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News: Seahorse Migration

- A study indicated that extensive fishing off the Coromandel Coast could be forcing the great seahorse to migrate towards Odisha.
- Though, fishing is less intense off the Odisha coastline but still it may not be the new comfort zone for the Seahorse due to lack of suitable habitat.

Sea horse

- Sea horses are **tiny fish that are named for the shape of their head**, which looks like the head of a tiny horse.
- They are **classified as fish, in the genus Hippocampus**.
- There are **46 species of seahorses reported worldwide**. The coastal ecosystems of India house 9 out of 12 species found in the Indo-Pacific.
- They are **found in shallow coastal waters in latitudes from about 52° N to 45°S**.
- Seahorse populations in India are **distributed across diverse ecosystems such as seagrass, mangroves, macroalgal beds, and coral reefs**.

Distribution in India

- These 9 species are distributed along the coasts of eight States and five Union Territories from Gujarat to Odisha, apart from Lakshadweep and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Slow Swimmers

- When swimming they maintain a vertical position and propel themselves forward using a soft-rayed dorsal fin.
- They migrate by rafting, clinging to floating substrata such as macroalgae or plastic debris for dispersal by ocean currents.

Unique Reproductive Habits

- The male gives birth to child as the female uses an ovipositor (egg duct) to place her eggs into a brood pouch located at the base of the male's tail where the eggs are later fertilized.

Conservation Status

- IUCN status-Vulnerable
- CITES: Appendix II

Reasons for Decline and Migration

- The population of the Great seahorse is declining due to its overexploitation for traditional Chinese medicines, Ornamental fish, general destructive fishing and fisheries by – catch.
- This creates immense pressure on the seahorse populations that have a high dependency on local habitats to maintain their extensive and long-life history traits.
- The 1,300 km northward migration of the great seahorse from Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar to Odisha is likely a response to extensive fishing activities around the southern coast of India.
- Around 13 million individuals are caught per year on Coromandel Coast.