

# 'NILGIRI TAHR' CONSERVE THE SPECIES AND ITS HABITAT

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

The Nilgiritragus hylocrius, commonly known as 'Nilgiri Tahr', is a mountain ungulate seen distributed patchily in the southern mountain ranges of Western Ghats from Nilgiris in the North to Kanyakumari in the south of both Tamilnadu and Kerala states. Once it has ranged 200 km north of its present distribution. Nilgiri Tahr is the state animal of Tamilnadu.

This sheep species is confined to the higher altitude grasslands with steep rocky cliffs and mountainous slopes. There are three areas with continuous extent of grasslands and cliffs which are Mukurthi National Park (76.4km<sup>2</sup>) and grass hills in Tamilnadu and Eravikulam National Park (94km<sup>2</sup>) in Kerala.

Since the Tahr is only using the rolling grasslands with steeply cliffs as its habitat, conserving the species and its habitat directly helps in preserving the Shola-grassland complexes of the Western Ghats, which provide various ecosystems services like oxygen, water, hydro-electricity, carbon sequestration etc.,

WWF carried out field surveys in most all of its distributional ranges during 2008-2012 which brought out a comprehensive report on Nilgiri Tahr population status and current distribution. Population numbers were estimated between 3000-3500 in the wild. Thirteen new locations to the science were identified during the surveys.

Based on habitat connectivity, the whole range was divided into five conservational blocks.

- Block-I includes areas of Mukurthi NP, Nilgiris FD, Nilambur FD and Silent valley NP. This block holds around 700 Nilgiri Tahr
- Block-II includes Coimbatore FD, Palghat FD and parts of Mannarkad FD. This block has around 200 Nilgiri Tahr
- Block-III includes Aanamalai TR, Parambikulam TR, Neliampathy WLS, Eravikulam NP, Munnar FD Kodaikanal WLS and Adimali FD which holds the largest population among these blocks of around 1600 individuals
- Block-IV has Srivilliputhur WLS, Theni FD, Meghamalai WLD, Periyar TR, Ranni FD and Nellai Wildlife Sanctuary and has around 700 Nilgiri Tahr
- Block-V consists of Kalakkad-Mundanthurai TR, Neyyar WLS, Peppara WLS and Kanyakumari WLS which harbours around 300 Nilgiri Tahr.

While speaking to D. Boominathan, Landscape Coordinator, WWF-India said that "regular monitoring of animal density, population status and threat assessment in any forest area would be helpful in scientific management and conservation of the species and its habitat. Annual population estimation exercises are being carried out in Mukurthi NP of Tamilnadu and Eravikulam NP of Kerala. All other Tahr ranging areas should also be doing the annual population estimation to do management interventions. The good sign is new set of Forest Guards and Foresters being recruited by Tamilnadu. This would help fill up the vacancy gaps which would strengthen protection. Provisions should be made available for new anti-poaching

camps (permanent and floating camps) through protection needs assessment”

Eminent Biologist Dr. Johnsingh says that “There is a great potential for re-introduction of Nilgiri Tahr in Western Ghats in places where they occurred in the past. Kerala and Tamilnadu forest department should take up this programme to increase the Nilgiri Tahr population in the Western Ghats. There are several places where it can be easily done and one such place is Glenmorgan hills in the Nilgiris forest division to begin with”.

Predit, Nilgiri Tahr Coordinator, WWF-India added that “Due to its evolutionary adaptation the Nilgiri Tahr is restricted in the steeply cliffs and mountainous terrain; the animal hasn’t got the attention which it should get otherwise in terms of conservation values.

Most people aren’t aware of its presence, distribution and its significance. It’s our collective wisdom to protect these mountain guardians for our own survival and for generations to come. Declaring a ‘World Nilgiri Tahr day’ would be the first step to get the attention this elusive and important animal deserves”

(Inputs from

Predit M.A., WWF,

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