Tapanuli orangutans

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

Why in news?

Scientists worry that Cyclone Senyar may have killed many Tapanuli orangutans, after one carcass of the critically endangered ape was found in the floodwaters.

- **Scientific name –** Pongo tapanuliensis
- **Family –** Hominidae
- **Habitat & Distribution –** It is a ***great ape species*** found ***exclusively*** in the ***Batang Toru Ecosystem of North Sumatra, Indonesia***, specifically south of Lake Toba.
- It prefers **montane and hill forests**, unlike other orangutans that inhabit lowland rainforests.
- **Range –** Their primary habitat is restricted to a small area of roughly 1,100 square kilometers.
- **Population –** Estimated at ***less than 800 individuals***, making it the rarest of all great apes.

Key Features

- **Discovery –** Discovered as a distinct species in 2017, after genetic and morphological studies showed differences from Sumatran and Bornean orangutans.
- **Evolutionary significance –** It is diverged from Sumatran orangutans approx. 3.4 million years ago, and from Bornean orangutans approx. 674,000 years ago.
- **Size & Weight –** They are similar in size to other orangutans.
  - Females are about 1.2 m tall and weigh around 37 kg.
  - Males grow in two stages - In the first stage, they are close in size to females, in second stage, fully mature males reach about 1.5 m tall and weigh around 75 kg.
- Orangutans can live ***up to 60 years in the wild***.

- **Distinctive Features –** It has thicker, frizzier fur; flanged males have a mustache and beard unlike other orangutans; cheek pads are flatter with blonde fuzz.



- **Diet –** Mostly fruit, but unusually includes caterpillars and conifer cones.
- **Arboreal –** Rarely seen on the ground, likely due to predators like Sumatran tigers.
- **Reproduction –** Very slow, with long mother-offspring bonds, making population recovery difficult.
- **Ecological role –** It act as a ***keystone species***, vital for seed dispersal and maintaining forest biodiversity.
- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN –** Critically Endangered
- **Threats –** Deforestation, roads and mining fragmenting forests, illegal hunting and pet trade.

References

1. Down to Earth | Scientists warn Cyclone Senyar may have pushed Tapanuli orangutan closer to extinction
2. NEPC | Tapanuli orangutans

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