



Rise in Leopard Population

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Why in News

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**".

Key Points

- 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).
- Region wise distribution:
 - **Central India and Eastern Ghats have the highest number of leopards** at 8,071.
 - **Western Ghats:** 3,387 leopards
 - **Shivalik and Gangetic Plains:** 1,253 leopards
 - **Northeast hills:** 141 leopards
- While the estimated number of leopards has increased, the report alerts that the leopard habitat area has been **shrinking alarmingly** over the past 100-125 years.
- **Techniques Used:**
 - Camera Traps
 - Satellite Imaging
 - Field work by the **Wildlife Institute of India** and **National Tiger Conservation Authority** (NTCA).
- **Limited Coverage:**
 - While the presence of the leopard is **fairly ubiquitous**, the study has been conducted only in tiger- populated forests areas under **Project Tiger**.
 - Leopard populations in other **agricultural, non-forested areas like tea and coffee plantations**, and in **most parts of the North East have not been conducted**.

- **Threats to Leopard:**

- Fragmentation of forests as well as the decline in quality of forests leading to habitat loss.
- Human-Leopard conflict
- Poaching
- Depletion of natural prey base

- **Conservation Status:**

- **International Union for Conservation of Nature** (IUCN): Vulnerable
- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora** (CITES): Appendix I

- **Appendix I:**

- It lists species that are the **most endangered** among CITES-listed animals and plants.

- **Wildlife Protection Act 1972: Schedule 1**

- Schedule I and part II of Schedule II** provide **absolute protection to threatened species**. Offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.

Wildlife Institute of India

- Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is an **autonomous institution** under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**.
- It was established in **1982**.
- It is based in **Dehradun, Uttarakhand**.
- It offers training programs, academic courses, and advisory in wildlife research and management.

National Tiger Conservation Authority

- National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change**.
- It was established in 2005 following the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force.
- It was constituted under enabling provisions of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006**, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it.

Source:IE