



Leopard Census

Why in News?

The **Maharashtra forest department** has released the **latest leopard census**, revealing at least 54 leopards within the park and its surrounding areas.

Key Points

- **Camera-Trap Survey:**
 - The [Wildlife Conservation Society India](#), in collaboration with the **Maharashtra Forest Department** and support from **WeWork India Management Limited**, led a large-scale camera-trap survey.
 - The survey covered **Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP)**, **Aarey Milk Colony**, and **Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (TWLS)**.
- **Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP)**
 - **About:**
 - SGNP, formerly known as **Borivali National Park**, is a major protected green space located near **Borivali in northern Mumbai**.
 - The park spans both the **Thane District** and **Mumbai Suburban District** in Maharashtra.
 - With a spread of 103 square kilometres, it **ranks among the largest national parks** located **within a metropolitan city**.
 - **Natural Richness and Biodiversity:**
 - SGNP is known for its **dense forests, rich birdlife, diverse butterfly species**, and even a small population of [tigers](#).
 - The park is home to a variety of trees such as **Kadamba, Teak, Karanj, Shisham, and other species including Acacia, Ziziphus, and Euphorbias**.
 - **Wildlife in SGNP:**
 - SGNP supports a wide range of mammals, including [mongoose](#), [four-horned antelope](#), [sambar](#), [wild boar](#), [langur](#), [monkey](#), and [panthers](#).
 - Other notable species include the [Atlas moth](#) and [Magar](#) (**mugger crocodile**).
 - The park **records 251 bird species** and hosts a **large variety of butterflies**.
 - **Historical and Cultural Significance:**
 - At the heart of the park lie the [Kanheri Caves](#), carved between the **9th and 1st centuries BCE by Buddhist monks**.
 - These caves served as a **major Buddhist learning centre and pilgrimage site**, sculpted from a basaltic rock outcrop.
- **Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary:**
 - **About:**
 - Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in the **Palghar district of Maharashtra**, approximately 75 km from Mumbai.
 - The sanctuary covers an area of 85 square kilometres, largely **consisting of hilly terrain**.
 - **Ecological Significance:**
 - It serves as an important **wildlife corridor connecting Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) and Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary**, supporting animal movement and genetic diversity.

- The landscape includes dense forests, rolling hills, and several streams and small rivers.
- **Vegetation and Flora:**
 - The sanctuary's vegetation is a unique mix of **Dry Deciduous, Moist Deciduous, and Semi-Evergreen forests**.
 - Prominent tree species include **teak, bamboo, and mango**.
- **Wildlife and Birdlife:**
 - Frequently sighted mammals include **leopards, wild boars, barking deer, langurs, bonnet macaques, rhesus macaques, and black-naped hares**.
 - The sanctuary is rich in bird diversity, hosting species such as the **Crested Serpent-eagle, Jungle Owlet, White-eyed Buzzard, Oriental Honey-buzzard, Emerald Dove, and Heart-spotted Woodpecker**.
- **Cultural and Religious Importance:**
 - Tungareshwar is home to several ancient temples, the most notable being the **Tungareshwar Temple**, dedicated to Lord Shiva, attracting pilgrims and trekkers alike.

Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)-India

- WCS-India is a **Section 25** (association having objects to promote commerce, art, science, religion, charity or any other useful purpose and not having any profit motive) **non-profit organization in India**, demonstrates a strong commitment to conservation.
- It operates in full compliance with Indian regulations, emphasizing its dedication to preserving the country's natural environment and its rich biodiversity.



EAT

- True carnivores that are excellent ambush predators
- Feed on anything they can overpower, from mid-size ungulates, to domestic livestock, dogs, birds, and rodents

ACTIVITY

- Mostly solitary, nocturnal creatures, also seen at dusk and dawn in forests. Entirely nocturnal close to human presence
- Territorial
- Leopard densities can reach 5 animals per 100 sq km in densely populated human landscapes like western India

BLACK PANTHER

- Dark morphs or black leopards, often called black panthers, are the same species, but with recessive melanistic genes
- Spots are hidden under the dark coat

PANTHERA PARDUS FUSCA

INDIAN LEOPARD

Highly adaptable big cat can live close to humans

POPULATION around 7,910 (2014 census in surveyed areas); thought to be around 12,000-14,000 across India	WEIGHT 50-77 kg (males); 29-34 kg (females)	GEOGRAPHIC RANGE Indian subcontinent (all states), Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China	HABITAT Forest, shrubland, savanna, grassland, rocky areas, mountains, desert
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Coats have black rosettes
Each coat pattern is unique and makes individuals identifiable

Large head, powerful jaws
Have an easily recognisable
sawing/rasping call

CUBS

- Females usually give birth to two cubs after a gestation period of 90-105 days
- Only the female cares for the cubs, who remain with the mother for about 1.5-2 years

AGILE CAT

- Excellent at climbing trees
- Can run down a tree head-first
- Can carry large prey up a tree to protect it from other carnivores including tigers and wild dogs

THREATS

- A TRAFFIC study reports that between 2001-2010 at least **2 leopards were killed each week** for the illegal wildlife trade in India
- Population has declined by **75-90%** in the last two centuries
- **Poisoning** and retaliatory killing
- **Poaching** for pelts and body parts.
- Become **roadkill** when roads and highways run through forests
- Conflict with **livestock herders**
- Hunting

PROTECTION STATUS:
VULNERABLE on the IUCN Red List