



Mains Practice Question

Q. Assess the significance of the Western Ghats in the conservation of India's biodiversity. (150 words)

01 Mar, 2023 GS Paper 3 Bio-diversity & Environment

Approach

- Start your answer by briefly writing about western ghats.
- Discuss its significance in conserving biodiversity in India.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction

- The Western Ghats are a biodiversity hotspot and one of the most important regions for conservation in India. The region is home to a **vast variety of plant and animal species**, many of which are endemic to the region.
 - The Western Ghats contain **around 30% of India's flowering plant species, 50% of its amphibians, and 14% of its mammals.**
 - Additionally, the region is **home to several endangered species** such as the Nilgiri Tahr, Lion-Tailed Macaque, Malabar Civet, and the Great Indian Hornbill.

Body

Importance of the Western Ghats in Conservation:

- The Western Ghats are of significant importance in the conservation of India's biodiversity due to several reasons:
 - **Endemic Species:** The region is home to a large number of endemic species. Endemic species are species that are found only in a specific geographic area, and the Western Ghats have a high number of such species.
 - This makes the region **crucial for conservation as the loss of habitat would result in the extinction of these species.**
 - **Watershed Protection:** The Western Ghats are the **source of several rivers, including the Godavari, Krishna, and Cauvery.** These rivers are vital for agriculture, drinking water, and other human needs.
 - The region also has **several dams and hydroelectric projects.** Conservation of the Western Ghats is, therefore, necessary for the protection of these water sources and the prevention of water scarcity in the region.
 - **Climate Regulation:** The Western Ghats play a significant **role in regulating the regional climate.**
 - The region receives a large amount of rainfall, and the **forests in the region absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen**, thereby mitigating the effects of climate change.
 - **Cultural Significance:** The Western Ghats are **home to several indigenous communities** whose lives and cultures are closely linked to the region's biodiversity.
 - The conservation of the Western Ghats is, therefore, necessary for the preservation of these communities' cultural heritage.

Examples of Conservation Efforts in the Western Ghats:

- Several conservation efforts are being made in the Western Ghats to preserve the region's biodiversity. Some of these efforts include:
 - **Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks:** Several wildlife sanctuaries and national parks have been established in the Western Ghats, including the **Silent Valley National Park, Periyar National Park, and Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary**.
 - These protected areas provide a safe haven for the region's wildlife and prevent habitat destruction.
 - **Conservation of Endemic Species:** The conservation of endemic species is a crucial aspect of conservation in the Western Ghats.
 - Several organizations, including the **Wildlife Institute of India**, are working on conserving the region's endemic species such as the **Lion-Tailed Macaque, Nilgiri Tahr, and the Great Indian Hornbill**.
 - **Community-Based Conservation:** Community-based conservation involves working with local communities to protect the region's biodiversity.
 - Several organizations such as the **Keystone Foundation** are working on community-based conservation efforts in the Western Ghats.
 - These efforts involve working with **indigenous communities to preserve their traditional knowledge of biodiversity** and conserve the region's natural resources.
 - **Government Initiatives for Conservation of Western Ghats:**
 - In 2012, the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests declared the **Western Ghats as an ecologically sensitive area** and established the **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP)** to develop guidelines for the conservation and sustainable development of the region.
 - The WGEEP report proposed a range of measures to protect the biodiversity of the Western Ghats, including the **creation of new protected areas, the restoration of degraded habitats, and the development of sustainable tourism initiatives**.
 - The Indian government has also established several protected areas in the Western Ghats, including national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, to protect the region's biodiversity.

Conclusion

- The Western Ghats play a critical role in the conservation of India's biodiversity, and the conservation of this region is essential for maintaining the ecological, social, and cultural integrity of the region.
- Several conservation efforts are underway in the Western Ghats, However, there is a need for continued efforts to preserve the Western Ghats' biodiversity, particularly in light of climate change and human activities such as deforestation and mining.
- Going forward, a **multi-stakeholder approach involving the government, civil society, and local communities** is necessary for the effective conservation of the Western Ghats and the **sustainable use of its natural resources**.