

Singalila National park

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In news-In the **first re-wilding programme of red pandas in India**, the **Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, West Bengal** has started an ambitious programme to release 20 of these furry mammals in about five years to the forests.

About the National Park-

- It is **located on the Singalila Ridge** at an altitude of more than 7000 feet above sea level, in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal.
- It is **bordered on the north by the state of Sikkim** and on the west by the country of Nepal.
- The park is part of the Eastern Himalayas. The **Singalila Ridge, which runs roughly North to South and separates Himalayan West Bengal from the other Eastern Himalayan ranges** to the west of it.
- The park was **declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1986**, and was made an Indian national park in 1992.
- The region had long been used as the **trekking route from Manebhanjang to Sandakphu** (the highest peak of West Bengal) and Phalut.
- **Rammam river and Srikhola River** flow through the park.
- Because of the park's range in altitude, **it includes three separate biomes**, ranging from subalpine to subtropical, and three corresponding **ecoregion**:
 - **The Eastern Himalayan subalpine conifer forests ecoregion**, of the temperate coniferous forests biome
 - **Eastern Himalayan broadleaf forests ecoregion**, of the temperate broadleaf and mixed forests biome
 - **Himalayan subtropical pine forests ecoregion**, of the subtropical coniferous forest biome
- Thick bamboo, oak, magnolia and rhododendron forest between 2000 and 3600 m cover the Singalila Ridge.
- **Sandakphu is known as the "mountain of poisonous plants"**

due to the large concentration of Himalayan cobra lilies (*Arisaema*) which grow there..

- **The park has a number of small mammals including the red panda, leopard cat, barking deer, yellow-throated marten**, wild boar, pangolin and pika. Larger mammals include the Himalayan black bear, leopard, clouded leopard, serow and takin.
- **The park is a birder's delight with over 120 species recorded** including many rare and exotic species like the Himalayan Vulture, scarlet minivet, kalij pheasant etc.
- The endangered Himalayan newt frequents the region and congregates around the lakes of Jore Pokhri and Sukhiapokhri and nearby lakes to reproduce.
- The number of **red pandas has been declining in the wild, even in the Singalila and Neora Valley National Parks**, the two protected areas where the endangered mammal is found in the wild in West Bengal.
- Recent studies estimate that there are 38 of them in Singalila and 32 in Neora.

About Red pandas-

- **Red panda, also called lesser panda, red cat-bear, or red bear-cat** is reddish brown, long-tailed, raccoon-like mammal, about the size of a large domestic cat.
- Its **scientific Name is Ailurus fulgens**.
- **Red pandas are made up of two subspecies – the Himalayan red panda** (*Ailurus fulgens fulgens*), which resides in the mountains of northern India, Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal, and the **Chinese red panda** (*A. fulgens styani*), which lives in China's Sichuan and Yunnan provinces.
- According to a study by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) India is home to both the (sub) species and the Siang river in Arunachal Pradesh splits the two phylogenetic species.
- It is also the **state animal of Sikkim**.
- It subsists mainly on bamboo and other vegetation,

fruits, and insects.

- **Once classified as a relative of the giant panda**, it is now usually classified as the sole member of the family Ailuridae.
- Its feet have hairy soles, and the claws are semi-retractile and has an extra thumb for feeding and climbing.
- **It is nocturnal and may live alone**, in pairs, or in family groups.
- Categorized as an **endangered species as per IUCN Red List of Threatened Species**, red pandas are shy, solitary and arboreal animals and considered an indicator species for ecological change.
- They are also one of the most iconic species in terms of their importance to global conservation.

Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park-

- It is the **only specialized Zoo in the country and is internationally recognized for its conservation breeding** programmes of Red Panda, Snow Leopards, Tibetan Wolf and other highly endangered animal species of Eastern Himalaya.
- **It was formerly known as Himalayan Zoological Park** and was established on 14th August, 1958 in Darjeeling (West Bengal) as a joint venture of Govt. of India (Department of Science and Technology) and Govt. of West Bengal.
- In 1975, Late Smt. Indira Gandhi the then Prime Minister of India dedicated the Himalayan Zoological Park, Darjeeling in Memory of Late Smt. Padmaja Naidu, ex-governor of West Bengal.
- It falls under the category of small zoos as per Central Zoo Authority's classification but is the largest high altitude zoo in the country.
- **It is one of the high-altitude zoos in the country** and has been quite successful in captive breeding of the furry mammals.