World Wildlife Day 2023 & CITES

Why in news?

March 3 is known as World Wildlife Day (WWD), marked annually to draw attention to issues of conservation of flora and fauna.

Why is World Wildlife Day marked?

- In 2013, the *United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)* proclaimed March 3 as the *UN World Wildlife Day* to celebrate and raise awareness of protecting the world's wild animals and plants.
- **CITES –** The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was signed in 1973 on this day.
- It is considered a landmark agreement on conservation that focuses on ensuring the sustainability of endangered species.
- **Theme for 2023 –** Partnerships for Wildlife Conservation.

What is the CITES?

- CITES is an **international agreement** between governments.
- **Aim –** Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species.
- **Protected Species –** It accords varying degrees of protection to more than 37,000 species of animals and plants.
- They range from live animals and plants to wildlife products derived from them, including food products, exotic leather goods, medicines, etc.
- **Secretariat –** The CITES Secretariat is administered by UNEP and is located in Geneva, Switzerland.
- **COP –** The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the supreme consensus-based decision-making body, comprises all its parties.
- Currently, there are 184 parties to the convention, including India.
- **CITES in India –** Both the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the *Wildlife Crime Control Bureau*, a statutory body under the Ministry, are meant to combat wildlife crime.
- It assists and advises the customs authorities in the inspection of the consignments of flora and fauna as per the provisions of the *Wild Life Protection Act of 1972.*

How does CITES work?

- The species covered under CITES are listed in *3 Appendices*, according to the degree of protection they need.
- **Appendix I –** It includes species *threatened with extinction*.

- Trade in specimens of these species is permitted rarely, only in exceptional circumstances, such as gorillas, and lions from India.
- **Appendix II –** It includes species *not necessarily threatened* with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled to ensure their survival.
- For example, certain kinds of foxes and Hippopotamuses.
- **Appendix III –** It contains species that are *protected in at least one country*, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.
- For example, Bengal fox or the Golden Jackal from India.

To know more about CITES – Click Here.

Why is CITES criticised?

- **Legitimises Illegal Trade –** Having wildlife allowed to be traded, legitimises their movement and increases their illegal trade.
- **Lagging behind –** CITES protections lag after a species is determined to be threatened by international trade.
- For example, while pangolins were finally added to Appendix I in 2017, an estimated million were trafficked between 2000 and 2013.
- Many animals that are in the wildlife trade are not protected by CITES.
- **Trade related issues –** If a party violates the convention, CITES can respond with sanctions, which prevent a country from trading in CITES-listed species.
- **Voluntary Membership –** Due to the voluntary nature of CITES membership, nobody is strictly bound to follow its direction.
- **Laxity –** CITES has been questioned on matters such as the ivory trade being allowed at times despite the convention banning it in 1989.

- CITES has had some **successes**, helping in recovering the South American vicuña (a small member of the camel family) and the Nile crocodile.

Reference

1. Indian Express | World Wildlife Day 2023

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