



Increased Risk of Extinction: Leopards

Why in News

According to a study published in the journal *Global Ecology and Biogeography*, the **leopard faces an 83% increased risk of extinction in North India due to roadkill.**

Key Points

▪ Findings of the Study:

- The **leopard population of North India is at highest risk** among four animal populations identified as being the **most vulnerable to extinction in the next 50 years** if observed roadkill levels persist.
 - Leopard is **followed by the maned wolf and the little spotted cat**, both of Brazil, and the brown hyena of southern Africa.
- At an **83% increased risk**, the study estimates the time to the North Indian leopard **population's extinction at 33 years.**
- Other populations found highly vulnerable include the **lion-tailed macaque (*Macaca silenus*)** and **sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*)** in South India.
- The study **brings attention to Sub-Saharan Africa and south-eastern Asia as regions where roads can lead to loss of mammalian biodiversity** and thus, areas where future road development and road mitigation need to be carefully considered.

// VULNERABLE TO EXTINCTION DUE TO ROADKILL

Species, location	Population road-killed	Probability of extinction	Time to extinction
Leopard, North India (<i>Panthera pardus</i>)	19.4%	83%	33 years
Maned wolf, Brazil	36.4%	34%	30 years
Little spotted cat, Brazil	20-37%	0-75%	0-36 years
Brown hyena, Southern Africa	6-43%	3-100%	0-21 years

OTHER SPECIES VULNERABLE TO ROADKILL

Lion-tailed macaque (South India), sloth bear (South India), Amur tiger, Goa antelope (Tibet), wild yak (Tibet), Iberian lynx, African lion

▪ Leopard:

- **Scientific Name:** *Panthera pardus*

◦ **About:**



- The leopard is the **smallest of the Big Cats (Of genus Panthera namely the [Tiger](#), [Lion](#), [Jaguar](#), Leopard, and [Snow Leopard](#))**, and known for its ability to adapt in a variety of habitats.
- A nocturnal animal, the **leopard hunts by night**.
- It **feeds on smaller species of herbivores** found in its range, such as the **chital, hog deer and wild boar**.
- **Melanism** is a common occurrence in leopards, wherein the entire skin of the animal is black in colour, including its spots.

- A **melanistic leopard is often called [black panther](#)** or jaguar, and mistakenly thought to be a different species.

◦ **Habitat:**

- It occurs in a wide range in **sub-Saharan Africa, in small parts of Western and Central Asia, on the Indian subcontinent** to Southeast and East Asia.
- The **Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*)** is a leopard widely distributed on the Indian subcontinent.

◦ **Population in India:**

- As per a recent report '[Status of leopards in India, 2018](#)' released by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, there has been a "**60% increase in the population count of leopards in India from 2014 estimates**".
- The 2014 estimates placed the population of leopards at nearly 8,000 which has increased to 12,852.
- The **largest number of leopards have been estimated in Madhya Pradesh** (3,421) followed by Karnataka (1,783) and Maharashtra (1,690).

◦ **Threats:**

- Poaching for the illegal trade of skins and body parts.
- Habitat loss and fragmentation
- Human-Leopard conflict

◦ **Conservation Status:**

- **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
- **CITES:** Appendix-I
- **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule-I

