

The State of India's Birds 2020 (SoIB)

Why in News?

The State of India's Birds 2020 (SoIB), a new scientific report on bird species was released recently.

What is the significance of this report?

- It is the **first such assessment** of long-term trend, current trend, distribution range size and overall conservation status of 867 birds.
 - a. Adequate data on how birds fared over a period of over 25 years (long-term trend) are available only for 261 species.
 - b. Current annual trends are calculated over a five-year period.
- This report jointly released by **10 organisations** is based on the observations contributed by the birdwatchers on eBird platform.

What are some findings?

- This assessment raises the alarm that several birds face a growing threat from loss of habitat due to human activity, widespread presence of toxins, hunting and trapping for the pet trade.
- It warned that diminishing population sizes of many birds because of one factor brings them closer to extinction because of the accelerated effects of others.
- For every bird species that was found to be increasing in numbers over the long term, 11 have suffered losses, some catastrophically.
- Of 101 species categorised as being of **High Conservation Concern**, endemics such as the Rufous-fronted Prinia, Nilgiri Pipit and Indian vulture were confirmed as suffering current decline.
- All these species except 13 had a restricted or highly restricted range, indicating greater vulnerability to man-made threats.

On what basis, the health of the avifauna is looked on?

- The health of avifauna is looked at based on scientific groupings such as raptors (birds of prey), habitat, diet, migratory status and endemicity (exclusively found in an area).
- The analysis concludes that **raptors overall are in decline**, with some 'open country' species such as the eagle suffering the most.

- Migratory shorebirds, along with gulls and terns, seem to have declined the most among water birds.
- Within India, the losses suffered by resident water birds, particularly in the past five years, calls for detailed investigation, it adds.
- From a dietary viewpoint,
 - 1. Meat-eater birds' populations have fallen by half,
 - 2. Birds depend on insects exclusively have also suffered over the long term.
 - 3. There has been some stabilisation for omnivores, seed and fruit eaters in recent years.
- **Habitat impacts** have decimated 'specialist' birds, which need specific environmental conditions to survive, particularly those dependent on forests.
- This is followed by declines in numbers of grassland, scrubland and wetland species calling for urgent investigation into the causes.

What are some suggestions in the report?

- Forward-looking actions suggested by the report include an **update to the IUCN Red List** of endangered species using the SoIB.
- There should be a **collaborative research** by scientists and citizens aided by policy with special emphasis on removing gaps in data.
- An urgent **emphasis on habitats** of species of high concern, notably grasslands, scrublands, wetlands and the Western Ghats.

What is the way forward?

- Resolute steps to protect forests and other habitats will confer multiple benefits, protecting other myriad species too.
- It is essential to revive the Great Indian Bustard, now pushed to precariously low numbers.
- Coursers and floricans need help with their delicate habitat.
- Bird diversity in India must be protected to improve the health of forests, wetlands, open country habitat and high mountains.

Source: The Hindu

