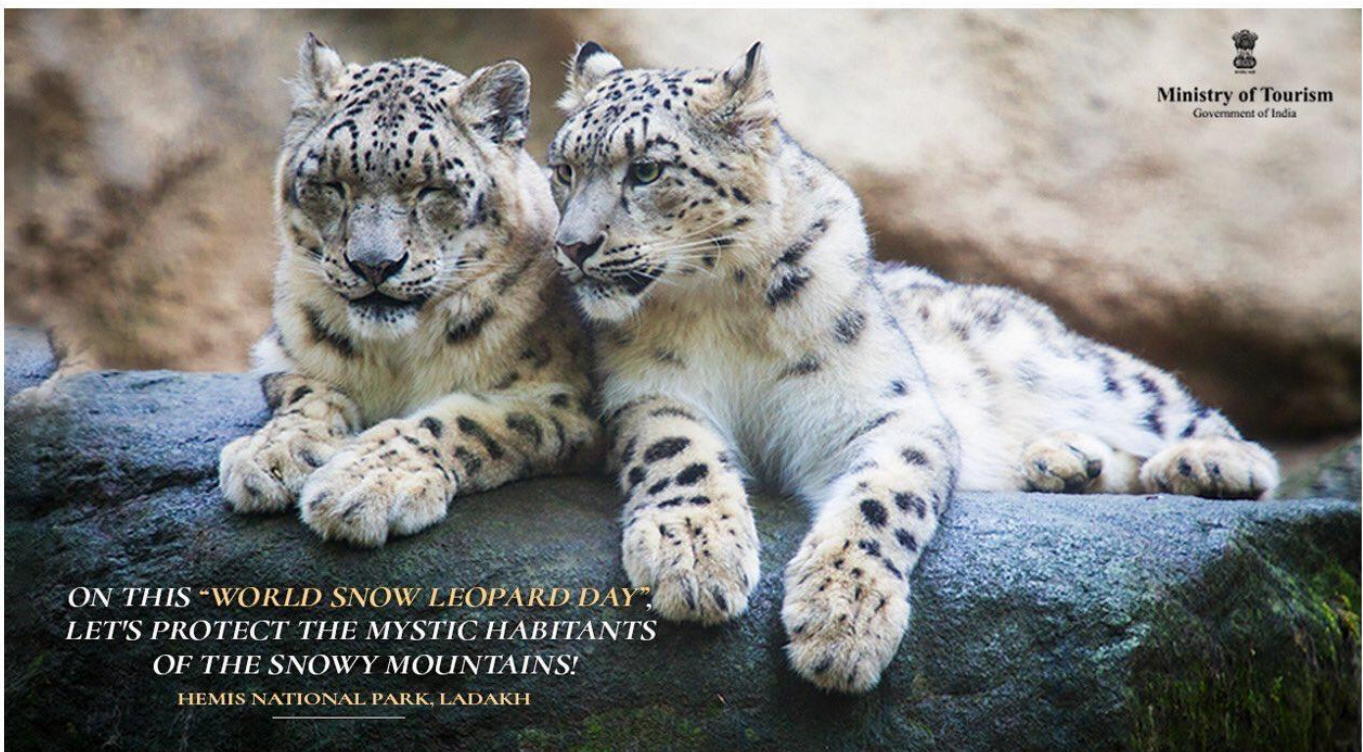




International Snow Leopard Day

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