



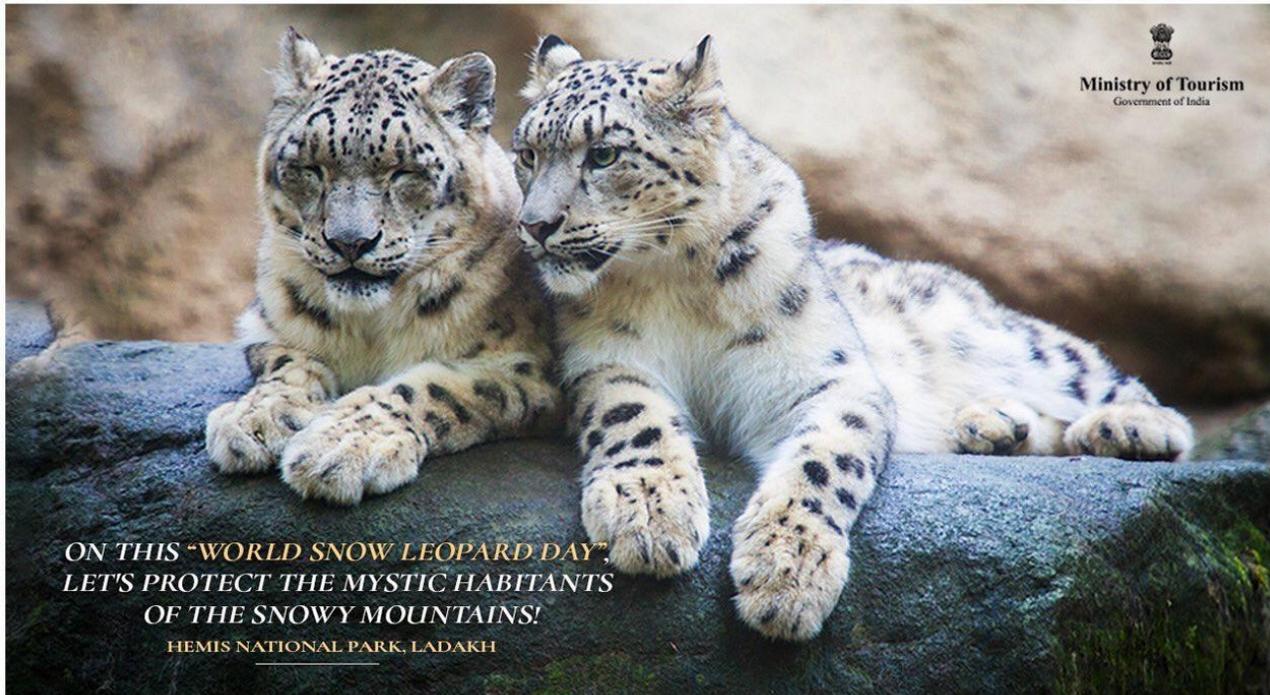
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International Snow Leopard Day

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Why in News

International Snow Leopard Day is observed on 23rd October.



Key Points

- **Aim:** To raise awareness on conservation and protection of snow leopards.

- **Background: International Snow Leopard Day** came into being on **23rd October, 2013**, with the adoption of the **Bishkek Declaration** by 12 countries on the conservation of snow leopards.
 - The **12 countries** included, India, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Mongolia, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
 - The **Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme (GSLEP)** was also launched on the same day **to address high-mountain development issues using conservation of the snow leopard as a flagship.**

Snow Leopard

- **Top Predator:** The Snow Leopard (also known as **Ghost of the mountains**) **acts as an indicator of the health of the mountain ecosystem** in which they live, due to their position as the **top predator** in the food web.
- **Habitation:** The Snow Leopard lives at high altitudes in the steep mountains of **Central and Southern Asia**, and in an extremely cold climate.
 - They inhabit the **higher Himalayan and trans-Himalayan landscape** in the states/union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.
 - **India is a unique country to have a good presence of 5 big cats**, including **Snow Leopard**. The other 4 are, **Lion, Tiger, Common Leopard, and Clouded Leopard**.
- **Snow Leopard capital of the world: Hemis, Ladakh.**

Hemis National Park is the biggest national park of India and also has a good presence of Snow Leopard.
- **Threat:** Factors that have contributed to the decline in the snow leopard populations include, **reduction in prey populations, illegal poaching and increased human population infiltration into the species habitat and illegal trade of wildlife parts and products** among others.
- **Protection:**
 - **IUCN Red List- Vulnerable**
 - **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)- Appendix I**
 - **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)- Appendix I**

Appendix I includes species **threatened with extinction.**
 - **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972- Schedule I**

Schedule I provides absolute protection and offences under this have the highest penalties.

- **Conservation Efforts Launched by India:**

- **HimalSanrakshak:** It is a **community volunteer programme**, to protect snow leopards, launched on 23rd October 2020.
- In 2019, **First National Protocol** was also launched on **Snow Leopard Population Assessment** which has been very useful for monitoring populations.
- **SECURE Himalaya: Global Environment Facility (GEF)-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** funded the project on conservation of high altitude biodiversity and reducing the dependency of local communities on the natural ecosystem.

This project is now operational in four snow leopard range states, namely, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim.

- **Project Snow Leopard (PSL) :** It was **launched in 2009** to promote an inclusive and participatory approach to conserve snow leopards and their habitat.
- Snow Leopard is in the list of **21 critically endangered species for the recovery programme** of the Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change.
- **Snow Leopard conservation breeding programme** is undertaken at **Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, Darjeeling, West Bengal.**

Source: PIB