



Snow Leopards

[Source: DTE](#)

Why in News?

Recently there was a significant discovery of [snow leopards](#) in the **Kishtwar High Altitude National Park** of Jammu and Kashmir's [Chenab Valley](#) region by a team of scientists.

- This discovery holds importance for snow leopard conservation in India, shedding light on a lesser-known population of this **apex predator**.

Why is the Sighting Significant?

▪ Importance of the Discovery:

- Snow leopards are highlighted as an **apex predator** and a **flagship species** of High Mountain Asia.
- India's role as home to 2% of the global snow leopard range emphasizes the importance of conservation efforts.
 - The **occupancy** and **abundance** of the snow leopard is **poorly known** across its range in India.
- India is home to 718 snow leopards, most of whom live in areas that are not under legal protection.
 - **Population surveys** in the Western Himalayas have been limited to Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

▪ Findings:

- Snow leopards were found at altitudes ranging from 3,004 to 3,878 meters.
 - This is mostly an **arid alpine region** above the treeline, with **steep and rugged terrain** flanked by high-altitude pastures of junipers, grasses, and legumes on rolling hills.
- **Anthropogenic pressure**, particularly from **livestock grazing**, was observed in certain catchments, posing threats to **habitat and prey availability**.
 - This could lead to [human-wildlife conflict](#) and drive the snow leopard and its prey into suboptimal areas, thus exposing them to other threats.

What are the Characteristics of Snow Leopard?

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Snow Leopard

Panthera Uncia

Often referred to as the "ghost of the mountains"

HABITAT

- Mountainous regions of **Central and Southern Asia**
- **12** Range Countries
- In India:
 - **Western Himalayas:** Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh
 - **Eastern Himalayas:** Uttarakhand and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh

MAJOR SITES

- Hemis National Park, Ladakh
 - **Snow leopard capital of the world**
- Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh
- Gangotri National Park, Uttarakhand
- Khangchendzonga National Park, Sikkim

PROTECTION STATUS

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

CONSERVATION EFFORTS

- Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) Programme
- Himal Sanrakshak- Community Volunteer Programme
- Project Snow Leopard
- Snow Leopard Conservation Breeding Programme- Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, West Bengal

THREATS

- Human Snow Leopard Conflict
- Climate Change
- Loss of Prey and Habitat
- Poaching



Some Key Facts:

- **Physical Features**
 - Height: 55-65 cm (22 - 26 inches)
 - Length: 90 - 115 cm (36 - 44 inches)
- Its **extra large paws** act like a pair of natural snow shoes preventing the cat from sinking into the snow.
- Its **round, short ears reduce heat loss**, and the wide, short nasal cavity warms the air before it reaches the cat's lungs.
- The cat has **strong, short front limbs** and longer hind limbs helping launch the cat up to 30 feet (10 meters) in one leap.

- Its **extra long tail** helps the cat keep its **balance** and provides **extra warmth** when it's wrapped around the body.
- **Unlike other big cats, snow leopards can't roar.**
- Despite being called the snow 'leopard', this big cat is **more closely related to the tiger** than the leopard.

Kishtwar High Altitude National Park

Information	Details
Location	Kishtwar district, Jammu and Kashmir
Region	Forms Chenab Valley region along with Doda and Ramban
Habitat	Potential snow leopard habitat
Connectivity	Connects greater Himalayas of Jammu and Kashmir, trans-Himalayas of Ladakh (via Zaskar), and lesser Himalayas of Himachal Pradesh
Importance	Acts as a corridor connecting snow leopard populations in Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions to the global snow leopard range, enabling gene flow for healthy populations
Altitude Restriction	Protected area inaccessible above 4,300 meters due to rugged terrain and extreme weather
Other Fauna	Home to Siberian ibex, Himalayan musk deer, and wolves

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Which one of the following National Parks lies completely in the temperate alpine zone? (2019)

- (a) Manas National Park
- (b) Namdapha National Park
- (c) Neora Valley National Park
- (d) Valley of Flowers National Park

Ans: (d)