



Wildfires Threaten Uttarakhand's Wildlife and Ecological Balance

Why in News?

The [wildfires in Uttarakhand's forests](#) are **endangering the state's rich wildlife**, which includes [tigers](#), [elephants](#), [leopards](#), as well as a range of [birds](#) and [reptiles](#).

Key Points

- The ecosystem is under severe pressure, particularly for birds and reptiles who are having difficulty fleeing the fires due to their limited mobility.
- According to environmental photographer, wildfires have resulted in the tragic loss of numerous bird species, including nesting ones.
- A conservator of forests (research), is concerned about the **critically endangered yellow-headed tortoise** as they are at increased risk during the fire season when they **seek shelter under dried [Sal leaves](#)**.
 - The loss of even a small number of these tortoises could have a significant **impact on the survival of the species**, considering their **already declining population**.
- Gajendra Pathak, associated with the **Jungle Bachao Jeevan Bachao campaign**, emphasizes the wider ecological consequences of the wildfires.
 - The burning of leaves not only damages wildlife but also interferes with the important **humus layer vital for soil health** and erosion prevention.
 - The **disappearance of insects** such as beetles, ants, and spiders adds to the **challenges of maintaining the fragile ecological equilibrium**.

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Yellow-Headed Tortoise

- **Scientific name:** *Indotestudo elongate*.

- **Common name:** Elongated tortoise, Yellow Tortoise and Sal forest tortoise.
- **Distribution:** It is a species of tortoise found in **Southeast Asia** and parts of the **Indian Subcontinent**, particularly Northeast India.
- **Physical description:** These up to **1 foot-long tortoises** have elongated somewhat narrow **carapaces and yellow heads**. Shells are typically a pale tannish-yellow to caramel color, with blotches of black.
- **IUCN Red List Status: Critically Endangered.**
- **Population:** According to the **IUCN** the population of the species may have fallen by about 80% in the last three generations (90 years).
- **Threats:** It is heavily hunted for food and collected both for local use, such as decorative masks, and international wildlife trade. In china, a **mixture, made by grinding up the tortoise's shell, also serves as an aphrodisiac.**

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