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News: Black tigers

- The Indian government informed the Rajya Sabha that there are 10 black tigers (melanistic tigers) in India, all of which are exclusively found in Odisha's Similipal tiger reserve.
- Black Tigers are not a distinct species but a rare colour variant of Bengal Tiger. The coat colour and patterning of black tigers are due to a single mutation in the Transmembrane Aminopeptidase Q (Taqppep) gene. This mutation is called pseudo-melanism.

Simlipal National Park

- Simlipal National Park is a national park and a tiger reserve in the Mayurbhanj district in the Indian state of Odisha covering 2,750 km². Geographically, it lies in the eastern end of the eastern ghat.
- It is part of the Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve, which includes three protected areas — Simlipal Tiger Reserve, Hadgarh Wildlife Sanctuary and Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It was formally designated a tiger reserve in 1956 and brought under Project Tiger in the year 1973.
- It was declared a biosphere reserve by the Government of India in June 1994.

- This protected area is part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves since 2009.
- Simlipal National Park derives its name from the abundance of red silk cotton trees growing in the area.
- It is the 7th largest national park in India.
- The park is home to Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, gaur, and chausingha along with some of the beautiful waterfalls like Joranda and Barehipani Falls.
- The high hills surround Meghasani/Tunkiburu, the highest peak in the park.
- At least 12 rivers cut across the plain area. The prominent among them are Budhabalanga, Palpala Bhandan, Kharkai River and Deo.
- Simlipal comes under a high cerebral malaria-prone zone.
- Simlipal forests are home to a variety of tribes. Prominent among these are Kolha, Santhala, Bhumija, Bhatudi, Gondas, Khadia, Mankadia and Sahara.
- Also, the period from January-April coincides with the Akhand Shikar ritual of many forest dwelling communities during which, the Adivasis usually clear the ground bushes and grasses by setting them on fire to enhance their visibility in the forest. Among others, this is said to be one of the causes of forest fires in the Simlipal national park.
- Recently a newly constituted Panda committee under the Tribal Affairs Ministry is to investigate the issue of forest rights of the Mankadia tribe in Simlipal Tiger Reserve. Mankadia is one of the 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in Odisha. They critically depend on making rope with

siali fibre that is richly available in Simlipal Tiger Reserve (STR). They were denied habitat rights inside STR under Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006.

- The Simlipal Tiger Reserve (STR) is the **only tiger habitat in the world with melanistic tigers, which have broad black stripes running across their bodies and thicker than those seen on normal tigers. Recently, scientists have unravelled the mystery behind these 'Black Tigers'.**
- Recently the **Forest Administration and SHGs (Self Help Groups) have started an awareness Campaign to manage fires in Simlipal.**