



World's First Melanistic Tiger Safari in Odisha

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Why in News?

Odisha is set to unveil the **world's first melanistic tiger safari** near the [Similipal Tiger Reserve \(STR\)](#).

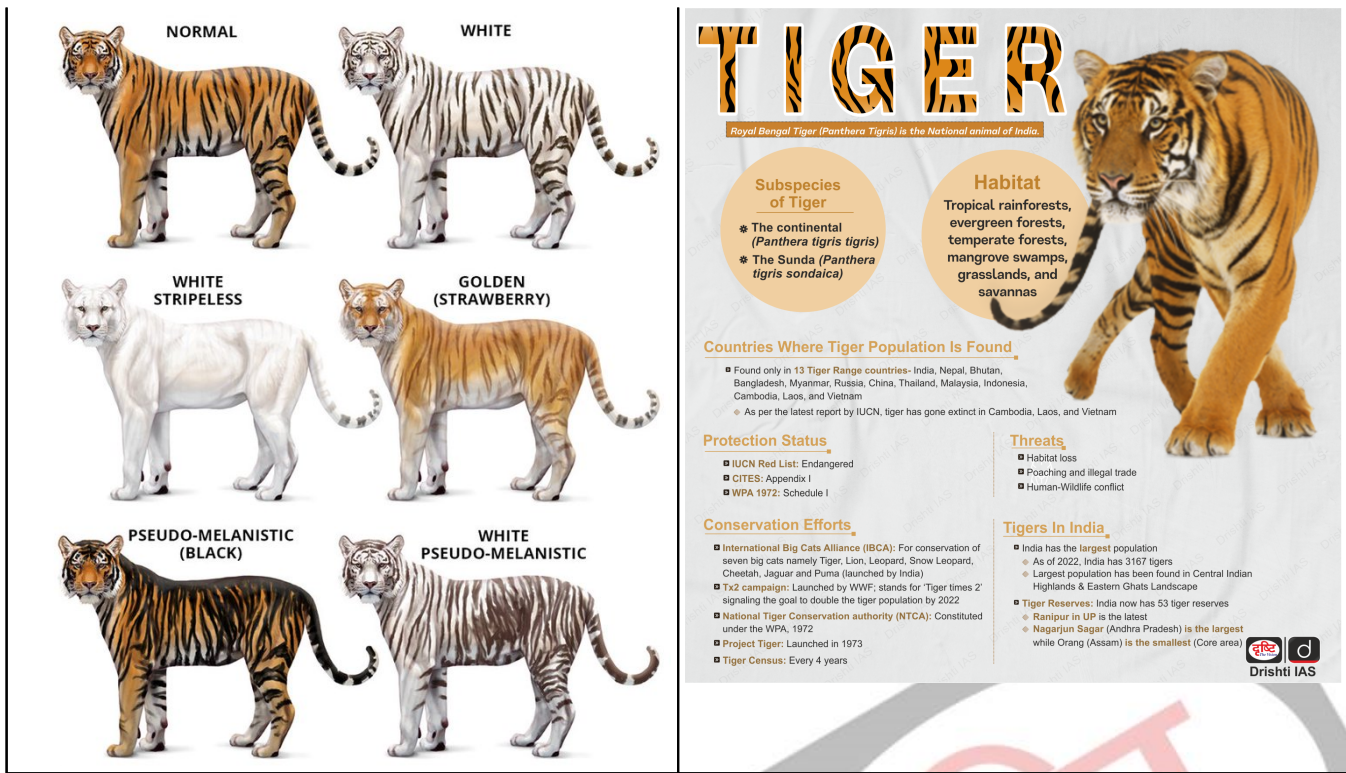
What is Odisha's Vision for the Melanistic Tiger Safari?

- **Melanism and Melanistic Tiger:** Melanism is a genetic condition, that results in increased melanin production, leading to **black or nearly black skin**, feathers, or hair in animals.
 - The **Royal Bengal Tigers of Similipal** boast a distinctive lineage with elevated melanin levels, giving rise to black and yellow interspersed stripes, making them pseudo-melanistic.
 - According to the [All India Tiger Estimation, 2022](#), Similipal Tiger Reserve houses 16 tigers, with 10 of them displaying melanistic traits.
- **Location of Safari:** Spanning approximately 200 hectares near **Dhanbad-Balasore National Highway-18**, the safari site lies in close proximity to STR, providing a landscape akin to Simlipal.
 - In the beginning, three melanistic tigers **from Nandankanan Zoo**, along with rescued or orphaned tigers, will **occupy the open enclosures of the safari**.
- **Objective:** It aims to raise awareness about the conservation needs of melanistic tigers, providing a platform for researchers and enthusiasts to engage with these rare big cats.
- **Approval:** The project necessitates approvals from the [Central Zoo Authority](#) and other regulatory bodies overseeing wildlife initiatives in the country.
 - A [National Tiger Conservation Authority](#) committee will also conduct a feasibility study of the proposed site before granting final clearance.

What are the Other Colour Variations in Tigers?

- **Orange with Black or Brown Stripes:** This is the most common and widely recognized tiger coloration, **e.g, the Royal Bengal Tiger**.
 - Each tiger's stripe pattern is unique, serving as a form of camouflage, in their natural habitat.
- **White Tigers:** They are not considered a separate subspecies. The colour of the white tiger's fur is the result of a genetic mutation called **leucism**.
 - **Leucism** is a genetic condition that results in **reduced pigmentation in animals**, causing them to have **white or pale-colored skin, feathers, fur, or scales**.
- **Golden Tigers:** They are also not considered a subspecies of tigers because their golden colour variation is caused by the presence of a recessive gene called "**wideband**".
 - The **wideband gene reduces melanin production** during the cycle of hair growth.
 - Recently, it was spotted in **Kaziranga National Park**.

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Similipal Tiger Reserve

- **Location:** Similipal is situated in the **Deccan Peninsula Biogeographic Zone**.
- **Vegetation:** Predominantly **moist mixed deciduous forest** with tropical semi-evergreen patches and sporadic dry deciduous forests and grasslands.
- **Floral Richness:** Holds 7% of India's flowering plants and 8% of its orchid species.
- **Faunal Diversity:** Home to 55 mammal species, 361 bird species, 62 reptile species, 21 amphibian species, and numerous insects and microfauna.
 - Major species other than tigers include **sambar, chital, barking deer, gaur, and mouse deer, leopards**, fishing cat etc.
 - Management efforts have revived **mugger crocodile populations** along rivers Khairi and Deo.
- It has also been designated as a **Global Network of Biospheres** site since 2009.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following pairs: (2013)

National Park - River flowing through Park

1. Corbett National Park : Ganga
2. Kaziranga National Park : Manas
3. Silent Valley National Park : Kaveri

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- (a) 1 and 2
(b) 3 only

- (c) 1 and 3
(d) None

Ans: (d)

Q2. Among the following Tiger Reserves, which one has the largest area under “Critical Tiger Habitat”? (2020)

- (a) Corbett
(b) Ranthambore
(c) Nagarjunasagar-Srisaïlam
(d) Sundarbans

Ans: C

Mains

Q: “Policy contradictions among various competing sectors and stakeholders have resulted in inadequate ‘protection and prevention of degradation’ to environment.” Comment with relevant illustrations. **(2018)**

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