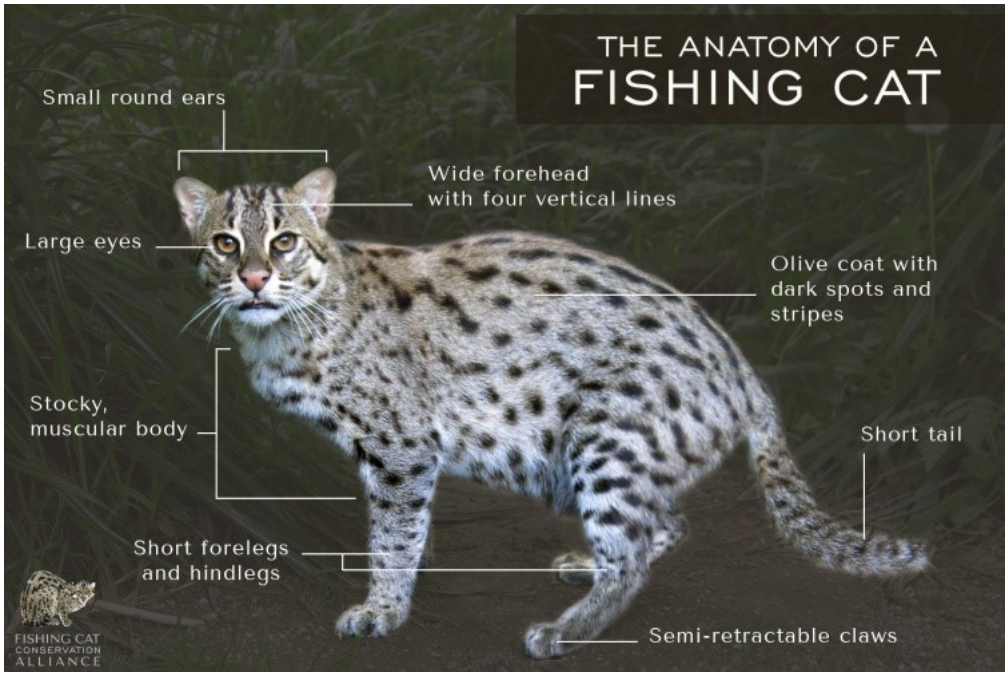
The 2nd fishing cat census is expected to be completed within a few weeks.

- **Fishing cat** – It is one of the *largest of the 28 species of small cats* and is about twice the size of a typical house cat.
    - **Scientific Name** – Prionailurus viverrinus.
- **Habitat –** Wetlands, cultivated grasslands and agricultural areas.
- **Global distribution** – Mainly in *Southeast Asia* comprising India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Mekong Delta of Vietnam and Thailand, Pakistan, East Cambodia and northern Himalayan foothills.
- **Distribution in India**
    - Mangrove forests of the Sundarbans
    - River valleys of Ganga & Brahmaputra along the Himalayan foothills
    - Western Ghats

*The **Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS)** which is India's 2nd largest mangroves, is home to larger number of fishing cat. It is part of the Godavari estuary, where the Coringa river confluences into the Bay of Bengal in the state of Andhra Pradesh.*

***Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary** in the Krishna estuarine forest area in Andhra Pradesh is another place where these endangered cat species live.*

- **Morphology** – Medium-sized, gray-brown with distinctive black spots, stocky legs, black lines run from the cat's forehead to its neck.
- Its cheeks are white with black marks, nose is pink while its lips, chin, belly and throat are white with gray spots.



- **Other features** – It is an *adept swimmer* and enters water frequently to dive and catch the fish.
- It is a *nocturnal* animal which preys on frogs, crustaceans, snakes, birds, and *scavenges on carcasses* of larger animals.
- It is capable of *breeding all-round the year.*
- **Uniqueness** – Its *muscular tail is shorter* than a domestic cat's and is ringed with 6 or 7 incomplete dark bands which are distinct from leopard.
- **Threats**
  - Destruction of wetlands
  - Human settlements
  - Pollution
  - Poached for its skin.
- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN** – Endangered.
  - **CITES** – Appendix II.
  - **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** – Schedule I.

