

Reintroduction of Asian giant tortoise in Nagaland

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance

Why in News?

Ten Asian giant tortoise has been reintroduced into the Zeliang Community Reserve in Nagaland by the Nagaland Forest Department and the India Turtle Conservation Program (ITCP).

The released tortoises are marked and tagged with a VHF-based telemetry system to study their dispersal and survival in deep rainforests.

- It is the **largest tortoise** in mainland Asia. They are considered one of the oldest tortoise lineages globally.
- **Scientific Name** - Manouria emys.
- It is also known as the Asian forest tortoise or Asian brown tortoise and small elephants of the forests.
- **Size & weight** - They can weigh up to 37 kg and reach a shell length of 60 cm.
- **Appearance**
 - **Shell** - Broad, flattened carapace and a large plastron.
 - **Limbs** - Thick, scaly legs with elephant-like feet, used for digging.
 - **Head** - Flattened with a sharp beak for tearing vegetation.
 - **Color** - Grayish-brown as hatchlings, darkening to charcoal as adults.
- **Habitat** - Hilly, wet tropical and subtropical forests, often found near streams or in damp soil.
- **Distribution** - These species are found in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia and other places.
- **Unique nesting** - It is the only tortoise species that builds an above-ground nest.
- Females construct large mounds of leaf litter and guard their nests, protecting their eggs from predators and potentially regulating the incubation temperature.
- **Diet** - Primarily herbivorous, feeding on leaves, fruits, fungi, bamboo shoots and other vegetation, occasionally consume invertebrates or small amphibians.
- **Threats** - Habitat loss, especially due to logging, agriculture, forest fires, and hunting for consumption and the illegal pet trade.
- **Conservation status**
 - **IUCN** - Critically endangered.
 - **CITES** - Appendix II
- **Significance for ecosystem**- They play a vital role in forest health by dispersing

seeds, turning over soil, and grazing on plants.

- They are considered a keystone species, meaning their presence is crucial for the health of their ecosystem.

Quick Facts

- **India Turtle Conservation Program (ITCP)** is a joint countrywide initiative focused on the conservation of freshwater turtles and tortoises and their habitats across India.
- It's spearheaded by the Turtle Survival Alliance Foundation India (TSA India) in partnership with the Government of India and State Forest Departments.
- **Zealiang community reserve** - It plays a crucial role as a wildlife corridor and reservoir, linking to the *Ntangki National Park and the Dhansiri Reserve Forest in Assam*.
- The local communities, particularly the *Zeliang Naga tribe*, are actively involved in conservation efforts within the reserve.
- They practice sustainable farming and are engaged in protecting the forests.
- **Tortoise Guardians** - Youths from the local community have been engaged by the project as 'tortoise guardians' to ensure protection of the released tortoises and assist in data collection.

Reference

[The Hindu | Asian giant tortoise](#)

