

## Nilgiri Tahr: Environment

The joint 2025 census by Kerala and Tamil Nadu Forest Departments recorded 2,668 Nilgiri Tahrs, with Eravikulam National Park hosting the largest population. Tamil Nadu's Project Nilgiri Tahr (2022–2027) aims to conserve and restore the species' habitat through surveys, reintroduction, and monitoring.

### Joint Population Estimation 2025 – Nilgiri Tahr

The Joint Population Estimation 2025 conducted by the Kerala and Tamil Nadu Forest Departments has reported a total of 2,668 Nilgiri tahrs across the two states. The census report was released during the 50th anniversary celebration of Eravikulam National Park (ENP) in Munnar, Kerala. Released by Kerala's Minister for Forests and Wildlife Protection.

#### Project Nilgiri Tahr

1. Launched by: Tamil Nadu Government in 2022.
2. Duration: Five-year program (2022–2027).

#### Primary Objective

1. To conserve and enhance the Nilgiri Tahr population.
2. To secure and restore its habitat in the Western Ghats.

### Key Components of the Project

#### 1. Synchronised Biennial Surveys

Carried out simultaneously across forest divisions in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It Helps avoid double counting and ensures uniform methodology.

#### 2. Reintroduction into Historical Habitats

Identify past distribution areas of Nilgiri Tahr. Reintroduce individuals to restore ecological balance.

#### 3. Disease Identification and Treatment

Regular veterinary monitoring to detect diseases early. Vaccination or medical care in controlled environments when needed.

#### 4. Radio-Collaring for Monitoring

Use of GPS collars to track movement, migration, and behaviour. Enables better habitat management and anti-poaching efforts.

#### 5. Promotion of Ecotourism

Community-based ecotourism in tahr habitats to generate local income. Links conservation success to livelihood benefits for locals.

### Key Findings of the 2025 Census

1. Total Population: 2,668 Nilgiri Tahrs (Kerala + Tamil Nadu).
2. Eravikulam National Park (ENP), Kerala: Largest contiguous population – 841 individuals. Previous year (2024) – 827 individuals → Slight increase in population.
3. Kerala: 90% of the state's tahr population concentrated in the Munnar landscape.
4. Tamil Nadu: Mukurthi National Park and Grass Hills National Park.

#### Ecological and Conservation Significance

Nilgiri Tahr habitats also support a variety of apex predators and endemic species:

1. Apex Predators: Tiger, Leopard, Dhole (wild dog).
2. Endemic Primates: Nilgiri Langur, Lion-tailed Macaque.

Conservation of tahr habitats indirectly ensures ecosystem health and biodiversity protection.

High-altitude grasslands and shola forests provide vital water catchment areas for peninsular rivers.

### Nilgiri Tahr (*Nilgiritragus hylocrius*)

1. Only mountain ungulate found in southern India (one among 12 species of mountain ungulates in India).

2. Other Names includes, Nilgiri Ibex (incorrect usage in scientific sense), Locally called 'Varayaadu' in tamil. State Animal of Tamil Nadu.
3. Sexual Dimorphism: Adult males ("saddlebacks") are larger, darker, and have a distinctive silvery patch on the back.
4. Distribution: Endemic to the Southern Western Ghats. Mainly found in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
5. Habitat: Tropical montane grasslands, Shola forests, rocky cliffs. Altitude range: 1,200 – 2,600 m above sea level.
6. Key Location: ENP holds the largest surviving population with the highest density.
7. Reproduction: Gestation: ~180 days. Usually one offspring per birth.
8. Life Span: Can live up to 9 years. Average in wild: 3 – 3.5 years due to predation, accidents, and harsh climate.

#### Conservation Status

1. IUCN Red List: Endangered.
2. Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule-I → Highest level of legal protection.
3. Threats includes, Habitat loss (plantations, infrastructure development), Poaching for meat and hide.
4. Habitat fragmentation reducing genetic diversity.
5. Population Decline, 2015 WWF Report – ~3,122 wild individuals. Historically, Nilgiri Tahrs roamed across the entire Western Ghats but now restricted to fragmented pockets.



#### Eravikulam National Park – Key Facts

1. Location: Kannan Devan Hills, Southern Western Ghats, Kerala.
2. Significance: Famous for Neelakurinji flower (blooms once every 12 years). Houses Anamudi Peak – highest point in South India.
3. Vegetation: Rolling montane grasslands with shola forest patches in valleys.

#### Wildlife

1. Large Mammals: Gaur, Sloth Bear, Tiger, Leopard, Nilgiri Tahr.
2. Primates: Nilgiri Langur.
3. Others: Giant Squirrel, Wild Dog.

#### Conservation Role

1. Core area for Nilgiri Tahr breeding and protection.
2. Water source for multiple rivers and streams of Kerala.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/survey-finds-1365-nilgiri-tahrs-in-kerala/article69897466.ece>