

India's first Nilgiri Tahr project

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In news– The Tamil Nadu government has recently launched an initiative for the conservation of the Nilgiri Tahr, the State animal, at a cost of ₹25.14 crore.

About the project-

- Under the project, **the government plans to develop a better understanding of the Nilgiri Tahr population through surveys** and radio telemetry studies; **reintroduce the Tahrs to their historical habitat**; address proximate threats; and increase public awareness of the species.
- The project is to be **implemented from 2022 to 2027**.
- Furthermore, **October 7 will be celebrated as 'Niligiri Tahr Day' in honour of E.R.C. Davidar**, who was responsible for **pioneering one of the first studies of the species in 1975**.
- The **funds for the project are to be provided by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board**.
- The project will be headed by a Project Director, who will be assisted by an Assistant Director.
- The team will include senior scientists, research fellows and field staff.

About Nilgiri Tahr-

- Also known as Nilgiri Ibex, the Nilgiri tahr (*nilgiritragus hylocrius*) inhabits montane grasslands with rocky cliffs at elevations.
- It is a **sure-footed ungulate** and it is the **only mountain ungulate in southern India amongst the 12 species present in India**.
- **The Adult males of NilgiriTahr species develop a light gray area or "saddle" on their backs and are hence called "Saddlebacks"**.

- **It is the sole Caprinae species** found in the tropical mountains of southern India.
- **The animal inhabits meadows with steep cliffs** at elevations between 300 metres and 2,600 metre above sea level.
- It is estimated that there are 3,122 Nilgiri Tahrs in the wild.
- **Historically, the Nilgiri Tahr was known to inhabit a large portion of the Western Ghats.** But today it remains restricted to a few scattered patches in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- It has become locally extinct in around 14% of its traditional shola forest-grassland habitat.
- **Some of the challenges in the conservation of the Nilgiri Tahrs are** potential local extinction due to highly fragmented populations; invasion of exotic species into the habitat; forest fires; over-exploitation of forest resources; and lack of ecological data and understanding.
- **Locally known as Varaiaadu,** the tahr has been an endangered species and is protected under Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of India, 1972.
- It has been listed as “Endangered” by IUCN.
- **There are multiple references to the Nilgiri Tahr in Tamil Sangam literature** dating back to 2,000 years.
- The late **Mesolithic** (10,000-4,000 BC) paintings highlight the significance of the Tahr in folklore, culture and life.
- It was designated as the State animal of Tamil Nadu in recognition of its ecological and cultural significance.