MISSION X FOR UPSC

XTERRA

WEEKLY

Weekly Current Affairs Compilation · 8-14 August 2026 · 7 Topics

Grouped by theme for faster revision — Protected Areas in the News and Species & Conservation Watch. Every topic includes a Prelims Memory Bank for instant recall.

"innovation in learning"

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PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NEWS

Kambalakonda Wildlife Sanctuary — Vizag's Shrinking Green Lung

WHY IN NEWS

Kambalakonda Wildlife Sanctuary, Visakhapatnam's last major forested tract and home to the rare, limbless Barkudia skink, continues to face mounting pressure from urban encroachment, hill quarrying and illegal tree felling along its buffer zones, even as it remains one of the Eastern Ghats' most distinctive biodiversity refuges.

70.70 SQ KM — KAMBALAKONDA WLS, VISAKHAPATNAM

CONNECT TO STATIC SYLLABUS

- **Eastern Ghats biodiversity & endemism**
  The sanctuary sits within this discontinuous, comparatively under-studied hill system
- **Indicator species concept**
  The Indian leopard serves as Kambalakonda's indicator species
- **Buffer-zone encroachment in urban protected areas**
  A recurring theme for city-adjacent sanctuaries, comparable to Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi NP

PRELIMS MATRIX

Location	Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh, Eastern Ghats
Area	70.70 sq km
Established	Notified as a wildlife sanctuary in 2002; under AP Forest Dept since 1970
Indicator species	Indian leopard
Distinctive endemic	Barkudia limbless skink, a rare burrowing reptile
Current pressures	Urban encroachment, hill quarrying, buffer-zone tree felling

UNIQUE FACT FOR PRELIMS

The Barkudia limbless skink found here is so elusive and rarely observed that it remained scientifically under-documented for decades, despite living within a sanctuary just a few kilometres from a major Indian metropolitan city.

PRELIMS MEMORY BANK

Kambalakonda WLS = Visakhapatnam, Eastern Ghats, 70.70 sq km

Indicator species = Indian leopard

Notified as WLS in 2002; AP Forest Dept control since 1970

Home to the rare Barkudia limbless skink

EXAM TRAP

Don't assume Kambalakonda's proximity to Visakhapatnam city makes it a minor or non-forested patch — despite its urban-edge location, it retains genuine dry evergreen forest cover and endemic species, comparable to other urban-fringe sanctuaries.

PRELIMS MODEL MCQ

With reference to Kambalakonda Wildlife Sanctuary, consider the following statements:
1. It is located in the Eastern Ghats.
2. Its indicator species is the Bengal tiger.
3. It was notified as a wildlife sanctuary in 2002.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

A 1 and 3 only
B 1 and 2 only
C 2 and 3 only
D 1, 2 and 3

Answer: 1 and 3 only

Approach
Statement 2 is the trap — Kambalakonda's indicator species is the Indian leopard, not the Bengal tiger, which is not part of its faunal assemblage. Statements 1 and 3 are accurate.

SPECIES & CONSERVATION WATCH

World's First Captive-Bred Slender-billed Vultures Released in Assam

WHY IN NEWS

Five captive-bred slender-billed vultures, along with five captive-bred white-rumped vultures, were released into the wild from Kaziranga National Park's Biswanath Wildlife Division on 7 August 2026 — reported to be the world's first-ever release of captive-bred slender-billed vultures.

