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

Prelims and Mains focus: about Olive Ridley Turtles and steps taken for their conservation; about IUCN

News: Preparations are almost done at the Rushikulya rookery on the Odisha coast to welcome and protect Olive ridley turtles during mass nesting. Odisha has half of the world’s Olive Ridley turtle population and 90% of India’s turtle population lives in the state.

Steps taken by the state government

- To provide security to mother turtles as well as the eggs from human and predator intervention, the forest department is erecting an over 5-km-long fence of metal net from Gokharkuda to Bateswar. This stretch is the most preferred location for mass nesting in the Rushikulya rookery.

- The forest officials have already completed two to three rounds of awareness drive at all villages near the rookery.

- Fishing in mechanised boats, including trawlers, has been banned. The forest department officials are also patrolling the region in two trawlers, two speed boats and a country boat.

- Debris and plastic waste, like pieces of fishing net, are being removed with the help of locals. There will be regular monitoring of the beach.

- The department has set up 11 onshore camps. Personnel at these camps regularly document beach condition, inform about the debris deposited by the sea, prevent entry of predators like stray dogs and search for turtle carcasses.
About Olive Ridley Turtles

- There are **five species of turtles in Indian waters** — Leatherback (Vulnerable), Loggerhead (Endangered), Hawksbill (Critically Endangered), Green (Endangered) and Olive Ridley.

- In India, sea turtles are protected under the **Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972**.

- The Olive ridley turtles are the **smallest and most abundant** of all sea turtles found in the world, **inhabiting warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans**.

- The Olive ridley is the most numerous among the sea turtles found in India and is **well known for its arribadas, or annual mass nestings** when thousands of turtles migrate to the breeding ground to nest simultaneously.

- Recognized as **Vulnerable** by the **IUCN Red list of Threatened Species**.

- International trade in these turtles and their products is banned under **CITES Appendix I**.

- **‘Operation Kachhapa’**: Conservation of the Olive Ridley Sea Turtle was launched by the Wildlife Protection Society of India in collaboration with the Orissa State Forest Department and the Wildlife Society of Orissa and other local NGOs.

- To reduce accidental killing in India, the Orissa government has made it mandatory for trawls to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs), a net specially designed with an exit cover which allows the turtles to escape while retaining the catch.