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Clouded Leopards and Their Habitats

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Recently a study conducted in **nine** countries (Bhutan, Nepal, **India**, Peninsular Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar) suggested that **only 9.44%** of the studied region was **'highly'** suitable for **clouded leopards** (*Neofelis nebulosa*).

- In India, the **Dampa tiger reserve in Mizoram** was chosen as the study site.
- Dampa had **one of the highest population densities of clouded leopards**, among the sites surveyed.



- **Clouded leopard:**

- Named after cloud shaped pattern on its skin.
- It is listed as **Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List**.
- It is the **State animal of Meghalaya**.
- It has been added to India's **Recovery Programme for Critically Endangered Species** to aid more research and strengthen conservation efforts.

- **Habitat:**
 - Clouded Leopard prefers **grassland, shrubs, subtropical and dense tropical forest up to a height of 7,000 feet** occurring from the Himalayan foothills through mainland Southeast Asia into China.
 - In India, it occurs in Sikkim, northern West Bengal, Meghalaya subtropical forests, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.
 - Clouded leopard's presence is positively related to:
 - Dense forest cover
 - High rainfall
 - Hard terrain
 - Low human presence
- **Factors affecting Clouded leopards distribution:**
 - Deforestation
 - Changing rainfall patterns
 - Human-animal conflict
 - Development projects

Thus, steps should be taken to make land-use and development policy to facilitate coexistence of people alongside **clouded leopards** as umbrellas for wider nature.

Dampa Tiger Reserve

- It is located in **Mizoram**.
- It received the status of a tiger reserve under **Project Tiger**.
- Recently in the news, as the tigers were estimated to be zero as part of the **latest all India tiger estimation exercise**.

Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitat (IDWH)

- It is a **centrally sponsored scheme** launched to provide **technical and financial assistance to States/UTs** for protection of wildlife habitat.
- The activities covered under the scheme include
 - Staff development and capacity building,
 - Wildlife research and evaluation
 - Anti-poaching activities
 - Wildlife veterinary care
 - Addressing man-animal conflict
 - Promoting eco-tourism.
- **Financial assistance** is also provided to States for the **relocation of communities from within protected areas to other areas**.

- The scheme includes three components:
 - **Support to Protected Areas (National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves & Community Reserves)**

All Protected Areas (PAs) in different states are eligible for assistance, except those areas which receive assistance under Project Tiger.
 - **Protection of Wildlife outside Protected Areas Many wildlife habitats fall outside the network of protected areas.**

Under this component, funds are granted against Biodiversity Plans prepared by Chief Wildlife Wardens of the respective States. Priority is given to regions contiguous to the Protected Areas.
 - **Recovery Program for critically endangered habitats and species**

16 species have been identified for recovery under this component. These are snow leopard, leopard, dolphin, hangul, Nilgiri Tahr, marine turtles, dugongs, edible nest swiftlet, Asian wild buffalo, Nicobar Megapode, vultures, Malabar Civet, Indian rhino, Asiatic lions, Swamp deer, Jerdon's Courser and Brown antlered deer. **A scientific Recovery Plan** has to be prepared by the **Chief Wildlife Warden in each state.**

Source:TH