Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about the findings of the survey and its significance; about Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary: flora and fauna found in it

News: Kaziranga recorded **96 species of wetland birds** — one of the highest for wildlife reserves in India, according to the **second wetland bird count** conducted on January 9-10.

**Background**

The first wetland bird survey in **Kaziranga, a UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 1985, was conducted in 2018. Rabindra Sarma, the park's research officer said avian surveys could have been done in the 115year-old Kaziranga earlier, but no records were maintained.

**Key findings of the census**

- The survey covered four ranges of the park — Agoratoli, Bagori, Kohora and Burapahar.

- More than half the birds (9,924) and 85 of the 96 species were recorded in Agoratoli Range. This was because **Sohola, the largest of Kaziranga's 92 perennial wetlands**, is in this range.

- The survey registered a total of 19,225 birds belonging to 96 species under 80 families. The **first waterfowl census in 2018** had yielded 10,412 birds covering 80 species, belonging to 21 families.

- With 6,181 individuals, the **barheaded goose led the species count**, followed by the **common teal** at 1,557 and **northern pintail** at 1,359. **All three belong to the family anatidae.**
The other species with sizeable numbers include gadwall, common coot, lesser whistling duck, Indian spotbilled duck, little cormorant, ferruginous duck, tufted duck, Eurasian wigeon, Asian openbill, northern lapwing, ruddy shelduck and spotbilled pelican.

Significance of the survey
Data on avian wealth is important because the wetlands nourish Kaziranga's ecosystem. Increase or decrease in the number of birds is indicative of the park's health.

About Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary
- It is located in the Golaghat, Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts of the state of Assam, India.

- The sanctuary, which hosts two-thirds of the world's great one-horned rhinoceroses, is a World Heritage Site.

- Kaziranga is home to the highest density of tigers among protected areas in the world, and was declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006 (now the highest tiger density is in Orang National Park, Assam).

- The park is home to large breeding populations of elephants, wild water buffalo, and swamp deer.

- Kaziranga is recognized as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International for conservation of avifaunal species.

- When compared with other protected areas in India, Kaziranga has achieved notable success in wildlife conservation. Located on the edge of the Eastern Himalaya biodiversity hotspot, the park combines high species diversity and visibility.

- Kaziranga is a vast expanse of tall elephant grass, marshland, and dense
tropical moist broadleaf forests, **criss-crossed by four major rivers, including the Brahmaputra**, and the park includes numerous small bodies of water.

- Kaziranga has been the theme of several books, songs, and documentaries. The park celebrated its centennial in 1998 after its establishment in 1905 as a reserve forest.

**About UNESCO World Heritage Site**

- A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of special cultural or physical significance.

- The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.

- Each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located and UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.

- India has 38 world heritage sites (Latest is Japiur city), that include 30 Cultural properties, 7 Natural properties and 1 mixed site.