

IN A FIRST, ERAVIKULAM NATIONAL PARK REPORTS BIRTH OF NILGIRI TAHR IN DECEMBER

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A tahr newborn inside the Eravikulam National Park (ENP) in Munnar in Idukki. | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Eravikulam National Park (ENP) in Munnar in Idukki, a natural habitat for the endangered Nilgiri tahr, has witnessed an early onset of the breeding season with two tahr births, even as the authorities are preparing to close the park on January 31. This is the first time in the park's history that a newborn has been reported as early as the second week of December.

"The normal kidding season begins in the second week of January and goes on till March," said a source. "Normally, the park closes for the breeding season from January 31 to March 31. Only a study can ascertain if the park needs to be closed early for breeding," added the source.

According to Job J. Neriampampil, assistant wildlife warden, two kids have been sighted inside the park till now. "The first kid was spotted on a cliff inside the park. It faces threat from leopards and wild dogs," he said.

Munnar wildlife warden S.V. Vinod has submitted a recommendation to the chief wildlife warden to close the park from January 31 to March 31. "The park is closing to ensure a safe breeding season. In addition, the park faces forest fire threat in February and March," Mr. Vinod said.

A tahr calve inside the Eravikulam National Park (ENP) in Munnar in Idukki | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

P.S. Essa, a wildlife expert who monitors annual census of Nilgiri thars, said that the annual schedule that the park now follows is based on a study by Clifford G. Rice, an American biologist. With a new birth reported in December, there is scope for reassessing the schedule. "Over the years many aspects have changed in the park. A new study can help in reassessing breeding season inside the park and, changes can be made, if needed," Dr. Essa said.

In the annual census conducted last year, 785 tahrs were sighted inside the park, and 125 new kids were sighted inside ENP.

According to officials, a survey of new births and the total population in ENP will be held in the second week of April. To get more accurate data, the survey will be conducted on sunny days

after the breeding season is over, said a Forest department official.

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