

**27– 10 – 2024**

**News: Snow Leopard**

- International Snow Leopard Day is every year celebrated on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2024.

## **Snow Leopard**

- Snow Leopard, often referred to as the “ghost of the mountains”, is a medium sized cat that inhabits at the higher Himalayan & trans-Himalayan landscape in 4 states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh and UT’s of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir.
- This area contributes to 5% of global snow leopard range.
- They are native to the mountains of Central and South Asia typically found at elevations between 9800 and 17000 feet in mountain ranges.
- Countries where Snow Leopards are found are Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- Snow leopard acts as an indicator species to the health of the mountain ecosystem in which they live, due to their position as the top predator in the

food web. It is also declared as a **flagship species** by the Government of India for the high-altitude Himalayas.

- Their **kills provide food for scavengers like vultures and wolves**, supporting other species.
- They **possess thick, greyish-white fur that provides camouflage against snow and rocks**.
- Snow leopards **do not roar**. They **communicate through growls, hisses, meows, and a unique sound called a “chuff”**.
- The animal is **most active at dawn and dusk**.
- Like most species of cats, **snow leopards are solitary animals**.
- IUCN Status: Vulnerable.
- Wildlife protection Act: Schedule I.
- CITES Status: Appendix I.
- CMS Status: Appendix I.
- Recently, the 1<sup>st</sup> Snow Leopard Survey of nation was developed by scientific experts. The use of technology such as camera traps & scientific surveys will help to estimate the numbers on International Snow Leopard Day (23<sup>rd</sup> October 2019).
- Recently, **Kyrgyzstan has officially declared the Snow Leopard as its national symbol**, signifying its commitment to conservation and ecological balance.

- The occasion also marked the inaugural session of 4<sup>th</sup> steering meeting of **Global Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Protection**.
- **Bishkek declaration** of 2013 reiterates the fundamental principles, objectives & actions pertaining to participatory conservation of snow leopards & their ecosystems of Asia.
- The **first Snow Leopard Conservation Centre** is decided to be established in **Uttarakhand** with the **funding of Global Environment Facility (GEF)**.
- **Securing Livelihoods, Conservation, Sustainable Use and Restoration of High Range Himalayan Ecosystems project** (SECURE Himalaya), a project developed as a response to the growing crisis of illegal trafficking in wildlife, will also contribute towards attainment of the aim of Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP).
- Snow Leopard is also the state animal of **Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh**.
- Recently, camera traps revealed the **first sighting of Snow leopard in Baltal – Zojila area in Jammu and Kashmir**.

### **Snow Leopard Population in India**

- As per the Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) Program, the **Snow leopard population is 718 individuals in India**.

- The estimated population in different states is as follows: Ladakh (477), Uttarakhand (124), Himachal Pradesh (51), Arunachal Pradesh (36), Sikkim (21), and Jammu and Kashmir (9).
- Hemis National Park in Ladakh is called the Snow Leopard capital of the world.

## Hemis National Park

- Hemis National Park is a high-altitude national park in the union territory of Ladakh.
- It is globally famous for its snow leopards.
- Hemis is believed to have the highest density of snow leopards in any protected area in the world and to be known as the Snow Leopard Capital of the world.
- It is the only National park in India that is north of the Himalayas, the largest notified protected area in the country and is the second largest contiguous protected area after the Nanda Devi National Park.
- The park is bounded on the north by the banks of the Indus River, and includes the catchments of Markha, Sumdah and Rumbak, and parts of the Zaskar Range.
- The Park is in a Rain shadow region, with Dry Subalpine forests.