

19 – 07 – 2022

News: Red Panda

- Recently, the Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park has started an ambitious programme to release 20 Red Pandas in about five years to the forests.
- The Singalila National Park, the highest protected area in West Bengal, will soon get new denizens.

Red Panda

- Red Panda is a small reddish – brown arboreal mammal.
- It is also the state animal of Sikkim.
- Found in the forests of India, Nepal, Bhutan and the northern mountains of Myanmar and southern China.
- Thrives best at 2200 – 4800m in mixed deciduous and conifer forests.
- IUCN Status: Endangered.
- Wildlife Protection Act: Schedule I.
- There are almost 5000 – 6000 pandas present in Sikkim, western Arunachal Pradesh, Darjeeling (West Bengal) and parts of Meghalaya.

- In a recent research, it was found that **Chinese Red Pandas are genetically different from Himalayan Red Pandas**, making the conservation further difficult.

News: Dragon Fruit

- Recently, the **Centre has decided to promote the growth of dragon fruit, which is recognized as a "super fruit" for its health advantages.**
- Further, the Centre believes that due to the fruit's nutritional benefits and global demand, farming in India may be extended.

Dragon Fruit

- Dragon fruit grows on the Hylocereus cactus, also known as the **Honolulu queen.**
- The dragon fruit is **indigenous to the Americas.** It is a member of the cacti family.
- It is also known as **'Pitaya', 'Pitahaya' strawberry pear, noblewoman and queen of the night** throughout the world.
- In India, it is also known as **'Kamalam'.**

- It is **hardy and grows in diverse climatic conditions** with varied soils, especially in the semi-arid and arid regions of India.
- It prefers **slightly acidic soil and can tolerate some salts** in soil too.
- **Flowering and fruiting of dragon fruits coincide with the monsoon season** in India (June to November).
- Its flowers are **hermaphrodites** (male and female organs in the same flower) in nature and open at night.
- The plant sustains yield for more than 20 years, is **high in nutraceutical properties (having medicinal effects)** and good for value-added processing industries.
- It is a **rich source of vitamins and minerals**.

Popularity in India

- The dragon fruit was introduced to home gardens in India in the **1990s**.
- The **low maintenance and high profitability** of dragon fruits has attracted the farming community throughout India.
- This has led to a steep increase in dragon fruit cultivation in **Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Gujarat and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands**, as well as in many north eastern states.

- At the moment, **Mizoram tops among the States that cultivate this fruit.**
- The **world's largest producer and exporter of dragon fruit is Vietnam**, where the plant was brought by the French in the 19th century.
- The **Vietnamese call it thanh long, which translates to “dragon's eyes”**, believed to be the origin of its common English name.
- Apart from Vietnam, this exotic fruit is also grown in the **USA, Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, China, Australia, Israel, and Sri Lanka.**
- The country produces approximately **12,000 tonnes of the fruit every year.**
- Dragon fruit is a **climber** that needs support and hence **farmers need to invest around Rs. 3.5 lakh per acre in infrastructure.**
- The fruit is considered good for **diabetic patients, low in calories and high in nutrients like iron, calcium, potassium and zinc.**
- In **June 2021, India exported its first consignment of dragon fruit from Maharashtra to Dubai (UAE).**

News: Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

- Recent survey shows that only four female GIBs are left in Gujarat.

Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

- GIB is also called **Indian Bustard** and **Ghorad**.
- It is also the **state bird of Rajasthan**.
- GIB is the **heaviest flying bird weighs up to 15 kg** and grows up to 1 metre high.
- Most **commonly arid and semi-arid grasslands**, open country with shrub. **They normally avoid irrigated areas**.
- GIB is also **endemic to Indian Sub-continent**.
- This **omnivorous bird** is considered as **a flagship species in grassland ecology**.
- They have poor frontal vision.
- GIBs are the largest among the fur bustard species in India, the others being MacQueen's bustard, lesser Florican and the Bengal Florican.
- These birds are often found associated in the **same habitat as Blackbuck**.
- GIB is found majorly in **Central and Western India and Eastern Pakistan**.
- The GIB lays one **egg every 1-2 years** and the success rate of these eggs is **60-70 per cent**. However, this **rate has been reduced to 40-50%** due to predators like fox and dogs.

- Population in India is reduced to 150 approximately in 2018. Out of them, 122 are in Rajasthan.
- Recent survey shows that only four female GIBs are left in Gujarat.
- IUCN Status of Great Indian Bustard is Critically Endangered.
- It is also protected under Appendix I of CITES Schedules and Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- Threats faced include developmental projects leading to collision led deaths, Hunting, Loss of Eggs; Noise pollution makes the mating call impossible and Habitat destruction.
- Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary/ Jawaharlal Nehru Bustard Sanctuary, Project Great Indian Bustard and Project Godawan by Rajasthan Gov are intended to protect Great Indian Bustard.
- It is also protected in Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh and Karera Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.
- The government has recently released Rs 33 crore to a project, titled "Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard-An Integrated Approach", for five years from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) for conservation and breeding of the GIB.

- In 2015, the Union Government launched the GIB species recovery programme, under which the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and Rajasthan forest department have jointly setup conservation breeding centres, where GIB eggs harvested from the wild are incubated artificially, and hatchings raised in a controlled environment.
- Until 2020, 9 eggs have been hatched.
- The plan is to create a population that can act as insurance against the threat of extinction and to release the third generation of these captive-bred birds.
- The World Conservation Congress in its session held in November 2004 had urged the Government of India to initiate action to conserve the species of bustards by launching a specific 'Project Bustard' on the lines of Project Tiger.
- Recently, the government informed Rajya Sabha that there were no GIBs in the Kutch Bustard Sanctuary in Gujarat.