Asiatic Black Bear Predates Red Panda

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Environment | Species*

Why in News?

Researchers at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have provided the first verified photographic documentation of an Asiatic black bear (Ursus thibetanus) preying on an endangered red panda (Ailurus fulgens).

- The event was recorded in Singalila National Park, West Bengal, at an altitude of approximately 9,000 feet.



Parameter	Asiatic Black Bear	Red Panda
Scientific name	*Ursus thibetanus*	*Ailurus fulgens*
IUCN status	Vulnerable	Endangered
Feeding habit	Omnivorous	Herbivorous
Lifestyle	Opportunistic feeder	Arboreal
Altitude range	2,600–11,400 ft	6,400–14,500 ft
Distribution	Eastern to Western Himalayas	Eastern Himalayas

Key Findings

- This study presents the first verified photographic evidence of Asiatic black bear predation on a red panda.
- **Documented camera-trap sequence:**
  - A red panda was observed climbing a resting tree (Betula utilis).
  - An Asiatic black bear approached the site, ascended the tree, and descended carrying the red panda in its mouth.
- This incident challenges the prevailing assumption that arboreal resting sites of red pandas are entirely free from predation risk.

Potential Factors Contributing to Predation

- Seasonal fluctuations in food availability.
- Opportunistic feeding behaviour exhibited by Asiatic black bears.
- Spatial overlap occurring between predator and prey populations.
- Variation in individual behavioural patterns.
- Potential effects of climate change and altered seasonal patterns on feeding and hibernation behaviours.

Ecological Significance

- **Predator-prey dynamics –** Presents evidence of an atypical predator-prey interaction within Himalayan ecosystems.
- **Climate change –** Highlights concerns regarding altered seasonal patterns and reduced hibernation periods.
- **Conservation paradox –** Both species are classified as threatened, and one may act as a predator of the other.
- **Habitat protection –** Indicates that arboreal refuges do not fully protect red pandas from predation.

Singalila National Park
• **Located in –** Northwestern border of Darjeeling district, West Bengal. • **Situated on –** The Singalila Ridge, an extension of the Kanchenjunga mountain range. • **Area –** 78.6 sq. km. • **Altitude –** 2,400 - 3,650 metres. • **Part of –** The Eastern Himalayas. • **Bordered by:** - Sikkim – North. - Nepal – West.

Reference

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