

INDIA ADDS 540 SPECIES TO FAUNAL DATABASE

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Union Ministers Bhupender Yadav and Ashwini Kumar Choubey during an event in Kolkata. Debasish Bhaduri DEBASISH BHADURI

India added 540 species to its faunal database in 2021 taking the total number of animal species to 1,03,258. The country also added 315 taxa to the Indian flora during 2021, taking the number of floral taxa in the country to 55,048.

Of the 540 faunal species, 406 are new discoveries and 134 new records to India. Thirteen new genera were also discovered in 2021. Among the new species discovered is one species from mammal, 35 reptiles and 19 species of pisces.

The new mammal species discovered is *Crocidura narcondamica*, a white-toothed shrew, from Narcondam Island of the Andaman and Nicobar group of islands.

Among the reptiles discovered in 2021, notable is *Boiga whitakeri*, or Whitaker's cat snake, from the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu.

The most number of new discoveries was from the faunal group Hymenoptera, an order of insects, comprising the sawflies, wasps, bees, and ants, in which 80 species, including one new genus, were discovered.

Dhriti Banerjee, Director, Zoological Survey of India ((ZSI), which observed its 107th foundation day on July 1, said scientists from the ZSI had contributed to 68% of the animal discoveries in 2021. She pointed out that during the COVID-19 pandemic, explorations were greatly hampered, but they have been renewed with full vigour now.

With 1.03 lakh species of fauna, India contributes to 6.1% of faunal diversity in the world.

The 315 taxa of flora added to India consist of 298 species and 17 intraspecific taxa as new to Indian flora. Of these, 204 taxa are new to science and 125 taxa are new distributional records from India. "Forty-three per cent novelties published in various national and international journals are of vascular plants; rest are non-vascular in nature. This volume records 135 angiosperms, four pteridophytes, 9 bryophytes, 28 lichens, 98 fungi, 29 algae and 12 microbes," a note from the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) said.

According to the BSI, regions such as the Western Ghats and the northeastern regions have contributed 28% of the total discoveries. In State-wise analysis, the most number of discoveries were made from Kerala with 51 taxa followed by Maharashtra and Arunachal Pradesh. In 2021, the floral discoveries include wild relatives of many potential horticultural, agricultural, medicinal, and ornamental plants such as begonia, impatiens (Balsams), legumes, zingibers and orchids.

The details of new discoveries and new records of fauna and flora were published by Bhupendra Yadav, Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, at the headquarters of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) in Kolkata on Friday.

Migration of species

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Yadav said climate change was no distant reality and science

had been very categorical on the issue. The Minister pointed out that as a consequence of climate change, a change in distributional pattern of vegetation, with species in high elevation ecosystem shifting to higher elevation had already been observed.

“Range shift and migration of animals is very much likely; the distribution of fauna needs to be monitored and periodically analysed as a priority study. Long-term studies on faunal elements of forests, aquatic, coastal and marine ecosystem are essential,” Mr. Yadav said.

The Minister also pointed out that the geo-spatial data of the ZSI would be of great importance in developing adaptive spatial planning of conservation areas.

“Recent findings of ZSI will be useful in forest management and support the national action plan to combat climate change in India,” Mr. Yadav said.

The Minister also pointed that the significance of taxonomists cannot be neglected but unfortunately the number of taxonomists was declining alarmingly.

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