

Narwhals (Unicorn of Sea)

Why in News?

Researchers from the Florida University, Canada's Department of Fisheries & Oceans, in partnership with Inuit communities of Canada used drones to provide new insights into narwhal behaviour.

- It is a medium-sized ***odontocete or toothed whale***.
- It is different from all other toothed whales in that it has *no teeth in its mouth*.
 - Scientific name - Monodon Monoceros (one tooth, one horn).
- **Nativity** - It is found *only in Arctic waters*, spend their lives in the Arctic waters of Canada, Greenland, Norway and Russia.
- **Habitat** - Most narwhals winter for up to 5 months under sea ice in the Baffin Bay-Davis Strait area.
- **Coloration** - They change color as they age.
 - Newborns are a blue-gray
 - Juveniles are blue-black
 - Adults are a mottled gray.
 - Old narwhals are nearly all white

Narwhales coloration contributed to their name “corpse whale”, refers to how their skin colour resembles that of a drowned sailor.

- **Diet** - They *change their diets seasonally*, feeding intensely in the winter and eating little during the ice-free summer season.
- **Tusks** - Some have up to 2 tusks, while others have none.
- The spiralled tusk juts from the head and can grow as long as 10 feet.
 - **Males** - They have a single long, straight tooth (or tusk) that *protrudes 2 to 3 meters* out of the upper left jaw.
 - **Females** - They *almost never have a tusk*.



- **Usage of tusks** - Used to investigate, manipulate and influence the behavior of Arctic char, a prey.
- **Tusking behaviour** - A situation where 2 or more of them simultaneously raise their tusks almost vertically out of the water, crossing them in what may be a ritualistic behaviour.
- It is to assess a potential opponent's qualities or to display those qualities to potential mates.
- **Threats** - Oil and gas development and climate change pose threats to narwhals.
- **Conservation status**
 - IUCN - Least Concerned

References

1. [Down To Earth| Study on Narwhals usage of their Tusks](#)
2. [WWF| Narwhals are Unicorns of Sea](#)