Wildlife Watchers Initiative

Prelims – Environment and Ecology

Mains – (GSIII) Conservation

Why in news?

Recently launched grassroots conservation effort in Pune's Purandar taluk, by 40 local volunteers have recorded over 350 wildlife sightings across 60+ species within six months.

- **Wildlife Watchers** – It is a community-driven conservation initiative launched in Purandar taluk of Pune district, Maharashtra.
- **Launched by** – The Grassland Trust (Pune-based NGO).
- The project is supported by Ashreya Hastha Trust.
- **Objective** – To empower local communities mainly farmers and herders to systematically monitor, document, and protect wildlife in non-protected grassland and scrubland ecosystems.
- **Key features –** Farmers and herders from Saswad and Morgaon villages were trained to monitor grassland and scrubland wildlife.
- They are equipped with field kits including torch, sack, shoes, water bottle, cap, and a local language field guide.
- They record wildlife sightings and incidents using a custom mobile app and receive incentives like binoculars or camera traps for verified reports.
- **Impact** – In just six months, volunteers reported over 350 verified sightings covering 60+ species, including grey wolf, hyena, jackal, Bengal fox, and over 40 bird species.
- Around 30 of these reports resulted in direct conservation actions, such as preventing poaching or confirming breeding of rare species.
- Children and other community members are also getting involved, showing increased awareness and reporting sightings actively.
- **Significance** – The grasslands in Pune are the only region in India where leopards, hyenas, and Indian grey wolves coexist in human-used landscapes.
- This model empowers local people to act as custodians of biodiversity using traditional knowledge alongside scientific training.
- The initiative promotes coexistence and provides an alternative to top-

down conservation by valuing local insights and participation.
- It triggered conservation actions, improved local awareness, and built a skilled community of grassroots naturalists.

Reference

The Hindu| Wildlife Watchers' programme

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