Fishing Cat Collaring Project
• It is a *3 year collaring project*, to be completed by March/April 2025. • **Aim** – To study the species' home range, behavior, habitat ecology, feeding habits, and space use. • **Project** – Fishing cats will be captured and collared with lightweight equipment containing the Geographical Information System (GIS). • **Executed by** – Wildlife Institute of India (WII) at Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary. • **Funded by** – Yanam-based Vedanta Limited. • **Census** – As a part of this 1st fishing cat collaring project, fishing cat census is also carried out.

As per the 1st survey of fishing cats, the population of fishing cats was 115 in 2018 but the number has increased significantly over the past 5 years.

References

1. The Hindu| Fishing Cat Collaring Project
2. National Zoo| Distribution and Habitat of Fishing Cat
3. World Wildlife Fund| Threats and Conservation of Fishing Cat

Overseas Voters in Election

Why in News?

According to recent Election Commission data, there was a poor electoral participation of overseas Indian voters in 18th Lok Sabha polls in 2024.

- **Overseas voters** – Generally, they are *referred as NRI voters* but Election Commission of India describes them as overseas electors.
- NRI's are Indians living abroad for a variety of reasons and
- **Voting rights** - They are *eligible to vote in the Lok Sabha, Assembly and other direct elections*.
- They have to show their original passport as proof of their identity.

> *According to Election Commission of India, while eligible Indian citizens who enrol in electoral rolls are called **electors**, those who actually exercise their franchise are described as **voters**.*

Overseas Voters in 18th Lok Sabha Election

- **Increased registration** – Overseas Indians showed great enthusiasm in registering as electors, with nearly 1.2 lakh enrolling in the voter list.
- According to the data released by the Election Commission, as many as *1,19,374 registered* as overseas electors in 2024, with Kerala witnessing the highest registrations at 89,839.
- In 2019, as many as 99,844 had registered as overseas electors.
- **Minimal turnout** – *Only 2,958 overseas electors* flew down to India to participate in the largest democratic exercise in the world.
- **Higher participation** – 2,670 were from *Kerala* alone.
- **Zero turnout** - *Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu* among larger states and Assam, Bihar, Goa among smaller states.
- **Cause for lower turnout** – Travel costs, compulsions of employment overseas, and education, among other things.
- **Recommendations** – In 2020, the EC proposed to extend the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) facility, so far available only to service voters, to eligible overseas Indian voters as well.

> *In 2018, the 16th Lok Sabha passed a bill to allow proxy voting rights to eligible overseas Indians but it could not be brought to the Rajya Sabha.*

Reference

The Hindu| Reduced Voter Participation of Overseas Electors

Related News Articles - Voting Process in India | Postal Ballot Voting | Election Commission of India

Dhruv-NG (Next Generation)

Why in News?

Recently, the Pawan Hans Limited has secured a 10-year contract for Rs. 2,141 crore to deliver 4 Dhruv-NG helicopters to the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC).

Dhruv
• It is an Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH). • **Developed by** – Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) • It was initially designed with Germany's assistance. • **In service** – It was *1st flown in 1992* but entered service after certification in 2002. • **Type certified by** - For military operations - Centre for Military Airworthiness Certification (CEMILAC) - For civil operation - Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) • **4 military variants** - Dhruv Mk-I, Mk-II, Mk-III & Mk-IV. • *Over 335 military helicopters* are operational as on date and have logged over 3, 75,000 cumulative flight hours. • **Civilian version** – It has been *in service since 2003*.

- **Dhruv-NG (Next Generation)** – It is a multi-role, multi-mission helicopter.
- It is the ***civil variant of the Dhruv Mk III***, which is widely employed by Indian defense forces.
- **Developed by** – Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
- **Weight** – 5.5 tonne.
- **Powered by** – *2 indigenous Shakti engines* with Cat 'A' performance.
- **Specialty** – It is capable of *day and night operations*.
- It is also fitted with *AS4 (Applicability Statement)* compliant systems.
- It received a restricted type certificate from the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) in June 2023.
- **For ONGC operation** – This will be the *1st time the chopper will be deployed in offshore operations* like transporting staff to and from duty stations on oil and gas rigs.

