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Competitive Exams Conservation status Conservation status & bio-geographic zones are important topics for

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Conservation Status

Presently, of all the Bio-geographic Zones, The Western Ghats with 44 Sanctuaries and National Parks, covering some 15,935 sq. km. has the highest percentage of protected areas. However, the two sub-divisions of this Zone (viz., the coastal plains and the main Western Ghats) do not enjoy the same extent of protection. The coastal plains, from north to south, cover 60,000 sq. km. (37.5 per cent) of the zone. This is one of the most highly developed and populated areas of the country.

It is also the area with the least number of protected areas. Only four sites (three Sanctuaries and one National Park) totaling a mere than 240 sq. km. (less than 0.5 per cent) exist in this section of the Western Ghats. Taking the tremendous pressures on this region into consideration, even by the most conservative estimate the total protected area percentage in this region can barely be extended beyond one per cent. Bombays Sanjay Gandhi National Park is the only National Park in this sub-division! In marked contrast to the coastal plains region, the 100,000 sq. km. main Western Ghats region has the largest extent of protected areas in India. 41 sites (six national parks and 35 sanctuaries) cover 15,695 sq. km. or 15.8 per cent of the total area. On paper this might seem to be a considerable area, but taking the exceptional biodiversity of this Zone into consideration, not only is this inadequate, but it is not uniformly distributed and some of the vital eco-zones, such as the Coorg, Palnis and the Upper Nilgiris have either been totally overlooked or are barely represented through tiny reserves. To successfully conserve the rich biological wealth reveal vital clues to the management of such areas of evergreen tropical forest regions, it is imperative that there be large-sized, unbroken protected areas that have a minimum disturbance. The forests in the northern half of the Western Ghats are highly fragmented, as a result of which considering areas for protection is not possible.

Hence the emphasis here is on smaller units, with a well spread network to incorporate as much of the diversity as possible. Less than 25 per cent of the protected areas network of the Western Ghats lies in the northern half -- Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa. Currently the largest,

contiguous stretch of wilderness exists in the Nagarahole Bandipur Mudumalai belt of Karnataka and TamilNadu and the adjoining Wynaad region of North Kerala. This forms a more or less unbroken protected area conservation unit of over 2,000 sq. km. The significance can be gauged from the fact that the forests hold an estimated 1,500 elephants Indias largest protected population of pachyderms. Additionally, this area is home to several other threatened species. The other well-protected portion of the Western Ghats extends over 1,500 sq. km. in the Anamalai Hills region of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The highest point in mainland India, south of the Himalaya, is to be found here as can some of the finest examples of lowland Dipterocarp forests, which rise up into the sholas.

The presence of extensive moist deciduous forests adds up to the fact that this is undoubtedly peninsular Indias richest bio-zone. Unfortunately, extensive plantations and related human disturbances threaten much of this region, which is fast losing most of its viable evergreen forest units. The Periya-Cardamom Hills belt in Kerala and Tamil Nadu is a major elephant conservation area. The grizz led squirrel too is found here. perhaps nowhere else in India. The total protected area unit in this region extends some 1,227 sq. km., much of it under great pressure from all sides. Located more or less at the southernmost end of the Western Ghats Zone are the Agastyamalai Hills in Reraia and Tamil Nadu. Separated from the northern Kerala forests by the Shencottah Gap, the Agastyamalais have an interesting biological commonness with the forests of Sri Lanka. There is great endemism observed here in the floral and lesser faunal (amphibians, insects etc.) communities. Mundanthurai and Kalakad Wildlife Sanctuaries form the southernmost range of the tiger in the sub-continent. The entire protected area unit of this belt works out to just over 1,000 sq. km. It is believed that under the existing conservation programs in this Zone, much of the endemic flora l community appears relatively secure. However, the habitat of some of the faunal elements of principal concern, though well-protected in pockets, is under threat from plantation encroachments. Rodgers and Panwar recommend a substantial increase the size of the main conservation units in this zone, particularly in the main Western Ghats region. Almost two dozen more protected areas have been recommended, to offer adequate protection to species in additional areas. However, inspite of this increase in the number of protected areas, the actual network will be reduced by nearly 500 sq. km. This is because much of the over 5,000 sq. km. Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka, being a much disturbed and interfered area, is proposed to be degazetted, for it is realized that it is far more advantageous to have healthy, undisturbed reasonably good-sized areas than a huge, highly disturbed region where much of the conservation and management programs cannot even be implemented. Implementation, in fact, is a key factor in the success of all wildlife plans which have invariably sounded good on paper, yet failed in practice.