

# **Himalayan Brown Bear**

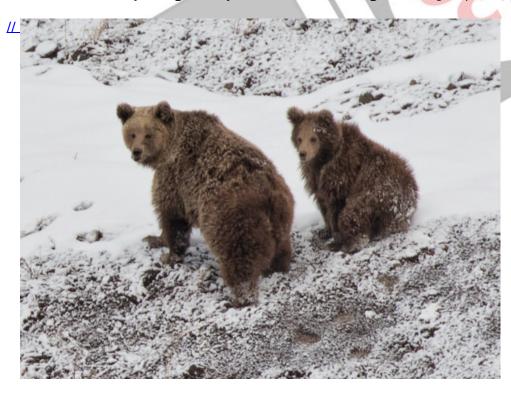
# Why in News?

The <u>Himalayan brown bear</u> (*Ursus arctos isabellinus*) population in **Kashmir** is facing numerous challenges that threaten both their survival and human safety.

- Recent incidents of bears entering residential areas and wrecking graveyards have raised concerns among local communities.
- These incidents highlight the urgent need to address the underlying factors causing this behavior and safeguard the habitat of this critically endangered species.

# What are Himalayan Brown Bears?

- About:
  - Himalayan brown bears are **a subspecies of brown bears** that inhabit the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas, ranging from Pakistan to Bhutan.
  - They have thick fur that is most often sandy or reddish-brown in color.
  - They can grow up to 2.2 meters long and weigh up to 250 kilograms.



#### Status:

- IUCN Red List- Critically Endangered
  - Brown bear (Ursus arctos) is listed as Least Concern.
- CITES Appendix I.

- Only the populations of Bhutan, China, Mexico and Mongolia; all other populations are included in Appendix II.
- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 Schedule 1.

#### Food:

Omnivorous.

#### Behavior:

 They are **nocturnal**, and their sense of smell is acutely developed and believed to be their principal means of finding food.

#### Threat:

• Human-animal conflict, rapid habitat loss, poaching for fur, claws, and organs, and, in some rare cases, bear baiting.

#### Range:

 North-western and central Himalaya, including India, Pakistan, Nepal, the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, and Bhutan.

#### Challenges:

- Insufficient Food Sources and Altered Behavior:
  - The bears' peculiar behavior of digging up graves and wandering into residential areas can be attributed to insufficient food in their natural habitats.
  - A study conducted by Wildlife SOS, an organization established with the goal of
    making lasting changes to protect and conserve India's natural heritage, forests,
    and biodiversity, revealed that a significant portion of the bears' diet in Kashmir
    consists of scavenged garbage, including plastic bags, chocolate wrappers,
    and other edible waste.
    - This disrupts their natural foraging patterns and alters their behavior, leading to conflicts with humans.
  - Improper disposal of kitchen waste by both local residents and hoteliers near bear habitats has provided easy access to food, leading to frequent interactions between bears and humans.
    - This altered behavior, coupled with complacency in hunting for food, has created a dependence on human-generated waste, further exacerbating conflicts.

# Restricted Distribution and Declining Population:

- The restricted distribution of the Himalayan brown bear in the alpine meadows of the Himalayas has made it challenging for researchers to gather comprehensive data on the species.
- Habitat destruction caused by factors like habitat encroachment, tourism, and grazing pressure has contributed to the declining population of bears.
  - With only an estimated **500-750 bears left in India**, urgent conservation efforts are required to ensure their survival.

# Future Threats and Conservation Recommendations:

- The Himalayan brown bear's future remains bleak, as a study predicts a **decline of** about 73% of their habitat by 2050 in the western Himalayas.
- <u>Climate change</u> poses a significant risk, necessitating preemptive spatial planning of protected areas to ensure the long-term viability of the species.
- Conservation efforts should focus on habitat preservation, creating biological corridors, and promoting responsible waste management to minimize humanbear conflicts.
- Should Strengthen the legal protection and enforcement by implementing the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 2022 and CITES regulations.

### **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)**

# Q. Consider the following fauna: (2023)

- 1. Lion-tailed Macague
- 2. Malabar Civet
- 3. Sambar Deer

### How many of the above are generally nocturnal or most active after sunset?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

#### Ans: (b)

- The lion-tailed macaque is not a nocturnal animal. It is an arboreal and diurnal creature, they sleep at night in trees (typically, high in the canopy of rainforest). These macaques are territorial and very communicative animals. **Hence, 1 is not correct.**
- Malabar civet is primarily nocturnal. It is a small, carnivorous mammal that is native to the Western Ghats region of India.
- It has a solitary and secretive nature, making it challenging to observe in the wild. Its nocturnal behavior helps it avoid predators and increases its chances of finding prey in the darkness. Hence,
   2 is correct.

The Vision

- Sambar deer are nocturnal. They more commonly communicate by scent marking and foot stamping. They prefer the dense cover of deciduous shrubs and grass. **Hence, 3 is correct.**
- Hence, option (b) is correct.

**Source: DTE** 

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