



Behler Turtle Conservation Award

Why in News

Recently, **Indian biologist Shailendra Singh** has been awarded the **Behler Turtle Conservation Award** for bringing **three critically endangered turtle conservation species** back from the brink of extinction.

- There are **29 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises in the country.**

Key Points

▪ About Behler Turtle Conservation Award:

- **Established in 2006**, it is a **major annual international award** honoring excellence in the field of **tortoise and freshwater turtle conservation** and biology, and **leadership in the chelonian conservation** and biology community.
- Also referred to as the **“Nobel Prize” of Turtle Conservation.**
- **Co-presented** by Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), **IUCN** Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, Turtle Conservancy, and Turtle Conservation Fund.
- In the present context, the **three critically endangered turtles** are being conserved as a part of TSA India’s research, conservation breeding and education programme in different parts of the country.

- The **Northern River Terrapin** (*Batagur baska*) is being conserved at the **Sunderbans**;
- The **Red-crowned Roofed Turtle** (*Batagur kachuga*) at **Chambal**;
- The **Black Softshell Turtle** (*Nilssonia nigricans*) at different temples in Assam.

▪ Northern River Terrapin:

◦ Habitat:

- The **Sundarbans eco-region** is their natural habitat.

◦ Protection Status:

- **IUCN Red List**: Critically Endangered
- **CITES**: Appendix I
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**: Schedule I

◦ Threats:

- Exploited for local subsistence and ritualistic consumption as well as some regional trade, including supply to the Calcutta markets in the 19th and 20th centuries.

▪ Red-crowned Roofed Turtle:

◦ Habitat:

- Historically, the species was widespread in the Ganga River, both in India and Bangladesh. It also occurs in the Brahmaputra basin.

- Currently in India, the [National Chambal River Gharial Sanctuary](#) is the only area with a substantial population of the species.
- **Protection Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Critically Endangered
 - **CITES:** Appendix II
 - **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I
- **Threats:**
 - Loss or degradation of habitat due to pollution and large scale development activities like water extraction for human consumption and irrigation and irregular flow from the upstream dams and reservoirs.
- **Black Softshell Turtle:**
 - **Habitat:**
 - They are found in ponds of temples in northeastern India and Bangladesh.
 - Its distribution range also includes the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries.
 - **Protection Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Critically Endangered
 - **CITES:** Appendix I
 - **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** No legal protection
 - **Threats:**
 - Consumption of turtle meat and eggs, silt mining, encroachment of wetlands and change in flooding pattern.

Sea Turtles of Indian Waters

- Sea turtles are **larger in size compared to terrapins (freshwater turtles) and tortoises.**
- There are **five species** in Indian waters i.e. [Olive Ridley](#), Green turtle, Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Leatherback.
- The **Olive Ridley, Leatherback and Loggerhead** are listed as '**Vulnerable**' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
- The **Hawksbill turtle** is listed as '**Critically Endangered**' and the **Green Turtle** is listed as '**Endangered**'.
- They are protected in [Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972](#), under **Schedule I**.

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