

PARLIAMENT QUESTION: CONSERVATION OF SNOW LEOPARDS

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The Government of India completed the first nationwide Snow Leopard Census, officially titled the Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI), which was carried out between 2019 and 2023 and its findings were released on 30th January, 2024. As per the findings of the 1st SPAI, the total estimated population of snow leopards in the country stands at 718 individuals. The highest numbers were recorded in Ladakh (477), followed by Uttarakhand (124), Himachal Pradesh (51), Arunachal Pradesh (36), Sikkim (21) and Jammu & Kashmir (9). The SPAI represents the first systematic, scientific assessment of snow-leopard populations in India and covered approximately 1,20,000 km² of high-altitude habitat, accounting for more than 70% of the species' potential range.

The exercise followed a rigorous two-stage framework, combining occupancy based sampling to map spatial distribution with camera-trap based abundance estimation in stratified regions. In total, survey teams walked 13,450 km of transects for sign surveys and deployed camera traps at 1,971 locations, generating about 1,80,000 trap nights and identifying 241 distinct snow leopards. The effort was coordinated by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun with the participation of all snow-leopard range States/UTs and conservation partners like local level NGOs. The second cycle i.e. SPAI 2.0 has been launched by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEFCC) in Wildlife Week 2025 with a robust framework to further strengthen the conservation of snow-leopard, its habitat and associated species.

The Ministry provides financial assistance to State Governments and Union Territory Administrations under the Species Recovery Programme of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme Development of Wildlife Habitats for focused conservation of identified species. The Snow leopard is one of the 24 species identified under this Programme. The SPAI provides the foundation for the Ministry's follow-up conservation action plan, which emphasises strengthened population monitoring, structured scientific assessments and enhanced community involvement across high-altitude landscapes.

Under the National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Priorities (NSLEP) the MoEFCC has prioritised several key actions for the conservation of Snow leopard. The MoEFCC, embarked upon a process of consultations with States and numerous agencies in the formulation and launch of the Project Snow Leopard (PSL). SECURE Himalaya - an initiative to protect high-altitude Himalayan ecosystems, conserve endangered wildlife like the snow leopard, and improve the livelihoods of local communities has also been undertaken.

India has strong wildlife legislations and snow leopard is conferred the highest level of conservation status, i.e. Schedule I under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. The Ministry's strategy for preventing habitat degradation in snow-leopard landscapes is anchored in long-term, science-based management. Efforts such as declaration of the Cold Desert Biosphere Reserve in Himachal Pradesh which has been inducted into the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves secures 7770 sq.km of snow leopard habitat through participatory approach in addition to the Nandadevi BR and Kanchendzonga BR.

Long-term protection of high-altitude ecosystems is being undertaken through expansion and improved management of protected areas, landscape-level conservation planning, community-based stewardship programmes, and measures to prevent habitat degradation, supported by scientific monitoring and inter-agency coordination.

This information was provided by UNION MINISTER OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE, SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH, in a written reply to a question in Rajya Sabha today.

VM/SK

(Rajya Sabha US Q1326)

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