5+5 SLENDER-BILLED & WHITE-RUMPED VULTURES RELEASED, 7 AUG

CONNECT TO STATIC SYLLABUS

- **Vulture population collapse & the 2006 diclofenac ban**
  Background context for why captive breeding became conservation-critical
- **Soft-release method in reintroduction biology**
  The gradual acclimatisation technique used before this release
- **India's vulture conservation architecture**
  BNHS breeding centres and Vulture Safe Zones underpin recovery efforts

PRELIMS MATRIX

Scientific name & IUCN status	Gyps tenuirostris; Critically Endangered
Appearance	Long, bare, blackish neck; thin dark bill; pale body, 80-95 cm
Nesting behaviour	Colonial tree-nester (unlike the cliff-nesting Indian vulture)
Diet & habits	Obligate scavenger; glides on thermals searching for carcasses
Release event	5 released, Biswanath Wildlife Division, Kaziranga NP, 7 Aug 2026
Significance	World's first-ever captive-bred release of this species

UNIQUE FACT FOR PRELIMS

India is home to nine vulture species, but the slender-billed vulture has fared worst of all in recent surveys — its entire surviving wild breeding population is now down to just 20 active nests, confined to 12 locations in Upper Assam.

PRELIMS MEMORY BANK

5 slender-billed + 5 white-rumped vultures released, 7 Aug 2026 | **Released from Biswanath Wildlife Division, Kaziranga** | **Bred at BNHS's Rani Centre, near Guwahati** | **World's first-ever captive-bred slender-billed vulture release**

EXAM TRAP

Don't confuse the "soft release" method (gradual acclimatisation in an aviary before release into the wild) with a direct hard release — the birds spent about three months adjusting at Biswanath before their actual release.

PRELIMS MODEL MCQ

With reference to the August 2026 vulture release in Assam, consider the following statements:
1. The ban on veterinary use of diclofenac in India was imposed in 2006.
2. The vultures were bred at a centre in Rani, near Guwahati.
3. This was the world's first-ever release of captive-bred white-rumped vultures.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

A 1 and 2 only
B 2 and 3 only
C 1 and 3 only
D 1, 2 and 3

Answer: 1 and 2 only

Approach
Statement 3 is the trap — this release was historic specifically for slender-billed vultures, not white-rumped vultures, which have featured in earlier captive-release efforts. Statements 1 and 2 are accurate.

SPECIES & CONSERVATION WATCH

BNHS Launches Suckermouth Catfish Removal Drive at Ujani Reservoir

WHY IN NEWS

The Bombay Natural History Society has launched an active removal operation targeting invasive suckermouth catfish and other alien fish species at Maharashtra's Ujani reservoir, as the hardy South American fish continues to spread across Indian rivers and wetlands, threatening native freshwater biodiversity.

19,000 EGGS A SINGLE FEMALE CAN LAY IN ONE CYCLE

CONNECT TO STATIC SYLLABUS

- **Invasive alien species & the Biological Diversity Act**
  Highlights the regulatory gap in managing ornamental-trade escapees
- **Freshwater ecosystem degradation**
  Polluted, low-oxygen waters favour hardy invasive species like this catfish
- **Aquarium trade as a bio-invasion pathway**
  Suckermouth catfish entered India through the ornamental fish trade

PRELIMS MATRIX

Species & IUCN status	Hypostomus/Pterygoplichthys spp.; not IUCN-evaluated (invasive)
Appearance	Armoured bony plates; sucker-like ventral mouth; large dorsal fin
Behaviour & habits	Nocturnal algae/detritus feeder; burrows into riverbanks to nest
Key adaptation	Accessory air-breathing organ enables survival out of water
Native range	Amazon basin, South America
Current drive	BNHS-led removal at Ujani reservoir, Maharashtra

UNIQUE FACT FOR PRELIMS

The suckermouth catfish can survive out of water for extended periods using an accessory breathing organ similar to a gill cavity, and its armoured, bony body makes it nearly inedible — so fishers who net it simply take on a loss.

PRELIMS MEMORY BANK

Suckermouth catfish = native to Amazon basin, South America

Entered India via the aquarium/ornamental trade

BNHS removal drive: Ujani reservoir, Maharashtra

Can breathe air; thrives in polluted, low-oxygen water

EXAM TRAP

Don't assume the suckermouth catfish has food or commercial value in India just because it's a fish — it is valued abroad only as an aquarium algae-cleaner, and in Indian waters it has no food value, so fishers treat it purely as a nuisance catch.

