

ANDAMAN SMOOTHHOUND, HIMALAYAN FRITILLARY AMONG 29 NEW THREATENED SPECIES IN INDIA: IUCN

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White-cheeked Dancing Frog, Andaman Smoothhound shark and Yellow Himalayan Fritillary are among 29 [new species assessed in India that are under threat](#), according to the latest update to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List unveiled during the COP15 biodiversity conference here in Canada.

The latest update warns that a barrage of threats including illegal and unsustainable fishing, pollution, climate change and diseases is destroying sea species such as the Andaman Smoothhound shark.

The IUCN Red List unveiled on Friday is a critical indicator of the health of the state of the world's biodiversity. It provides information about the global extinction risk status of species—and is a key tool to help define and inform conservation targets.

Over 15,000 scientists and experts from around the world are part of the IUCN Commission. They found 1,355 of over 9,472 species of plants, animals, and fungi across India's land, freshwater, and seas assessed for the Red List are considered to be under threat, classed as critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable to extinction.

According to the data shared by IUCN, 239 new species analysed in India have entered the list. Of these, 29 are threatened.

"Today's IUCN Red List update reveals a perfect storm of unsustainable human activity decimating marine life around the globe. As the world looks to the ongoing UN biodiversity conference to set the course for nature recovery, we simply cannot afford to fail," said Bruno Oberle, IUCN Director General, at the 15th Conference of Parties to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD COP15).

Delegates from 196 countries, including India, have gathered here in Montreal, Canada for a two-week conference from December 7-19, to adopt the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, a landmark agreement to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030.

“We urgently need to address the linked climate and biodiversity crises, with profound changes to our economic systems, or we risk losing the crucial benefits the oceans provide us with,” Bruno said during a press conference here.

According to IUCN, the white-cheeked Dancing Frog (*Micrixalus candidus*), which has entered the Red List as endangered, is only known from a small range with an extent of occurrence of 167 square kilometers (km²) in the Western Ghats of Karnataka, a biodiversity hotspot.

“It is considered to be uncommon. Its habitat is threatened by the conversion of forest to areca nut and coffee plantations,” it said.

“As per the published research papers and reports, 30 per cent of dancing frogs are found to live in the regions that are not protected by the government,” said Dr Sumit Dookia, Wildlife Biologist & Faculty, GGS Indraprastha University, New Delhi.

“They are endangered with extinction due to loss of their habitat, pollution, changes in temperature, diseases, pests, invasive species among others,” Dr. Dookia told *PTI*.

The Andaman Smoothhound (*Mustelus andamanensis*) has been included in the Red List as Vulnerable. This recently described shark is found in the Andaman Sea in the Eastern Indian Ocean off the coast of Myanmar, Thailand, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

It is subject to fishing pressure across its spatial and depth range. It is taken as a bycatch in industrial and artisanal fisheries with multiple fishing gears including trawl, longline, and gillnet, IUCN said.

“A small fish, discovered in April 2021 as new to science —Andaman Smoothhound—is facing the risk of extinction due to overfishing,” said Dr. Dookia.

“Growing demand for fish and fish meat is a major reason. This new species is currently only known from the Andaman Sea and endemic to India,” he added.

The Yellow Himalayan Fritillary plant (*Fritillaria cirrhosa*), which has been included in the Red List as Vulnerable, is mostly found in the Himalayas. It occurs in Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.

In the Indian Himalayas, the species is threatened due to unorganised harvest, over-extraction, unsustainable and premature harvesting of bulbs, coupled with illegal hidden markets, according to the data.

Dr. Dookia noted that over the last few years, a rapid decline has been reported and raised high conservation concerns on the rapid population decline of *Fritillaria cirrhosa* in the Western Himalayas.

“Harvested and traded with a new trade name i.e., ‘Jangli lehsun’ probably to disguise common *Allium* species, the species is facing tremendous decline in wild populations due to its illegal harvesting and trade in Himachal Pradesh,” he said.

Climate change modelling predicts a future decline in the species' geographic distribution, IUCN

said.

Dr. Dookia said all three species found in three unique ecosystems are pushed towards the extinction risk category due to over-harvesting and climatic events in the last few decades.

“As of now, the government does not have any policy to conserve these species. The recent IUCN’s assessment will alarm the bells and hopefully, attention of global and national policymakers will be attracted to formulate the conservation plans,” he added.

The IUCN Red List now includes 150,388 species, of which 42,108 are threatened with extinction. Over 1,550 of the 17,903 marine animals and plants assessed are at risk of extinction, with climate change impacting at least 41% of threatened marine species, according to the IUCN statement.

For instance, globally, populations of dugongs—large herbivorous marine mammals—and 44% of all abalone shellfish species have entered the IUCN Red List as threatened with extinction.

Data shows the pillar coral has deteriorated to Critically Endangered due to accumulated pressures.

“The awful status of these species should shock us and engage us for urgent action,” said Professor Amanda Vincent, Chair of the IUCN SSC Marine Conservation Committee.

“These magical marine species are treasured wildlife, from the wonderful abalone to the charismatic dugong and the glorious pillar coral, and we should safeguard them accordingly. It is vital that we manage fisheries properly, constrain climate change and reverse habitat degradation,” Ms. Vincent added.

In October this year, the findings from WWF’s Living Planet Report (LPR) were equally grim. It found that wildlife populations have seen a devastating 69% drop on average since 1970—a biodiversity crisis that experts classify as the sixth mass extinction.

The report warned governments, businesses and the public to take urgent and transformative action to reverse the destruction of biodiversity.

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