

# Nilgiri Tahr

The Nilgiri tahr (*Nilgiritragus hylocrius*) is an endangered mountain goat species that is endemic to the Western Ghats of India. They are known for their striking appearance, with long, curved horns, and shaggy fur that ranges in colour from reddish-brown to greyish-brown. The males are larger than the females and have longer horns.

Nilgiri tahr inhabits the montane grasslands and shrublands of the Western Ghats, where they graze on a variety of grasses, leaves, and shoots. They are social animals, living in small herds that typically consist of females and young, while males tend to be solitary or form small groups.

The Nilgiri tahr is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, primarily due to habitat loss and fragmentation caused by human activities such as deforestation and grazing. Hunting and poaching have also contributed to their declining population. Conservation efforts, including habitat restoration, captive breeding, and population monitoring programs, are underway to protect this species and prevent further decline in their population.

Sl No.	Characteristics	Description
1	Common Name	Nilgiri Tahr
2	Scientific Name	<i>Nilgiritragus hylocrius</i>
3	Length	80-100 cm (31-39 in)
4	Colour	Dark brown to black fur with a lighter underbelly
5	Height	80-100 cm (31-39 in)
6	Tail Length	9-14 cm (3.5-5.5 in)
7	Height till Shoulder	80-100 cm (31-39 in)

8	Average Weight	Males: 80-100 kg (176-220 lb) Females: 60-80 kg (132-176 lb)
9	Food Habits	Grasses, shrubs, and other vegetation.
10	Habitat	Found in the high altitudes of the southern Western Ghats of India
11	Interesting Facts	Nilgiri Tahr is an endangered species with less than 3,000 individuals remaining in the wild. It is also the state animal of Tamil Nadu.

## Appearance

The Nilgiri tahr is a type of mountain ungulate that is endemic to the Western Ghats of southern India. Both males and females of the species have a shaggy coat of dark brown or black hair with a lighter underbelly. The males are typically larger than the females, with a shoulder height of around 100-110 cm and a weight of 80-100 kg, while the females are smaller, standing around 75-80 cm tall and weighing around 35-50 kg.

One of the most distinctive features of the Nilgiri tahr is their curved horns, which are present in both males and females. The horns of the males can reach lengths of up to 40 cm and are thicker and more heavily ridged than those of the females, which typically measure around 25 cm in length.

The Nilgiri tahr is well adapted to life in its mountainous habitat, with excellent agility and sure-footedness that allows it to navigate steep and rocky terrain. They are also able to survive on a diet of coarse grasses and other vegetation that is tough to digest.

In terms of behaviour, Nilgiri tahr are social animals that

typically live in groups of 20-30 individuals. During the breeding season, males will engage in ritualised battles for access to females, using their horns to lock heads and push against one another in a test of strength.

## **Food Habits**

In terms of their diet, Nilgiri tahr are primarily grazers, feeding on a variety of grasses, herbs, and shrubs. They have a unique digestive system that allows them to extract maximum nutrients from their food, which is necessary for survival in their high-altitude habitat where food can be scarce.

## **Habitats**

The Nilgiri tahr is primarily found in the high-altitude grasslands and montane forests of the Western Ghats of southern India, specifically in the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. They are well adapted to living in steep, rocky terrain and are typically found at elevations of between 1,200 and 2,600 metres above sea level.

## **Vulnerable Species**

Nilgiri tahr is considered a vulnerable species in India, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The population of Nilgiri tahr in India is estimated to be between 3,000 to 4,000 individuals, which is a significant decline from historical population numbers due to habitat loss, hunting, and fragmentation.

The primary threat faced by the Nilgiri tahr is habitat loss, as their high-altitude grassland and montane forest habitat is being rapidly destroyed or degraded due to human activities such as deforestation, agricultural expansion, and infrastructure development. Habitat fragmentation and isolation also pose a significant threat to the species, as

they require large, contiguous areas of suitable habitat to survive and breed.

Another threat faced by the Nilgiri tahr is hunting, which occurs both for meat and for their unique curved horns, which are highly valued in traditional medicine and as a decorative item. Poaching for these reasons has severely impacted the population of Nilgiri tahr in the past, but efforts have been made to curb poaching through conservation and anti-poaching measures.

## Protected Areas

The Nilgiri tahr is primarily found in the Western Ghats of southern India, and several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries have been established in the region to protect their habitat and population.

Eravikulam National Park in the Idukki district of Kerala is known for its beautiful high-altitude grasslands and is home to the largest population of Nilgiri tahr in India. The park has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is a popular tourist destination.

Silent Valley National Park in the Palakkad district of Kerala, is known for its lush evergreen forests and is home to a variety of endemic species, including the Nilgiri tahr.

Anamalai Tiger Reserve in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu is known for its rich biodiversity and is home to several endangered species, including the Nilgiri tahr. The reserve is also an important elephant corridor.

Mukurthi National Park in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu is known for its high-altitude shola-grassland ecosystem and is home to several endemic species, including the Nilgiri tahr.