***Pawan Hans** has been a key industry player in the Indian offshore industry, providing helicopter services to ONGC, British Gas, HOECL, Petro Gas, and others.*

- **Significance** - It is a "reliable and cost-effective product' for service provider Pawan Hans Limited.

These helicopters are scheduled to go into service in 2025, largely to meet Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) crew change requirements.

References

1. The Hindu| Dhruv-NG
2. Aviation Today| Implication of Dhruv-NG

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International Relations and Issues

Louisiana Purchase

• **Treaty between** – The United States and France in 1803.
• **Effect** – It added 828,000 square miles of land to the United States, nearly doubling its size

Agriculture

Piped Water Supply in Punjab

• Punjab has recently reached a significant milestone by ensuring *100% piped water supply to every rural* household.
• **As part of** – The central government's 'Har Ghar Jal' initiative.

Har Ghar Jal

• **Launched by** – Ministry of Jal Shakthi, in *2019*
• **Aim** - To provide *55 litres of tap water* to every rural household per capita per day regularly on long term basis *by 2024*.

Environment

Common murres (Uria aalge)

• These are sleek, powerful seabirds in the Alcidae family.
• **Distribution** – In colder circumpolar waters of the North Pacific and North Atlantic Oceans.
• **Morphology** – It have a streamlined black-and-white body built for swimming, and during the breeding season, their heads are entirely black.
• **Threats** – Marine heatwave decimates nearly 4 million of Alaska's common murre seabirds over a three-year period.

Security

Surya Kiran Exercise 2024

Indian Army contingent has left for Nepal to take part in the 18th Battalion Level Joint Military Exercise.
• It is *annual event* that alternates between India and Nepal.
• **Location** – In *Nepal* from December 2024, to January 2025.
• **Purpose** – To improve cooperation in several key areas, including jungle warfare, counter-terrorism operations in mountainous regions, and disaster relief efforts in line with the United Nations Charter.
• It will also prioritize enhancing readiness and medical training.

Science

Kaveri engine

• It is India's Indigenous Fighter Jet Engine.
• **Developed by** – Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE).
• **Initiative of** – Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
• It is now ready for real-world performance evaluations aboard a specialized flying test bed (FTB).

Foldscopes

• National Institute of Biotic Stress Management recently said that it has distributed 'foldscopes', *portable microscopes* to farmers in nearly 20 districts of Chhattisgarh.
• **Uses** – It aids in *pest and disease detection*, *soil quality assessment and water analysis*.
• It helps in in-situ diagnosis and digital cataloguing of plant-pathogenic fungi through foldscope microscopy.
• **Usage in Chhattisgarh** – Used to identify diseases such as powdery mildew, leaf blight, leaf spot and post-harvest diseases.

Miscellaneous

Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar

• **Instituted by** – Ministry of women and child development.
• **Categories** – It has 2 categories
• **Eligibility** - Awardees must be Indian citizens residing in India.
• **Bal Shakti Puraskar** - Awarded to children of 5 -18 age group for outstanding achievement in innovation, scholastic achievements, social service, arts and culture, bravery, or sports.
• **Bal Kalyan Puraskar** - To individuals or organisations that have made outstanding contributions in child development, child protection, or child welfare.

H-1B visa Programme

• **Role** – It allows US employers to hire immigrant workers in specialty occupations that require "a high level of skill" and "at least a bachelor's degree.
• **Duration** – It can be issued for a maximum of 6 years at a stretch.
• **Users** – Indians accounted for 72.3% (2.79 lakh of a total of 3.86 lakh) H-1B visa holders.

Demise of Jimmy Carter

The 39th president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, has died at the age of 100.
• **Nobel Peace Prize** – In 2002, for his contributions to global peace.
• **Camp David Accords** – It resolved longstanding conflicts between Israel and Egypt.

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