PRELIMS MODEL MCQ

With reference to the suckermouth catfish, consider the following statements:
1. It is native to the Amazon basin in South America.
2. It entered Indian waters primarily through a deliberate government-led aquaculture programme.
3. It has an accessory breathing organ that allows it to survive in low-oxygen water.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

A 1 and 3 only
B 1 and 2 only
C 2 and 3 only
D 1, 2 and 3

Answer: 1 and 3 only

Approach
Statement 2 is the trap — the species entered India through the global aquarium/ornamental fish trade via accidental or informal releases, not a deliberate government programme. Statements 1 and 3 are accurate.

PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NEWS

Tadoba-Andhari's Tigers Eyed for Similipal's Second Genetic Rescue Phase

WHY IN NEWS

Odisha's Forest Department has begun preparations for a second phase of tiger translocation to Similipal Tiger Reserve, proposing to bring one male and one female tiger from a Central Indian reserve such as Tadoba-Andhari, building on the successful 2024 translocation of two tigresses from Tadoba to Similipal.

2024 — YEAR TADOBA TIGRESSES FIRST MOVED TO SIMILIPAL

CONNECT TO STATIC SYLLABUS

- **Genetic diversity & inbreeding in isolated tiger populations**
  The core rationale driving inter-state tiger translocation
- **NTCA's translocation approval process**
  The National Tiger Conservation Authority must clear any inter-reserve tiger movement
- **Pseudo-melanistic ("black") tigers of Similipal**
  A distinctive genetic trait linked to low genetic diversity

PRELIMS MATRIX

TATR location	Chandrapur district, Maharashtra; tiger reserve since 1995
2024 precedent	Tigresses Zeenat & Jamuna moved from TATR to Similipal
Proposed 2026 phase	One male + one female tiger from Central India (Maharashtra or MP)
Approval stage	Preliminary proposal; final NTCA approval still pending
Similipal's issue	13 of 24 adult tigers (2024 estimation) are pseudo-melanistic
Similipal location	Mayurbhanj district, Odisha

UNIQUE FACT FOR PRELIMS

Similipal is the only place in the world where black, or pseudo-melanistic, tigers are found in the wild — a striking but genetically worrying trait caused by low gene flow, which these Tadoba-linked translocations are designed to correct.

PRELIMS MEMORY BANK

TATR (Chandrapur, Maharashtra) = source for Similipal's tiger translocations

2024: tigresses Zeenat & Jamuna moved TATR → Similipal

2026 proposal: 1 male + 1 female tiger from Central India

Similipal has the world's only wild pseudo-melanistic tigers

EXAM TRAP

Don't assume the second translocation phase has already happened — as of this proposal, it is only at a preliminary stage awaiting final NTCA approval, not yet executed.

PRELIMS MODEL MCQ

With reference to tiger translocation to Similipal Tiger Reserve, consider the following statements:
1. Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve is located in Chandrapur district, Maharashtra.
2. Similipal is the only place with wild pseudo-melanistic tigers.
3. The second phase of tiger translocation to Similipal has already been completed.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

A 1 and 2 only
B 2 and 3 only
C 1 and 3 only
D 1, 2 and 3

Answer: 1 and 2 only

Approach
Statement 3 is the trap — the second phase is still only a preliminary proposal awaiting NTCA approval, not a completed translocation. Statements 1 and 2 are accurate.

PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NEWS

Bengal Tiger Sighted at 8,000-ft Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary

WHY IN NEWS

The reported sighting of a Bengal tiger at Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary in Almora, Uttarakhand — situated at an altitude of around 8,000 feet — has prompted the Forest Department to intensify surveillance and issue cautionary advisories, after a video of the animal circulated widely on social media.

