Westward migration of butterflies in southern India

Prelims: *Current events of National and International Importance| Environment*

Why in News?

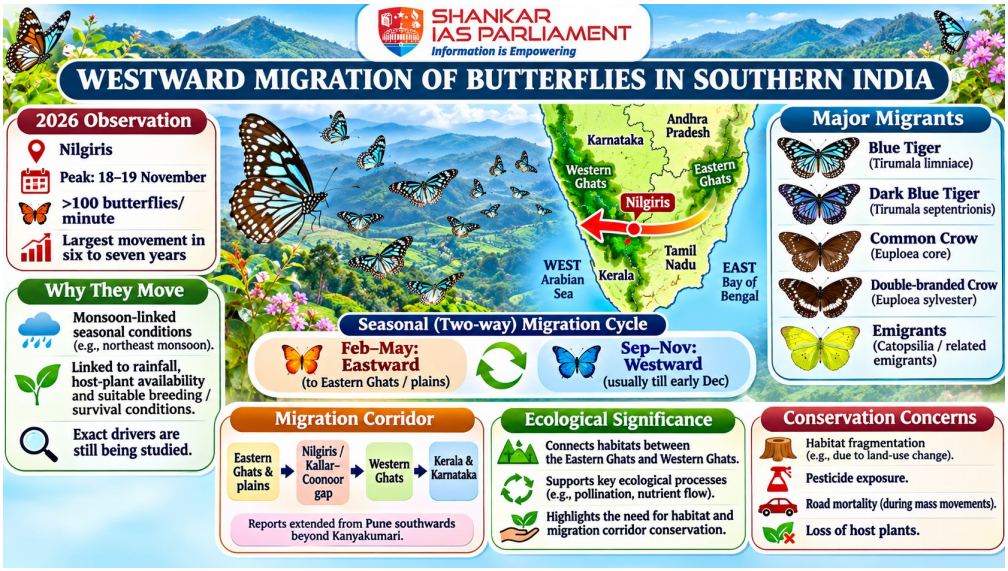
*A large-scale westward butterfly migration was observed in the **Nilgiris district** of Tamil Nadu in November 2026, peaking on November 18 and 19 with more than 100 butterflies per minute crossing the skies.*

Tracked from mid-September by volunteers from the Wynter-Blyth Association, the event was noted as the largest of its kind in the Nilgiris in six to seven years.

- **Species Involved–** Primarily brush-footed butterflies (Nymphalidae) and milkweed butterflies (Danainae), including **Blue Tigers**, **Dark Blue Tigers**, **Crows**, and **Emigrants** (Pieridae).
- **Route & Terrain–** Rather than a single narrow path, the butterflies move across a broad front spanning several kilometers.
- In the Nilgiris, they use valleys, knuckle ridges, and mountain passes—including the **Kallar-Coonoor gap**—moving toward Selas, Kolacombai, Mooparkadu, Geddai, and the Mukurthi highlands before heading onward toward Kerala and Karnataka.
- **Wider Footprint–** Sightings linked to the seasonal movement were reported as far north as Pune, south beyond Kanyakumari, and across to Sri Lanka.

Biannual Migration Pattern in Southern India

- **Westward Movement (September–November)–** Butterflies move from eastern areas and plains toward the Western Ghats, coinciding with the Northeast Monsoon.
- **Eastward Movement (February–May)–** Butterflies move eastward from the Western Ghats toward the Eastern Ghats ahead of the Southwest Monsoon.
- **Causes–** While monsoon rains and host-plant/resource availability are key factors, experts note that the exact triggers for the migration are still being studied.



Reference

[The Hindu| Westward migration of butterflies in southern India]

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