

Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle Faces Habitat Decline in Ganga



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The Red-crowned Roofed Turtle, once widely found in the Ganga river system, is now confined to shrinking habitats, raising serious conservation concerns. This freshwater species, known for its ecological importance, is witnessing rapid population decline due to habitat degradation, pollution and human interference.

About the species

The Red-crowned Roofed Turtle is a freshwater turtle species endemic to South Asia. It belongs to the genus *Batagur* and is among the three large freshwater turtle species found in India. The species is recognised for its striking appearance and ecological significance in riverine ecosystems.

Distribution and habitat

The species is native to India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Historically, it was widely distributed across the Ganga river system in both India and Bangladesh. It is also found in the Brahmaputra basin. However, its habitat has drastically reduced, with populations now limited to protected or fragmented river stretches, often under conservation programmes.

Physical features and ecological role

Male Red-crowned Roofed Turtles are significantly smaller than females, reaching nearly half their size. They are distinguished by a reddish-orange head with a black crown, along with a greenish-brown carapace marked with yellow patterns. The plastron is yellow with black markings. The species is omnivorous, feeding on aquatic plants and small animals. It plays a crucial role as a bio-indicator of river health and contributes to nutrient cycling, thereby supporting aquatic ecosystem balance.

Important Facts for Exams

- The Red-crowned Roofed Turtle is endemic to South Asia and belongs to the genus *Batagur*.
- It is found in the Ganga and Brahmaputra river basins.
- IUCN status: Critically Endangered.
- It is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Conservation status and concerns

The species is classified as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is listed under Appendix II of CITES and receives the highest level of protection under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The shrinking of its natural habitat due to river pollution, sand mining and infrastructural activities has intensified the threat to its survival, making conservation interventions and habitat restoration essential for its future.