

Western Ghats - A Brief Overview for UPSC

The Western Ghats are a mountain range running parallel along the western coast of India starting from Gujarat and ending in Tamil Nadu covering the states of Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka and Kerala. The Ghats are often called the Great Escarpment of India and are also a UNESCO World Heritage site. This article covers many important facts on the Western Ghats.

Western Ghats – Recent News

1. The Koyna region of the Western Ghats is in the news after the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) reported that the region is witnessing significant warming of 0.6 to 1 Degree Centigrade over the past 100 years.
2. Dancing Frogs called the Torrent Frogs are endemic to the Western Ghats. There are 24 species of these species of frogs found in the Western Ghats.
3. A new species of flies are named after Singanallur Tank (Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu) in the Western Ghats.
4. A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the constitutional validity of the draft notification issued by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) concerning the demarcation of 56,825 square kilometres as the Western Ghats Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA).
5. A team of conservationists from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Sathaye College, and the University of Camerino has discovered a new species of plant, *Echinops sahyadricus*, in the northern Western Ghats. A paper on the discovery has been published in the international journal 'Nordic Journal of Botany'.

The topic, 'Western Ghats' comes under Geography syllabus of Civil Services Examination. Download the notes on Western Ghats PDF provided at the end of the article.

Important Facts about Western Ghats for UPSC

There are a few questions that are frequently asked about the Western Ghats. The table below mentions those questions and supporting answers about Western Ghats for UPSC.

Why the Western Ghats are called Ghats?	Ghats are known to be a mountain pass and as Deccan plateau of India is surrounded by Ghats on west and east, the Western mountain ranges are called the Western Ghats
Why are the Western Ghats important?	The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has defined the importance of Western Ghats as, "The Western Ghats perform important hydrological and watershed functions. Approximately 245 million people live in the peninsular Indian states that receive most of their water supply from rivers originating in the Western Ghats. Thus, the soil and water of this region sustain the livelihoods of millions of people."
How many states are covered by the Western Ghats?	Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are the six Indian states covered by the Western Ghats
What is another name	There are a few local names given to the Western Ghats:

given to the Western Ghats?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sahyadri in Maharashtra • Nilgiri hills in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu • Anaimalai hills and Cardamom hills in Kerala
Are the Western Ghats a continuous or discontinuous range of mountains?	The Western Ghats are a continuous range of mountain
What is the speciality of Western Ghats?	High Biodiversity and Endemism are special features of Western Ghats
What kinds of forests are found in the Western Ghats?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evergreen Forests • Moist Deciduous Forests • Scrub jungles • Sholas • Savannas including the high rainfall savannas
How were the Western Ghats formed?	The erosion of Gondwana supercontinent led to the formation of peninsular India, and further erosion of Deccan plateau has given rise to the Western Ghats
Which is the highest peak of Western Ghats?	Anamudi is the highest peak
Are the Western Ghats older than the Himalayas?	Yes, Western Ghats are older than the Himalayas
Which is the famous Biosphere Reserve in the Western Ghats?	Nilgiri Biosphere is the famous one

Note on the Western Ghats for IAS Exam

The mountain range is also a “Hottest Hotspot” of biodiversity, being one of eight in the world. The Western Ghats contain 39 properties that include national parks, reserve forests and wildlife sanctuaries. The mountains of the range cover an area of approximately 140000 sq. km. It is 1600 km long interrupted only by a low mountain pass called the Palakkad Pass/Palghat Gap.

As per UNESCO, ‘At least 325 globally threatened (IUCN Red Data List) species occur in the Western Ghats’:

1. Vulnerable Species: 129

2. Endangered – 145
3. Critically Endangered – 51

The list of a number of flora and fauna species that are globally threatened and are found in the Western Ghats is given below:

1. Plant species – 229
2. Mammal Species – 31
3. Bird Species – 15
4. Amphibian Species – 43
5. Reptile Species – 5
6. Fish Species – 1

Importance of Western Ghats:

The Western Ghats are extremely important from several points of view. One is its geomorphic importance. It is older than the Himalayas and is considered an ‘evolutionary ecotone’ illustrating the “Out of Africa” and the “Out of India” hypotheses. The Ghats also have a major influence on the ecological and biophysical processes on the entire peninsula of India. They also influence the monsoon weather patterns across the country. They present a classic example of the tropical monsoon system. The mountains act as a barrier to the rain-laden southwest monsoon winds in late summer in India.

Another reason for the Ghats’ significance is the enormous diversity and abundance of species of flora and fauna in this region. Many of these species are also endemic to the region. There are 4 – 5 thousand plant species here out of which 650 tree species are found. And, out of the 650 tree species, 352 are endemic. There are also 179 amphibian species, 65% of which are endemic; 157 reptile species, 62% of which are endemic; and 219 fish species, 53% of which are endemic. There are many flagship mammal species also here. Some of the endangered species found here are Nilgiri Tahr, Lion-tailed Macaque and Nilgiri Langur.

Protection of Western Ghats:

The following laws underline the protective measures for the western ghats:

1. Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972
2. Indian Forest Act of 1927
3. Forest Conservation Act (1980)

Frequently Asked Questions related to the Western Ghats

Why Western Ghats are called Ghats?

Two mountain ranges forming the eastern and western edges surround the Deccan plateau of peninsular India. In Hindi ghat means “river landing stairs” or “mountain pass” and has been extended in its Anglicized plural form (formerly ghauts) to include the mountains themselves. Hence, the ghats at the west of the Deccan Plateau are called the Western Ghats.

What is the Western Ghats famous for?

Western Ghats are best known for their biological diversity and endemism. Also, it one of the world's eight hottest hotspots of biodiversity.

Which plant is known as Queen of Western Ghats?

The wild child of the Western Ghats, Taman has purple blossoms that make the tree stand out as a mass of a single, vibrant colour, earning it the nickname 'Queen's flowers'.