~8,000ft ALTITUDE OF THE TIGER SIGHTING AT BINSAR

CONNECT TO STATIC SYLLABUS

- **High-altitude tiger presence in the Himalaya**
  An emerging, still-rare ecological phenomenon worth tracking
- **Camera-trap monitoring under the Wildlife (Protection) Act**
  The technical tool used here to confirm and track the animal's movement
- **Human-wildlife conflict in hill sanctuaries**
  Relevant given Binsar's proximity to tourist and residential areas

PRELIMS MATRIX

Sanctuary	Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary, Almora district, Uttarakhand (Kumaon Himalaya)
Altitude	Approx. 900-2,500 m; tiger sighted around 8,000 ft (~2,440 m)
Established	Declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1988
Habitat type	Broadleaf oak and rhododendron forest
Response	Camera traps installed; advisories issued to tourists and residents
Historical note	Former summer capital of the Chand Dynasty rulers of Kumaon

UNIQUE FACT FOR PRELIMS

From Binsar's highest point, Zero Point (Jhandi Dhaar), five Himalayan peaks — Kedarnath, Chaukhamba, Shivling, Trisul and Nanda Devi — are visible on a clear day, making this rare high-altitude tiger sighting all the more striking against its panoramic mountain backdrop.

PRELIMS MEMORY BANK

Tiger sighted at Binsar WLS, ~8,000 ft, Almora, 11 Aug 2026

Binsar declared WLS in 1988; Kumaon Himalaya

Habitat: broadleaf oak and rhododendron forest

Response: camera traps installed, tourist advisories issued

EXAM TRAP

Don't assume Binsar was already a well-known tiger habitat — this sighting is unusual precisely because Binsar's fauna is typically associated with leopards, bears and deer, making a confirmed tiger presence here noteworthy enough to trigger monitoring.

PRELIMS MODEL MCQ

With reference to Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary, consider the following statements:
1. It is located in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand.
2. It was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1988.
3. Tiger presence in Binsar has been well-documented and common for decades.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

A 1 and 2 only
B 2 and 3 only
C 1 and 3 only
D 1, 2 and 3

Answer: 1 and 2 only

Approach
Statement 3 is the trap — the sighting made news precisely because tiger presence at this altitude and location is unusual, not a well-established, common occurrence. Statements 1 and 2 are accurate.

SPECIES & CONSERVATION WATCH

Three New Cascade Frog Species Discovered in Northeast India

WHY IN NEWS

A 15-year study published on 12 August 2026 in Harvard's Bulletin of the Museum of Comparative Zoology described three new cascade frog species from Tripura, Nagaland and West Bengal, while also confirming five more cascade frog species recorded in India for the first time.

3+5 NEW + NEWLY-RECORDED CASCADE FROG SPECIES, 12 AUG

CONNECT TO STATIC SYLLABUS

- **Amolops genus & torrent-dwelling amphibians**
  Frogs adapted to fast-flowing hill streams and waterfalls
- **Northeast India as a biodiversity hotspot**
  Part of the larger Indo-Burma hotspot recognised for high endemism
- **Amphibians as bioindicators**
  Their sensitivity to water quality and habitat change makes them useful monitoring species

PRELIMS MATRIX

Genus & IUCN status	Amolops spp.; status varies, mostly Not Evaluated (newly described)
Appearance	Adhesive toe-discs for gripping wet rocks; smooth greenish-brown skin
Behaviour & habits	Nocturnal; breeds in fast-flowing hill streams and waterfalls
Tadpole adaptation	Sucker-like mouths let tadpoles cling to rocks in strong currents
New species	A. ammachi, A. sendenyu, A. bella
Published in	Harvard's Bulletin of Comparative Zoology, 12 Aug 2026

UNIQUE FACT FOR PRELIMS

Amolops ammachi was named in honour of Padmini Varkey, a Kerala-based social worker and philanthropist popularly known as "Ammachi," linking a remote Tripura hill-stream frog discovery to a human legacy of community service.

