



Daily current affairs

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Nilgiri tahr climb population charts

- The species, however, remains under threat from invasive plants
- In a heartening development for conservationists, a recent census has revealed that the population of the Nilgiri tahr (an endangered mountain goat) at the Mukurthi National Park has grown by an impressive 18% in the last two years, from 480 to 568.
- Tamil Nadu Forest Department officials said that a count conducted in 2016 had put the population in the national park at around 480, but a revised count in 2017 pegged it at 438.
- This year, there is a definite increase in the number of animals in the only pristine habitat left in the Nilgiris for the tahr.
- The rise in the animals' population has led to a few herds migrating out of the national park, into the erstwhile Nilgiris South Forest Division.

Several threats

- Researchers point to the continuing spread of invasive species of flora, such as wattle and pine, and exotic weeds like scotch broom (*Cystisus scoparius*) and gorse, which end up diminishing grazing land posing a threat.
- The Forest Department was stepping up efforts to remove exotics, with wattle eliminated in over 125 hectares of Shola grasslands.

Mukurthi National Park (MNP)

- Mukurthi National Park (MNP) is a 78.46 km² (30.3 sq mi) protected area located in the western corner of the Nilgiris Plateau west of Ootacamund hill station in the northwest corner of Tamil Nadu state in the Western Ghats mountain range of South India.
 - The park was created to protect its keystone species, the Nilgiri tahr.
 - The park is characterised by montane grasslands and shrublands interspersed with sholas in a high altitude area of high rainfall, near-freezing temperatures and high winds.
 - It is home to an array of endangered wildlife, including royal Bengal tiger and Asian elephant, but its main mammal attraction is the Nilgiri tahr.
 - The park was previously known as Nilgiri Tahr National Park.
 - The park is a part of Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, India's first International Biosphere Reserve. As part of the Western Ghats, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1 July 2012
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New rankings based on innovation

The Centre announced another annual ranking of higher educational institutions, based on how they fare in terms of innovation.

Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA)

- The new ranking - named Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) - will be formally launched on October 15, the birth anniversary of former President APJ Abdul Kalam.
- The first results will be declared on February 28, 2019, which is also Science Day.
- The new rankings will work parallel to the ranking of institutions captured by the annual National Institutional Ranking Framework.

National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)

- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was approved by the MHRD and launched by Honourable Minister of Human Resource Development on 29th September 2015.
- This framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country.
- The methodology draws from the overall recommendations broad understanding arrived at by a Core Committee set up by MHRD, to identify the broad parameters for ranking various universities and institutions.

The parameters broadly cover

- Teaching, Learning and Resources;
- Research and Professional Practices;
- Graduation Outcomes;
- Outreach and Inclusivity and;
- Perception.

Every large institution will be given a common overall rank as well as a discipline specific rank as applicable.

