

SPECIAL RECOVERY PROGRAMME: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: Gharial, sloth bear to be covered under Centre's scheme for critically endangered species

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife has proposed the inclusion of *Gharial* and *Sloth Bear* under the **Species Recovery Programme** of the **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH)** scheme to enhance focused conservation.

This programme, funded through CAMPA, aims at restoring habitats and saving critically endangered species through coordinated efforts with States and UTs.

Species Recovery Programme (SRP) and Inclusion of Gharial & Sloth Bear

Recent Development

- The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SCNBWL) has recommended the inclusion of:
 - Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*)
 - Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*)
- Under the Species Recovery Programme (SRP) of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme – Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH).

Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH)

Overview

- Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- Aimed at strengthening wildlife conservation by focusing on habitat protection, species recovery, and human–wildlife coexistence.

Objectives

- Provides financial and technical support to States and Union Territories for:
 - Habitat restoration
 - Anti-poaching operations
 - Wildlife protection outside protected areas
 - Community participation and awareness

Implementing Agency

- Wildlife Institute of India (WII)

Funding Source

- Supported through National Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) funds.

Key Components

1. Support to Protected Areas

- Includes National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves, and Community Reserves.

2. Protection of Wildlife Outside Protected Areas

- Focuses on conservation measures beyond the protected area network.

3. Species Recovery Programme (SRP)

- Focused on recovery of critically endangered species and restoration of their habitats.

Target Species under ESRP

- Total: 22 Species (16 Terrestrial and 6 Aquatic)

Terrestrial Species

1. Asian Wild Buffalo
2. Asiatic Lion
3. Brow-Antlered Deer (Sangai)
4. Edible Nest Swiftlet
5. Great Indian Bustard
6. Hangul (Kashmiri Stag)
7. Indian Rhinoceros (One-Horned)
8. Jerdon's Courser
9. Malabar Civet
10. Nilgiri Tahr
11. Snow Leopard
12. Swamp Deer
13. Vultures
14. Clouded Leopard
15. Red Panda

16. Caracal

Aquatic Species

1. Dugong
2. Gangetic River Dolphin
3. Marine Turtles
4. Nicobar Megapode
5. Northern River Terrapin
6. Arabian Sea Humpback Whale

About Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*)

Habitat and Distribution

- Endemic to freshwater rivers in the Indian subcontinent.
- Prefers deep, fast-flowing rivers and sandy banks for nesting.
- Found in:
 - Chambal (MP, Rajasthan, UP)
 - Girwa River (Katarniaghat WLS, UP)
 - Rapti-Narayani River system (Nepal)
 - Other rivers: Ganga, Yamuna, Gandak, Mahanadi, Brahmaputra

Conservation Status

- IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered
- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I
- CITES: Appendix I

Key Characteristics

- Possesses the longest and narrowest snout among crocodilians.
- Males develop a distinctive ‘ghara’ (bulbous growth) for vocalization and mating.
- Primarily piscivorous (fish-eating), highly aquatic.
- Important for maintaining fish population balance and river ecosystem health.

About Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*)

Habitat and Distribution

- Native to India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.
- Found in tropical dry forests, moist deciduous forests, and scrublands.
- Reported from five major biogeographic zones:
 - Peninsular India
 - Western Ghats
 - Deccan Plateau
 - Gangetic Plains
 - North-East India

Conservation Status

- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I
- CITES: Appendix I

Key Characteristics

- Medium-sized bear with shaggy black fur and white V-shaped chest patch.
- Specially adapted to feed on insects (termites, ants) using a long snout and tongue.
- Nocturnal and solitary; females carry cubs on their back.
- Plays a role in seed dispersal and forest ecosystem balance.

National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)

Legal Status

- Statutory body constituted under Section 5A of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- Reconstituted through the 2022 Amendment to the Act.

Functions

- Serves as an advisory body to the Central Government on wildlife conservation.
- Recommends strategies, conservation plans, and project evaluations.

Powers and Mandated Approvals

- Mandatory recommendations are needed for:
 - Altering boundaries of National Parks or Sanctuaries.
 - De-notifying Tiger Reserves.

- Construction of tourism infrastructure within protected areas.
- Diversion or destruction of wildlife habitats for development.

Structure

- Chairperson: Prime Minister of India
- Vice-Chairperson: Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
- Member Secretary: Director, Wildlife Preservation and ADGF (WL)

Other Members

- 3 Members of Parliament (2 Lok Sabha, 1 Rajya Sabha)
- 5 NGO representatives
- 10 Eminent environmentalists/conservationists
- Secretaries from relevant ministries (Environment, Tribal Affairs, Defence, etc.)
- Director General of Forests, Chief of Army Staff, and others

Standing Committee of NBWL

Role

- Functions as a sub-body of NBWL responsible primarily for project clearances.
- Provides faster decisions on project proposals affecting wildlife and habitats.

Composition

- Up to 10 members from the NBWL
- Chairperson: Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change

Key Distinction from NBWL

Aspect	NBWL	Standing Committee of NBWL
Nature	Advisory and Policy Formulation	Project Approval and Implementation
Headed By	Prime Minister	Environment Minister
Scope	Wide – Policy, Planning, Monitoring	Narrow – Project Evaluation and Clearances

Source: <https://www.ptinews.com/detail/national/Gharial--sloth-bear-to-be-covered-under-Centre-s-scheme-for-critically-endangered-species/2716713>