News: The 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is scheduled from February 17 to 22 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

About the COP meet

- Representatives from across the world, and conservationists and international NGOs working in wildlife conservation, are expected to attend the COP, which will also see PM Modi address the gathering via video conference. India has been designated the President of the COP for the next three years.

- India will be moving to include the Asian Elephant and the Great Indian Bustard in the list of species that merit heightened conservation measures.

- The list will be debated at the 13th COP of the CMS, an environment treaty under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). There are 130 parties to the convention and India has been a member since 1983.

- It is expected that the COP will clear the inclusion of the Great Indian Bustard and the Asian Elephant as it has been vetted by technical experts and reflects the consensus of several countries. The elephant faces risks particularly in neighbouring Bangladesh and Nepal.

How will this move benefit?

Having the elephant and the Great Indian Bustard in the list — more formally
known as Appendix 1 — would coax countries neighbouring India, where wild animals such as tigers and elephant foray into, to direct more resources and attention to protecting them. There are now 173 species in the Appendix 1.

Migratory species in India and efforts at conservation

- **India** is home to several migratory species of wildlife, including the **snow leopard**, **Amur falcons**, **bar-headed geese**, **black-necked cranes**, **marine turtles**, **dugongs** and **hump-backed whales**.

- The Indian sub-continent is also part of the major bird flyway network, i.e., the **Central Asian Flyway (CAF)** that covers areas between the Arctic and Indian Oceans, and covers at least 279 populations of 182 migratory water bird species, including 29 globally threatened species. India has also launched the **National Action Plan** for conservation of migratory species under the **Central Asian Flyway**.

- The Union Environment Ministry reports India as having **29,964 elephants** according to the **Project Elephant Census in 2017**. It merits the **highest level of protection**, or **Schedule 1**, under the **Wildlife Protection Act**.

- The government of India has been taking **necessary actions** to protect and conserve migratory marine species. Seven species that include **Dugong, Whale Shark, Marine Turtle (two species)**, have been identified for preparation of the **Conservation and Recovery Action Plan**.

About the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)

- **Migratory species** are those animals that **move from one habitat to another during different times of the year**, due to various factors such as food, sunlight, temperature, climate, etc. The movement between habitats, can sometimes exceed thousands of miles/kilometres for some migratory birds and mammals. A migratory route can involve nesting and also requires the availability of habitats before and after each migration.
In order to protect the migratory species throughout their range countries, a 
Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), has been in 
force, under the aegis of United Nations Environment Programme 
(UNEP).

Also referred to as the Bonn Convention, it provides a global platform for 
the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their 
habitats and brings together the States through which migratory animals 
pass, the Range States, and lays the legal foundation for internationally 
coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range.

The convention complements and co-operates with a number of other 
international organizations, NGOs and partners in the media as well as in the 
corporate sector.

Under this convention, migratory species threatened with extinction are 
listed on Appendix I and Parties strive towards strictly protecting these 
animals, conserving or restoring the places where they live, mitigating 
obstacles to migration and controlling other factors that might endanger 
them.

Migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from 
international co-operation are listed in Appendix II of the Convention.

About Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

A large bird of the bustard family (Otididae), one of the heaviest flying birds 
in the world. It inhabits dry grasslands and scrublands on the Indian 
subcontinent; its largest populations are found in the Indian state of 
Rajasthan.

Conservation status: listed as critically endangered species on the 
International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List of 
Threatened Species.
Threats: Habitat loss and degradation appear to be the primary causes of decline. Ecologists have estimated that approximately 90 percent of the species’s natural geographic range, which once spanned the majority of northwestern and west-central India, has been lost, fragmented by road-building and mining activities and transformed by irrigation and mechanized farming. Many croplands that once produced sorghum and millet seeds, on which the great Indian bustard thrived, have become fields of sugarcane and cotton or grape orchards. Hunting and poaching have also contributed to the decrease in population. These activities, combined with the species’s low fecundity and the pressure of natural predators, have left the great Indian bustard in a precarious position.

In 2012 the Indian government launched Project Bustard, a national conservation program to protect the great Indian bustard, along with the Bengal florican (Houbaropsis bengalensis), the lesser florican (Syptoides indicus), and their habitats from further declines. The program was modelled after Project Tiger, a massive national effort initiated in the early 1970s to protect the tigers of India and their habitat.