Himalayan Pangolin

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

Why in News?

Researchers have revalidated and concluded that the Himalayan pangolin is a distinct extant species, separate from the Chinese pangolin (Manis pentadactyla).

- **Scientific Name** – Manis aurita.
- **Family** – All Pangolins belong to Family Manidae.
- It is a cryptic, nocturnal, scaly ant-eating mammal.

Key Findings of the Study

- **Distinct Species** – Extensive genomic and morphological evidence suggests that the Himalayan pangolins are a distinct species, previously classified as a subspecies of the Chinese pangolin.
- It provides a vital baseline for the conservation of one of the world's most endangered and heavily trafficked animals.
- **Distribution** – It is restricted to the southern Himalayan foothills, with confirmed populations in Nepal, South Tibet, and Northeast India, including the state of Assam.
- **Comparison** – M. aurita is significantly larger in body size and skull & larger on average (95.2 cm in size) compared to 71.2 cm for the Chinese pangolin, and has smaller ears, shorter and broader nasal bone.



- **Reason for conferring distinctive species**
- **Climate change** – It played a key role in diverging the two lineages approximately 1.8 million years ago during the early Pleistocene Epoch.
- **Demographic Collapse** – Around the 14th century, M. aurita underwent a sharp demographic collapse due to intense cooling and aridification.

- Unlike the Chinese pangolin, which benefited from stable maritime-influenced forests in southern China, M. aurita lacked climatic buffering, habitat instability and faced long-term decline.
- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN** – Not been separately assessed by the IUCN.
  - **CITES** – Appendix I
  - **WPA, 1972** – Schedule I
- **Threats** – Illegal wildlife trade for meat, organs, skin, scales, and other parts of the body are valued for their use in traditional medicine and internal threat of inbreeding.

Reference

Down to Earth | Himalayan pangolin confirmed as a distinct species

