News: Researchers have discovered a new species of non-venomous burrowing snake in Arunachal Pradesh, named Trachischium aptei.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the discovered snake species and its location, about Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS)

Where?

- The snakes were found under fallen logs inside a thickly forested area of the Tally Valley Wildlife Sanctuary near the town of Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh during a field expedition by researchers in July 2019.

- Researchers said that the newly discovered species belongs to a group of fossorial snakes that live mostly underground, and surface mainly during or after a heavy monsoon shower.

- Trachischium are commonly called slender snakes. Seven species are distributed across the Himalayas, and the IndoBurma and IndoChina regions.

Burrowing habit

- Experts behind the discovery suggested that due to the burrowing habits of species of this genus, snakes belonging to the group are seldom seen and hence remain poorly studied. This could have been one of the reasons that the species had eluded the researchers.

About the snake species

- Trachischium aptei was named so to honour the contribution of Deepak Apte, noted marine biologist and Director of the BNHS.

- Morphologically, the snake is distinguished by smooth and dorsal scales arranged in 15 rows throughout the body. The dorsal colour of the holotype is dark brown to black with faint dorsal longitudinal lines. Largesized members of the genus measure about 293
Biodiversity hotspot

- Researchers behind the discovery, who covered large tracts of forested land in northeast India, said that they have documented more species from the forests of Arunachal Pradesh, which is likely to yield new species. Work is under way to describe them.

- Underlining that forests across northeast India have not been wellexplored for their biodiversity, especially reptiles, amphibians and most invertebrate groups, the authors said that “anthropogenic pressures like road widening, construction of dams and hydropower plants threaten the forest and biodiversity across Arunachal Pradesh”.

About BNHS

- BNHS is one of the largest non-governmental organisations in India engaged in conservation and biodiversity research.

- It was founded on 15 September 1883 and headquartered at Hornbill House, Mumbai.

- It supports many research efforts through grants and publishes Journal of Bombay Natural History Society.

- Department of Science and Technology has designated it as ‘Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation’.