White-Bellied Heron

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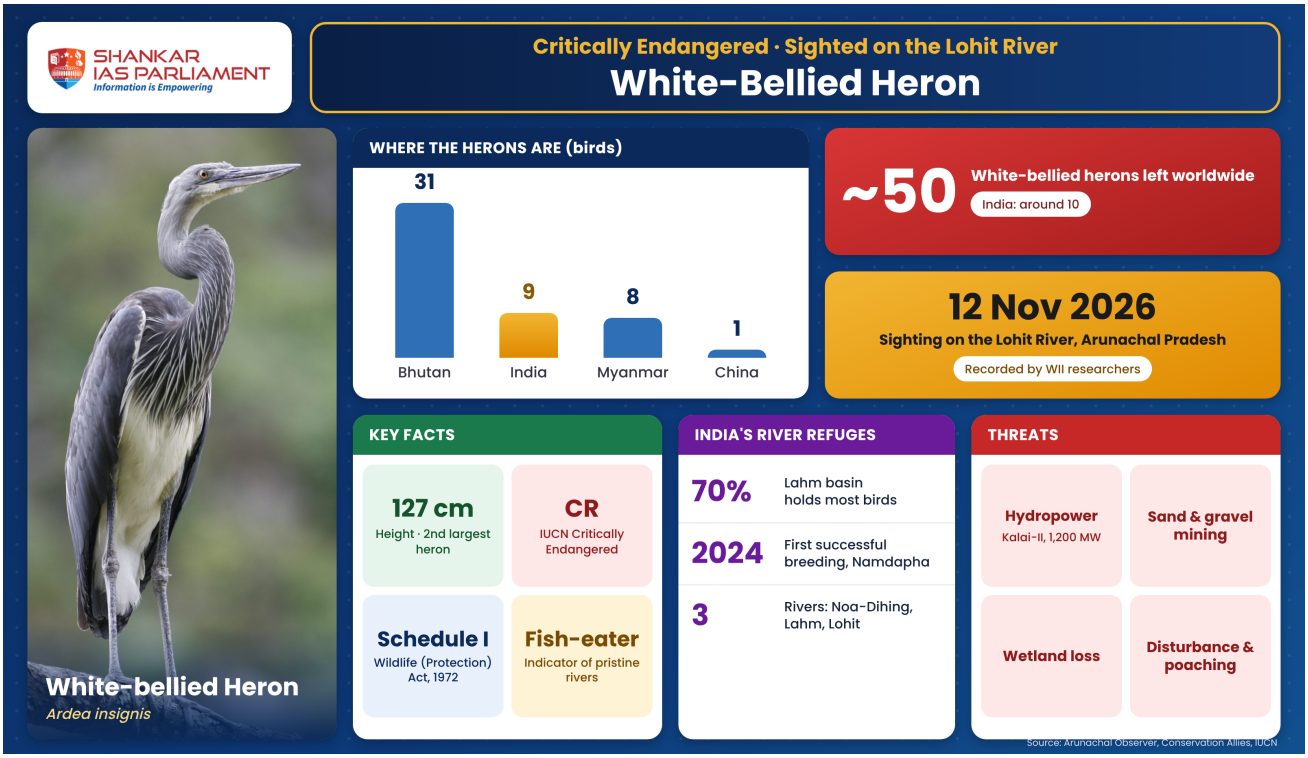
Why in News?

Researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) sighted the critically endangered White-Bellied Heron along the Lohit River in Arunachal Pradesh on November 12, 2026.

About White-Bellied Heron

- **Scientific name** – Ardea insignis.
- It is also called the Imperial Heron or Great White-bellied Heron.
- **Habitat** – Undisturbed rivers and wetlands in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas (North-East India, Bhutan and Myanmar).
- **Population & Distribution –** Globally, about 49 birds: Bhutan 31 (including 5 in captive care), India 9, Myanmar 8 and China 1.
- In India, around 10 individuals are estimated to remain in the wild, all of them in this Himalayan state.
- An estimated 6–10 birds are in the Noa-Dihing, Lahm and Lohit river basins; the Lahm basin holds about 70%.
- **Namdapha Tiger Reserve** – India's key refuge; the first documented successful breeding in India was recorded here in 2024.
- **Size** – About 127 cm tall; the second-largest living heron.
- **Appearance** – Dark grey body with white throat, belly and vent; long silvery plumes on the crown and fore neck.
- **Diet** – Fish, mainly Schizothorax carps; regarded as an indicator of pristine river habitats.
- **Protection Status**
    - IUCN – Critically Endangered (since 2007); among the top 100 EDGE species.
    - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 – Schedule I.
- **Threats** – Hydropower projects, sand and gravel mining, wetland conversion, human disturbance and poaching.



Concerns

- The proposed 1,200 MW Kalai-II hydropower project on the Lohit River received in-principle forest clearance in 2026, though the heron was missing from its impact assessment.
- Demwe Lower (1,750 MW) is also proposed on the Lohit.

Quick facts

Namdapha Tiger Reserve
• **Location** – Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh. • **Status** – National Park and tiger reserve since 1983. • **Area** – About 1,985 sq km. • **River** – Noa-Dihing, a tributary of the Brahmaputra. • **Significance** – The only park in the world with four big cats: tiger, leopard, clouded leopard and snow leopard.

Reference

Arunachal Observer | Critically endangered white-bellied heron sighted along Lohit River

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