Woodpeckers

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance*

Why in news?

Recently, the researchers studied how the woodpecker protects its skull despite its constant knocking of its head against wood.

- Woodpeckers are a ***family of birds*** known for their distinct behavior of pecking and drilling into trees to find insects, communicate, and create nests.
- **Family –** Picidae, which comes from the Latin word picus meaning woodpecker.
- **Habitat –** Most species live in forests or woodland habitats, although a few species are live in treeless areas, such as rocky hillsides and deserts.
- **Distribution –** With over 200 species ***spread across the world***, except in the region of Australia, New Guinea and polar regions.
- They are most abundant in South America and Southeast Asia.
- Some of the woodpeckers includes Pileated woodpecker, Downy woodpecker, Red-headed woodpecker, Sapsucker, etc.
- **Key Characteristics –**
  - They are characterized by their ***chisel-like bills*** for drilling, zygodactyl feet (two toes forward, two back) for climbing, and stiff tail feathers that act as props.
  - The birds hold the ability to peck wood ***20 times per second***.
  - **Long Tongue –** They also possess long, sticky tongues for extracting insects, its total length of the tongue is one-third of the woodpecker's body length.
  - The surface of their tongues is covered with barbs that help in catching their prey.
  - **Protect its skull –** Its long tongue helps protecting the skull of the bird by wrapping it around the skull, thus protecting it from the impact and ***cushioning the brain***.
  - There are also ***soft bones*** that lie at the front and back of the skull

that spread out the area of the shock generated.
    - **Drumming** - It is one of their unique features used t0 communicate with each other by drumming against wood to make a loud sound.
    - Most species carve out their own ***nesting cavities*** in dead wood, bamboos, cacti and rotting wood.
- **Conservation Status -** Woodpecker status ***varies***, but habitat loss from deforestation and logging threatens many species.

References

1. The Hindu | Woodpeckers
2. Britannica | Woodpeckers

