

Gir Forest

August 9, 2020

Why in news?

- Every summer, the Forest Department of Gujarat conducts an Herbivore Census in Gir forest in May.

More information:

- 2019's exercise was of particular significance as it was the last Herbivore Census ahead of **2020's Lion Census, which is held once in five years.**
- The Herbivore Census covers ungulates such as spotted deer, blue bulls (nilgais), sambars, Indian gazelles (chinkaras), four-horned antelopes (choshinga) and wild boars, as well as Indian langurs and peafowl.

Importance:

- Wild ungulates and langurs are the main prey of **Asiatic lions, the endangered species** whose only wild population in the world is surviving in the 22,000 sq. km Greater Gir area.
- A count provides a sense of the **availability of the prey base for lions as well as other predators** like leopards, hyenas and wolves.
- A strong prey base can **reduce depredation of livestock by lions and can reduce man-animal conflict.**
- **During summer, as foliage is reduced to a minimum in dry and deciduous tropical forests,** the conditions afford the best visibility for conducting a census.
- The wild animals concentrate around water points including the 450 artificial ones filled by the Forest Department.
- The population of herbivores in Gir forest has been on the rise since 1974.
- In 2010, the population of ungulates was 1, 07,172.

- The population of ungulates in 2013 was estimated to be 1, 26,893 or 76.49 animals per square kilometres, translating to 8000 kg of biomass available to carnivores.
- This was very close to the levels in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park.