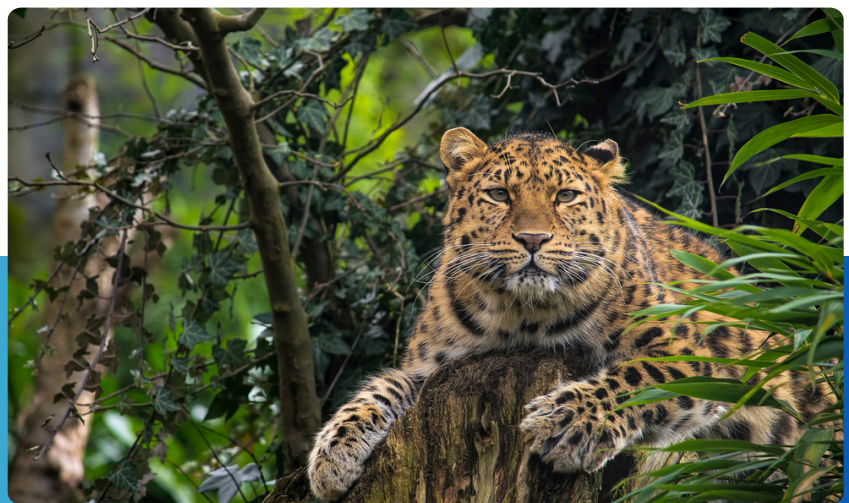
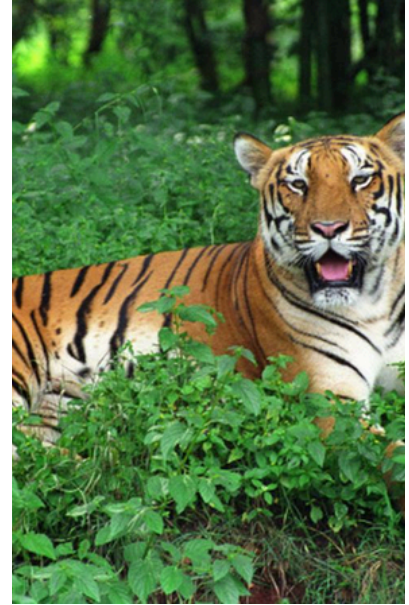


CURRENT AFFAIRS



Attukal Pongala



Recently, women celebrated the Attukal Pongala festival by making the ritual offering to the presiding deity of the Attukal Bhagavathy temple.

About

The Attukal Pongala held in Attukal Temple, Thiruvananthapuram is the largest congregation of women for a festival in the world.

Pongala, which means 'to boil over', is the ritual in which women prepare sweet payasam (a pudding made from rice, jaggery, coconut and plantains cooked together) and offer it to the Goddess or 'Bhagavathy'.

The ritual can only be performed by women and the streets of the city are known to be jam-packed with faithful devotees during the time of the festival.

The Goddess-fondly referred to as 'Attukalamma' is said to be appeased by this ritual.

The entire Thiruvananthapuram city lights up in festive fervour and the number of devotees has increased to the point that it has been recorded in the Guinness World Book of Records.

Attukal Temple

Attukal temple, located at the heart of Thiruvananthapuram city in Attukal, has Goddess Bhadrakali (Kannaki) as the main deity.

Bhadrakali, according to Hindu mythology, is the Goddess of prosperity and salvation.

The temple structure shows a confluence of traditional Tamil and Kerala styles of architecture.

Beautifully carved figures of Goddess Kali, Sree Parvathy, Lord Shiva and the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu are the other attractive sights at the temple.



Grant Permanent Commission To Women: SC to Coast Guard



- Recently, the Supreme Court urged the Indian Coast Guard to ensure that women are granted permanent commission.
- The top court was hearing a plea filed by Indian Coast Guard officer Priyanka Tyagi seeking the grant of permanent commission to eligible women Short Service Commission Officers of the force.

