

IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature

[UPSC Notes]

What is IUCN?

IUCN is the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which was established in 1948 in Fontainebleau, France.

- The IUCN collaborates with both governments and civil society establishments with a common goal of safeguarding nature.
- **Aim:** To persuade international collaboration and impart scientific knowledge that guides conservation actions.
- The main vision of IUCN is to create a just world that values and conserves nature.
- IUCN has its headquarters in **Gland** which is close to Geneva in Switzerland.
- With over 1,400 Member organizations and 18,000 experts representing about 170 countries, IUCN has become the world's biggest and most diverse environmental organization.

How Does IUCN Operate?

- IUCN works based on democratic principles and unites influential organizations and leaders from across the world in a combined effort to protect nature and promote sustainable development.
- **IUCN World Conservation Congress** is held quadrennially (once in four years) where the IUCN members which include policymakers, civil society representatives, leaders from indigenous communities, business, and academia come together and set the path of the IUCN's work.
- IUCN consists of six Commissions that provide scientific knowledge and recommendations to the organization and its members which forms the framework for conservation and sustainable development. These commissions are:
 - CEC - Commission on Education and Communication
 - CEM - Commission on Ecosystem Management
 - CEESP - Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy
 - SSC - Species Survival Commission
 - WCEL - World Commission on Environmental Law
 - WCPA - World Commission on Protected Areas

- Further, the IUCN Secretariat which is led by a **Director-General** focuses its work mainly on crucial themes and is divided into 11 operational regions to secure its knowledge and serve the local interests.
 - The major themes include Climate change, Ecosystem management, Gender, Protected areas, Species, World heritage, etc.

IUCN Significance

- IUCN has successfully spread awareness about the adverse impact of various human activities on nature.
- IUCN endorsed the need for the adoption of environmental impact assessments, which have now become a standard in various sectors.
- In 1964, IUCN established the **IUCN Red List** which has become a holistic database of the conservation status of various species.
- IUCN played a key role in the development of important international conventions and agreements such as the **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**, the **World Heritage Convention**, the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species** and the **Convention on Biological Diversity**.
- IUCN also collaborated with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to publish the **World Conservation Strategy** which is considered as a revolutionary document that defined the concept of 'sustainable development' and provided a framework for global conservation and sustainable development agenda.
- Acknowledging its importance in environmental conservation, the UN General Assembly provided IUCN the official observer status in 1999.
- IUCN has further developed various nature-based solutions which address key issues associated with food and water security, climate change, and poverty.

IUCN Categories UPSC - IUCN Red List

- The IUCN Red List was set up in 1964 and is a comprehensive database on the global extinction risk status of various species of animal, fungus, and plants.
- The IUCN Red List has become a key indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity.

The IUCN Red List categorizes species at high risk of global extinction into nine categories namely -

IUCN Categories	Description
Not Evaluated (NE)	Not yet assessed by the IUCN
Data Deficient (DD)	There are inadequate information on the species
Least Concern (LC)	Species that are unlikely to become endangered or extinct in the near future.

Near Threatened (NT)	species that are close to being endangered in the near future.
Vulnerable (VU)	species that are considered to be at high risk of human-caused extinction without further human intervention
Endangered (EN)	Species that are considered to be at very high risk of extinction in the wild
Critically Endangered (CR)	Species that are considered to be at an extremely critical state.
Extinct in the Wild (EW)	Species that are surviving only in captivity, cultivation and/or outside native range
Extinct (EX)	Species that are no longer extant

