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B.Sc HONS Part-III Paper-VII

Topic - Describe the characteristic fauna of Ethiopian Region

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Q. Describe the characteristic fauna of Ethiopian region.

Ans. Geographical limits : Ethiopian region includes Africa. South of Sahara. Madagascar and South Arabia. But DARLINGTON and WILLIAM GEORGE has separated Madagascar from Ethiopian region and dealt with it separately on account of its distinctive fauna. It has land continuity with its

northern neighbour (the palaearctic Region) but Sahara desert acts as an effective barrier between two. The remaining sides are all surrounded by sea.

Climatic Conditions : Africa is mainly a tropical country and has big rivers like those of Neotropical Region. It has large blocks of lofty evergreen. Forests in the equatorial region. Mountainous regions and wide grassy plants in the eastern part. Its southern part has warm temperate climate with mixed vegetation.

Fauna : The vertebrate fauna of Ethiopian Region is rich varied and well marked with a number of endemic genera families present . In number of unique families it ranks second to the Neotropical Region. In its fish, amphibian and reptilian fauna it resembles both Neotropical and Oriental Regions and in birds and mammals it exhibits remarkable similarity with Oriental Region. The similarities are mainly on account of similar tropical climate. But the affinities are much stronger with tropics. Old World than with those of New World. In all 161 families of terrestrial vertebrates are represented in this region.

Fishes : Fish fauna is diverse Catfishes, Characinids. Some Cyprinids. Cyprinodonts and Cichlids. The following fish families are exclusive :

(i) Archaic bichirs (ii) Protopterus (lung fish).

(iii) Isospondyli fishes (iv) Few Catfishes

(v) Mormyrids or African electric fishes. The mormyrids are not related to Neotropical electric fishes-Gymnotids.

Amphibians : The fauna is less distinctive being represented by caecilians. Bofonids, Ranids, Rhacophoridae, Brevicipitids but Rana and Bufo are absent. The family Pipidae is represented by Xenopus. The clawed family is confined to this region only. Family Hylidae is absent. but the clawed family of tree frogs. the Polypedatidae is present. The tailed amphibians are absent.

Reptiles : Crocodile and turtles are very numerous. Turtles are represented by Trionychidae. Testudinae and Pelomedusidae. The last one is shared with Neotropical fauna. Lacertid and Agamid lizards are few and Iguanids are altogether absent. Out of fifty species of Chameleon family only four are found beyond this region. i.e. Chamaeleonidae is almost exclusive whereas Cordylidae, Spiny lizards and Feylinids are endemic or exclusive pythons. Colubrids. Typhlops. Septotyphlops and viperids are the snakes of this region.

Birds : Birds are very numerous having strong affinities with the birds of Oriental Region. There are 67 families out of which 53 are worldwide. Three are shared with Oriental Region and six families are exclusive. The common birds are Hornbills. Herons. Cuckoos. Weavers. Goatsuckers. Storks. Thrushes, Larks. Parrots, Pigeons, Swallows, bee eaters, Shrikes, Plovers, Bustards, Guinea fowls etc. Those shared with Oriental Region are Honey guides, Bulbuls and Prothonotaries. The exclusive birds are Ostriches. Secretary birds. Helmeted birds. Pitta. Mouse birds. and Hammer headed birds.

Mammals : Ethiopian mammalian fauna is most varied. There are about 38 families excluding Bats. Shrews. Rabbits, Squirrels, Cricetid mice, Murid mice, Dogs, mustelids, Cats, Bovids have wide distribution. There are approximately twelve exclusive families and the rest are shared with either palaearctic or Oriental Region. Whereas Hedgehog, Porcupines, Civets, Hyenas and are shared with both. The palaearctic families represented in Ethiopian region are Dormice, Jerboas, Doneyes and Wild horses. The Oriental Mammals of this region are Loris. Old World, Monkeys (Lemurs.) Apes (Chimpanzee and Gorilla). Pangolins. Bamboo rats, Elephants. (Loxodonta, rhinoceros and Chevotins. But these Ethiopian mammalian families are markedly different from oriental families.

Twelve families of mammals are exclusive. These are represented by Giraffes. Hippopramus, Aardvarks, three families of Insectivores and six Giraffes. Hippopramus, Aardvarks. Three families of Insectivores and six families of Rodents. The insectivorous families are represented by Otter shrews, Golden moles, Aye Aye and Elephant-shrews. The Rodents are anomalurid (Anomalurus), African flying squirrel. Pedetidae, African jumping Hare, Cave rats and Rock rats. In addition different species of Zebras and large number of Antelopes are also unique. Rhinoceroses, Horses and Pangolins although not exclusive are unique.

Another characteristic feature of this region is the entire absence of otherwise widely distributed families such as Talpidae. Ursidae Bears. Cervidae (Deers. Goat and Sheep) and Wrens etc.

Subregions : Ethiopian Region has been divided into four subregions :

1. East African Subregion : This subregion includes tropical Africa and tropical Arabia. It comprises of 145 families of terrestrial vertebrates. of which only one mammalian and one avian form are peculiar to this subregion. The mammalian forms are crested rats and avian form is horned. In addition rhinoceros. giraffes and zebras are characteristic of this subregion.

2. West African subregion : It includes western part of Africa extending upto Congo and is characterised by forest area. Although it contains 134 families of terrestrial vertebrates, the peculiar families are absent Gorillas, Chimpanzees, Monkeys, Potamogale. Flying squirrels. Okapi among mammals. Pitta angolensis (family Pittidae) are characteristic of the region

3. South African Subregion : It embraces southern portion of Africa It includes about 153 families of terrestrial vertebrates. Family Promelopidae of mammals is the only unique family of this subregion. The other characteristic mammalian families are Chrysochloridae (Golden moles). Macroscelidae (Elephant shrews), Pedetidae (African jumping hare. Bathyergidae (African mole-rat). Earth wolf and Aardvark. Avian families are represented by Secretary bird and Ostriches.

4. Malagasy Subregion : It includes Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and neighbouring islands. The fauna of this region is most interesting. It contains 86 families of vertebrates of which are confined to this subregion only. These are Chiromyidae. (Aye-aye). Centetidae. (Tenrecs) among mammals. Acrochridae (Helmet Birds). Vangidae. Philepinda Mesocnathidae and Leptomedusae among birds and Uropeltidae among reptiles.

There are 36 species of Lemurs all belonging to peculiar genera and they are confined to Madagascar and 55 families of birds. Five of which are peculiar.