Key Points

- It had wondered whether the Centre was adopting a “patriarchal approach” despite judgments upholding permanent commissions to women officers in the armed forces.
- The Supreme Court had frowned on the government’s suggestion to allow 10% women permanent commission, saying women were no “lesser beings”.

Indian Coast Guard

- Established in 1977 with just 7 surface ships, it now has an inventory of 158 ships and 78 aircraft in its fleet.
- Now, the Indian Coast Guard has grown into the world’s fourth-biggest Coast Guard.

- The Coast Guard enjoys a very cordial and good relationship with the neighbouring countries.
- It is headquartered in New Delhi.
- Functions of the Indian Coast Guard
- A coast guard is in-charge of organizing rescue missions, recruiting volunteers, conducting searches, stopping smuggling through marine channels and watching over our nation's boundaries.
- The Indian Navy, the Department of Revenue (Customs), the Department of Fisheries, the Central Armed Police Forces, and the State Police Services all collaborate closely with the coast guard.



Similipal Tiger Reserve



- Concerned over the sizeable number of pseudo-melanistic tigers in its Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR), largely due to inbreeding, the Odisha government has written to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to consider introducing female tigers from other landscapes to the reserve.

Key Points

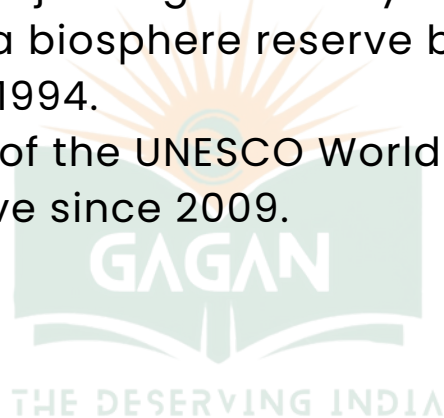
- According to the All Odisha Tiger Estimation (AOTE 2023-24) report, which was released recently, 30 tigers were found in the State's forests.
- With 24 adult tigers, the STR currently holds the largest share of the State's tiger population. It also houses all adult female tigers in the State.
- A total of 13 adult tigers (seven females and six males) were found to be pseudo-melanistic in Similipal. No other wild habitat in the world has pseudo-melanistic tigers.

Melanistic tigers

- According to a study conducted by multiple authors, approximately 37% of the tigers in STR are pseudo-melanistic – a condition characterised by wide, merged stripes.
- Similipal's tigers are also found to move within an isolated habitat, although it has one of the largest tract of contiguous forest.

Similipal Tiger Reserve

- Similipal derives its name from 'Simul' (silk cotton) tree.
- It was formally designated a tiger reserve in 1956 and brought under Project Tiger in the year 1973.
- It was declared a biosphere reserve by the Government of India in June, 1994.
- It has been part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserve since 2009.



Leopards in India



- India' leopard number rose by 8% from 12,582 in 2018 to 13,874 in 2022, according to report made by the Environment Ministry.
- While the highest number of leopards were reported in Madhya Pradesh (3907), only three states reported over 1,000 animals each – Maharashtra (1985) and Tamilnadu(1070).
- Uttarakhand reported a 22% decline in the big cat number – reportedly due to poaching and man – animal conflict , Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal.

Indian leopard

- The Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*) is a leopard subspecies widely distributed on the Indian subcontinent.
- The species is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.
- Populations have declined following habitat loss and fragmentation , poaching for the illegal trade of skin and body parts, and persecution due to conflict situations.

- India now has 12,852 leopards as compared to the previous estimate of 7910 conducted in 2014. More than 60% increase in population has been recorded.
- Monitoring of the tiger in India has clearly shown its umbrella role in the ecosystem, which has shed light on other charismatic species like the leopard.
- Umbrella species are species selected for making conservation-related decisions, typically because protecting these species indirectly protects the many other species that make up the ecological community of its habitat.

