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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

CMS COP15: Expanding Species Lists While Migratory Populations Collapse



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CMS COP15: Expanding Species Lists While Migratory Populations Collapse

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"CMS COP15 added 40 new species to protected lists, but 49% of migratory species are still declining. Is adding species to Appendices actually conserving them, or is CMS a framework convention with inadequate enforcement?"

WHY IN NEWS

CMS COP15, held in Brazil in March 2026, added 40 species — including the Great Indian Bustard, Cheetah, Striped hyena, and Great hammerhead shark — to its protected lists. The COP's State of the World's Migratory Species report found that 49% of migratory species face population decline, and 24% face extinction risk.

THE LISTING GAP

The CMS has a structural problem: it lists species far faster than it can protect them. Of the 188 species at high extinction risk under CMS, 103 are birds. The political will to add species to Appendices is relatively easy to mobilise — no government wants to be seen opposing protection for a charismatic species. But the hard work — monitoring populations, protecting flyways, eliminating hunting, reducing bycatch — requires sustained national implementation that most CMS member states do not deliver.

CMS's own State of the World's Migratory Species report documents the failure: 49% of species declining despite decades of listing. Adding 40 new species to COP15's Appendices is meaningful as a signal of political commitment. As a conservation intervention, its effectiveness is limited by what happens between COPs, in member states' domestic policy.

FLYWAY PROTECTION AND INDIA'S RESPONSIBILITY

India sits at the intersection of the Central Asian Flyway and the East Atlantic Flyway — both major migratory bird routes. Tens of millions of birds pass through or overwinter in India annually. India's CMS COP13 hosting (Gandhinagar, 2020) was accompanied by commitments on the Central Asian Flyway Action Plan. Progress on

implementation has been variable: wetland protection has improved in some Ramsar sites, but habitat destruction around key stopover sites continues.

The Amur Falcon — which transits through Northeast India in massive numbers — is a CMS success story: community-based hunting bans in Nagaland transformed it from a hunted species to an ecotourism draw. This model of engaging local communities, creating livelihood alternatives, and building conservation pride is replicable but requires sustained governmental support.

SPECIES-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS FROM COP15

The Cheetah's COP15 listing intersects with India's Project Cheetah — the reintroduction of African cheetahs in Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh. CMS listing reinforces international cooperation obligations relevant to cheetah reintroduction programmes. The Great hammerhead shark's listing reflects the broader collapse of shark populations from fin trade — relevant to India's coastal fisheries regulation.

The Striped hyena — common across India's dry forests and scrublands — benefits from greater road mortality mitigation efforts, which CMS listing can catalyse through the Wildlife (Protection) Act's Schedule I status already afforded in India.

THE CBD-CMS-CITES COORDINATION PROBLEM

Migratory species fall under multiple international conventions: CMS (migration routes and flyways), CITES (trade), CBD (broader biodiversity). These conventions have separate secretariats, separate COPs, and different membership. A species like the Great Indian Bustard is simultaneously under CMS Appendix I, CITES Appendix I, and CBD's post-2020 Kunming-Montreal Framework. But there is no mechanism to coordinate national action plans across the three frameworks — leading to duplicated reporting, bureaucratic fragmentation, and conservation gaps.

India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change manages all three obligations separately. An integrated National Migratory Species Action Plan — combining CMS, CITES, and CBD obligations into a single nationally coordinated programme — would be administratively more efficient and ecologically more effective.

UPSC RELEVANCE

CMS COP15 (Brazil 2026) – 40 species added; 49% migratory species declining; CMS established 1979 Bonn; administered by UNEP; India hosted CMS COP13 Gandhinagar 2020; Central Asian Flyway; Amur Falcon (Nagaland); GIB CMS Appendix I.

MAINS GS-3:

“International wildlife conventions like CMS, CITES, and CBD are necessary but insufficient for biodiversity conservation. Critically evaluate with examples from India.”

MAINS GS-2:

India’s obligations under **multilateral** environmental agreements – coordination challenges and the role of MoEFCC.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

CMS COP15:

Venue: Brazil, March 2026

40 new species added; GIB, Cheetah, Striped hyena, Giant otter, Great hammerhead shark

49% of migratory species declining; 24% face extinction risk

High extinction risk species: 188 (103 birds, 26 fish, 28 terrestrial mammals, 23 aquatic mammals)

CMS (BONN CONVENTION):

Established: 1979, Bonn, Germany

Administered by: UNEP

Appendix I: Strict protection (no taking)

Appendix II: Cooperative management agreements

India hosted CMS COP13: Gandhinagar, January 2020

INDIA'S FLYWAYS:

Central Asian Flyway: Passes through India (Pakistan → India → Sri Lanka + SE Asia)

East Atlantic Flyway: Western route; limited Indian relevance

Amur Falcon (Nagaland): Community conservation success; hunting ban → ecotourism

KEY CONVENTIONS COMPARISON:

CMS: Migratory species; UNEP; Bonn (1979)

CITES: Trade in endangered species; UNEP-linked; Washington (1973)

CBD: Biodiversity; UNEP; Rio (1992); Kunming-Montreal Framework (2022)

Ramsar: Wetlands; UNESCO advisory; Ramsar (1971)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Project Cheetah (India): African cheetah reintroduction; Kuno NP, Madhya Pradesh; launched Sept 2022

Great hammerhead shark: Listed under CITES + CMS; fin trade primary threat

National Biodiversity Authority (NBA): India's implementing body under Biological Diversity Act 2002

Sources: [CMS Secretariat](#) , [MoEFCC](#) , [Down to Earth](#)

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