Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the bar-headed geese: its conservation status and need for conservation

News: While the Kundavada lake on the outskirts of Karnataka’s Davangere city, which was the winter abode for many barheaded geese from Mongolia, has failed to attract these winged visitors this time, the Kondajji lake located nearby has emerged as their new home.

Why did it happen?

- The barheaded geese, known for their ability to fly in extreme altitude and weather conditions, used to arrive at the Kundavada lake in the third week of November.

- As the temperature drops in Mongolia in the last week of October, these birds migrate to comparatively warmer places in India.

- They used to stay at the Kundavada lake till the first week of March. The lake is spread over 260 acres and is also a source of drinking water for Davangere city. Bird enthusiasts have recorded the presence of barheaded geese in the Kundavada lake from 2012.

- Large tracts of agricultural land in the vicinity of Kundavada have been converted into residential layouts in recent times. The Department of Horticulture has established a glasshouse on the bank of the lake on a three-acre area in 2018. In November 2018, only 10 barheaded geese came to Kundavada. Last November, not a single goose visited the lake.

- Following the loss of habitat in Kundavada, the barheaded geese have made the Kondajji lake, located in a forest 14 km from Davangere, their new abode. The geese were sighted in Kondajji for the first time in January 2019, and in the second week of January this year, as many as 430 geese
have been counted here.

Way ahead

The onus is on the Department of Forest and Wildlife to ensure minimum human interference near the Kondajji lake to ensure a comfortable stay for the birds.

About the bird

• Geese, ducks and swans (the biological family Anatidae): collectively known as waterfowl.

• Geese, which are larger than ducks and smaller than swans, are subdivided into three groups: grey, black and white geese.

• About 73 cm long and weighing 1.6 kilograms, the Bar-headed Goose is a large bird. It eats mainly grasses, water plants, seeds and berries, but also partakes of smaller animal matter including insects and crustaceans. Its legs are well-developed for walking and running in soft wet land where it forages.

• It is a migratory bird. It spends the summer months in central Asia, nesting and raising its young. As winter sets in it migrates to warmer climes of Southern Asia.

• The Bar-headed Goose is one of few bird species known to fly over the Himalayas. There are reports of it actually flying over Mount Everest. How it deals with oxygen issues at enormous heights - as well as the reason for following that high-altitude route - is a matter of great interest for scientists.

• Conservation status: Least Concern (LC)