PRELIMS MEMORY BANK

- 3 new cascade frogs: A. ammachi (Tripura), A. sendenyu (Nagaland), A. bella (WB)
- Published 12 Aug 2026, Harvard's Bulletin of Museum of Comparative Zoology
- 15-year study; led by Prof. S.D. Biju, Delhi University
- +5 more cascade frog species recorded in India for the first time

EXAM TRAP

Don't assume "cascade frog" refers to a single species — it refers to the genus Amolops as a whole, a group of torrent/stream-adapted frogs with many distinct species across Northeast India and beyond.

PRELIMS MODEL MCQ

With reference to the 2026 cascade frog discoveries, consider the following statements:
1. Cascade frogs belong to the genus Amolops.
2. The study identified three entirely new species and confirmed five more species new to India's record.
3. All three new species were discovered from a single state.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

A 1 and 2 only
B 2 and 3 only
C 1 and 3 only
D 1, 2 and 3

Answer: 1 and 2 only

Approach
Statement 3 is the trap — the three new species came from three different states: Tripura, Nagaland and West Bengal, not a single state. Statements 1 and 2 are accurate.

SPECIES & CONSERVATION WATCH

Ladakh Hosts India's First Black-necked Crane Festival

WHY IN NEWS

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena inaugurated India's first-ever Global Black-necked Crane Festival in Ladakh from 11-14 August 2026, held across Leh, Tso Kar and Hanle to promote conservation of the world's only alpine crane species alongside local culture and eco-tourism.

11-14 Aug — INDIA'S FIRST BLACK-NECKED CRANE FESTIVAL, LADAKH

CONNECT TO STATIC SYLLABUS

- **High-altitude wetlands of the Changthang Plateau**
  Tso Kar and Hanle are key high-altitude breeding wetlands for the species
- **State symbols & conservation politics**
  Ladakh has declared the black-necked crane its state bird and the snow leopard its state animal
- **Threats to ground-nesting birds**
  Feral dogs and habitat disturbance are a recurring theme, as with the vulture case above

PRELIMS MATRIX

Species & IUCN status	Grus nigricollis; Near Threatened
Appearance	Whitish-grey body, black head/neck, red patch around eye; ~139 cm tall
Behaviour	Monogamous pairs; elaborate courtship dancing display
Diet & migration	Omnivorous (tubers, insects, small vertebrates); breeds in Ladakh in summer
Festival dates	11-14 August 2026, across Leh, Tso Kar and Hanle
India's only breeding ground	Ladakh's Changthang wetlands (Tso Kar, Tso Moriri, Hanle)

UNIQUE FACT FOR PRELIMS

BNHS has sterilised more than 2,950 free-ranging dogs in Ladakh specifically to protect black-necked crane nests and chicks from predation in the region's fragile alpine wetlands.

PRELIMS MEMORY BANK

- India's 1st Black-necked Crane Festival: Ladakh, 11-14 Aug 2026
- Held across Leh, Tso Kar, Hanle
- Only Indian breeding ground: Ladakh's Changthang wetlands
- Ladakh's state bird; IUCN Near Threatened

EXAM TRAP

Don't confuse the black-necked crane's breeding range with its wintering range — Ladakh is its only breeding ground in India, while a separate, smaller wintering population occurs in Arunachal Pradesh's Sangti and Chug valleys.

PRELIMS MODEL MCQ

With reference to the black-necked crane, consider the following statements:
1. It is the world's only alpine crane species.
2. Ladakh is its only breeding ground in India.
3. It is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

A 1 and 2 only
B 2 and 3 only
C 1 and 3 only
D 1, 2 and 3

Answer: 1 and 2 only

Approach
Statement 3 is the trap — the IUCN lists the black-necked crane as Near Threatened, not Critically Endangered. Statements 1 and 2 are accurate.