

CoP 19 of CITES

November 25, 2022

In news— The 19th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP 19) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was held at Panama City from 14th November to 25th November 2022.

Key updates-

- **At CoP of CITES, also known as the World Wildlife Conference, all 184 Parties to CITES have the right to attend**, to put forward proposals for the Conference to consider, and to vote on all decisions.
- 52 proposals have been put forward so far that would affect the regulations on international trade for: sharks, reptiles, hippos, songbirds, rhinos, 200 tree species, orchids, elephants, turtles and more.

India at Cop19 of CITES-

- At CoP 19, **India's proposal for induction of fresh water turtle Batagur kachuga earned wide support of the parties in CoP 19 of CITES.**
- It also lauded **operations such as those initiated by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau namely Operation Turtshield**, which resulted in nabbing many criminals involved in poaching and illegal trade of fresh water turtles and substantial seizures made by the agencies in different part of the country.
- **India's proposal for transferring Leith's Softshell Turtle (*Nilssonina leithi*) from Appendix II to Appendix I of the CITES was adopted** by the Cop to CITES in its 19th Meeting at Panama.
- **India's proposal for inclusion of Jeypore Hill Gecko (*Cyrtodactylus jeyporensis*) in Appendix II and the transfer of Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle (*Batagur kachuga*) from Appendix II to Appendix I of CITES have also been adopted** by the CoP in this meeting.

About CITES-

- **CITES is an international agreement signed in 1973** to which States and regional economic integration organizations adhere voluntarily.
- It is administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- Although CITES is **legally binding on the Parties** – in other words they have to implement the Convention – it does not take the place of national laws.
- Rather **it provides a framework to be respected by each Party**, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.

The red-crowned roofed turtle(Batagur kachuga)-

- The red-crowned roofed turtle or Bengal roof turtle(Batagur kachuga) is a **species of freshwater turtle endemic to South Asia**.
- It was the type species of its former genus Kachuga. Females can grow to a shell length of 56 cm (22 in) and weigh 25 kilograms (55 lb), but males are considerably smaller.
- The turtles like to bask in the sun on land. In the breeding season, the heads and necks of male turtles exhibit bright red, yellow and blue coloration.
- The females excavate nests in which they lay clutches of up to thirty eggs.
- Historically, this turtle was found in central Nepal, northeastern India, Bangladesh and probably Burma, but it has suffered declines in population due to being harvested for meat and shells, drowned in fishing nets, water pollution, hydro-electric schemes and habitat loss.
- Fewer than four hundred adult females are thought to remain in the wild, with the **International Union for Conservation of Nature rating this turtle as being**

“critically endangered”. India has put conservation measures in place, and a captive breeding programme has been initiated.

Leith's Softshell Turtle-

- It is **a large fresh water soft-shelled turtle which is endemic to peninsular India** and it inhabits rivers and reservoirs.
- The species has been poached and illegally consumed within India. It has also been illegally traded abroad for meat and for its calipee.
- The population of this turtle species is estimated to have declined by 90% over the past 30 years such that the species is now difficult to find.
- It is classified as **'Critically Endangered' by the IUCN.**
- The species is **listed on Schedule IV of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**, which gives it protection from hunting as well as trade.
- However, poaching and illegal trade of protected turtle species is a major challenge in India with seizures of thousands of specimens reported every year.
- The CITES Appendix I listing of this Turtle species would ensure that legal international trade in the species does not take place for commercial purposes.