

Indian Pangolin

Pangolins are fascinating creatures that belong to the family Manidae and are found in parts of Africa and Asia. These animals are unique in that they are covered in scales made of keratin, the same material found in human hair and nails. They are often referred to as scaly anteaters due to their long, sticky tongue used for capturing ants and termites, which make up the majority of their diet.

There are many stories and legends about pangolins in various cultures. In African folklore, pangolins are often associated with wisdom and healing. Some African tribes believe that pangolins have magical powers and can protect people from harm. In Asia, pangolins are seen as symbols of good luck and prosperity, and are often depicted in artwork and literature.

Pangolins, the only mammals in the world with scales, have become one of the most trafficked animals in the world due to their high demand in traditional medicine and as a delicacy in some cultures. Among the eight species of pangolins, the Chinese and Indian pangolins are two of the most widely distributed, but they are also the most threatened.

In this article, we delve into the unique characteristics of the Chinese and Indian pangolins and explore how their biology, behaviour, and conservation status differ from each other.

Sl No.	Characteristics	Description
1	Common Name	Indian pangolin
2	Scientific Name	Manis crassicaudata
3	Length	2.6 to 2.8 metres (8.5 to 9.2 feet)

4	Colour	dark grey dorsal surface, lighter grey sides, and a light grey or pinkish-white belly
5	Average weight	8 to 15 kg
6	Food habits	ants and termites
7	Habitat	They prefer areas with a high density of ants and termites, which make up the bulk of their diet
8	Any interesting facts about them	One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Indian pangolin is its ability to roll up into a tight ball when threatened

Features

The Indian pangolin, also known as the scaly anteater, is a species of pangolin found in the Indian subcontinent. It is a nocturnal, solitary mammal that feeds primarily on ants and termites.

The Indian pangolin has a unique and distinctive appearance, characterised by its thick, scaly body, long snout, and small eyes and ears. The scales on its body are brownish in colour and are made of keratin, the same material that makes up human fingernails and hair.

Males and females of the Indian pangolin species look very similar in terms of their physical characteristics. However, males are generally larger than females, with an average weight of around 12-15 kg, while females weigh around 8-10 kg.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Indian pangolin is its ability to roll up into a tight ball when threatened. This behaviour, along with its scaly exterior, helps protect the pangolin from predators.

Another unique feature of the Indian pangolin is its long, sticky tongue, which it uses to extract ants and termites from their nests. The tongue can be up to 40 cm long, which is longer than the animal's entire body!

Food Habits

As a specialised feeder, the Indian pangolin feeds almost exclusively on ants and termites, which they locate using their keen sense of smell. They use their strong claws to rip open ant and termite mounds, and their long, sticky tongue to extract their prey. They can consume up to 70 million ants and termites annually!

Habitats

The Indian pangolin is found in a variety of habitats across the Indian subcontinent, including tropical and subtropical forests, grasslands, and agricultural landscapes. They are distributed across several countries in South Asia, including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

In India, the Indian pangolin is found in several states, including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and parts of the Himalayan region. They prefer areas with a high density of ants and termites, which make up the bulk of their diet.

Vulnerable Species

Indian pangolin is considered a Endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) due to a significant population decline over the past few decades. It is estimated that there has been a population decline of up to 80% over the past 21 years.

One of the primary threats facing the Indian pangolin is habitat loss and fragmentation due to deforestation, agriculture, and urbanisation. As a result, their natural habitat is shrinking, making it difficult for them to find enough food and shelter. Additionally, the species is hunted for its meat, which is considered a delicacy in some parts of India, and for its scales, which are used in traditional medicine and believed to have healing properties.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of Indian pangolins remaining in the wild, but it is believed to be in the thousands. However, due to their elusive nature and nocturnal habits, they are challenging to study and monitor. In India, they are found in various states such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh.

Protected Areas

There are several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries in India that are home to the Indian pangolin and other wildlife species.

Located in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, Pench National Park is known for its diverse flora and fauna, including tigers, leopards, Indian bison, and Indian pangolins.

Situated in the Satpura Range of Madhya Pradesh, Satpura Tiger Reserve is home to a variety of wildlife species, including Indian pangolins, leopards, sloth bears, and wild dogs.

Situated in Madhya Pradesh, Bandhavgarh National Park is home to one of the highest densities of Bengal tigers in India, as well as other wildlife species such as Indian pangolins, leopards, and Indian bison.

Located in Maharashtra, Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve is known for its large population of Bengal tigers, as well as other wildlife species such as Indian pangolins, Indian bison, and

sambar deer.

Located in Tamil Nadu, Mudumalai National Park is known for its diverse wildlife, including Indian pangolins, elephants, leopards, and Indian bison.

These national parks and wildlife sanctuaries provide crucial habitats and protection for the Indian pangolin and other wildlife species. However, conservation efforts are still needed to ensure the survival of these animals in the wild.

Conservation of the Species

The Chinese and Indian Pangolin, both classified as endangered species, are facing numerous threats in India, including poaching, habitat destruction, and the illegal wildlife trade. These species are often hunted for their scales, which are believed to have medicinal properties, and their meat, which is considered a delicacy.

In recent years, there have been efforts to conserve these species and protect their populations in India. The government of India has listed both the Chinese and Indian Pangolin under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, which provides them with the highest level of protection. Additionally, several conservation organisations have been working to raise awareness about the importance of protecting these species and to implement conservation measures.

One such organisation is the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), which has been working with local communities and law enforcement agencies to combat the illegal trade in pangolins. The WTI has established anti-poaching teams and has also set up rescue and rehabilitation centres for confiscated pangolins.

Another organisation, the Pangolin Conservation Working Group (PCWG), has been conducting research on pangolin populations

in India and developing conservation strategies. The PCWG has also been working with local communities to raise awareness about the importance of pangolins and the threats they face.

The conservation efforts for these species have also received support from the Indian government, which has launched several initiatives to conserve endangered wildlife, including the Chinese and Indian Pangolin. For instance, the government has established protected areas for these species, including national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. The government has also launched a program to provide financial assistance to local communities for conservation efforts

Conclusion

In conclusion, both the Indian pangolin and the Chinese pangolin are unique and fascinating animals that play important ecological roles in their respective habitats. However, they are facing severe threats due to poaching and habitat loss, and urgent conservation efforts are needed to ensure their survival. It is crucial that governments, conservation organizations, and individuals work together to protect these species and their habitats, and to raise awareness about the importance of conserving biodiversity for the well-being of our planet. As humans, it is our responsibility to protect the biodiversity of our planet and the species that inhabit it. Pangolins are a reminder that our actions have consequences, and we must take action to ensure that future generations can enjoy these amazing creatures.