

CAMERA TRAPS GIVE HOPE FOR SNOW LEOPARD IN KASHMIR

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The estimated population of the snow leopard is 50 in Jammu and Kashmir.

The first-ever recording of the snow leopard from the Baltal-Zojila region has renewed hopes for the elusive predator in the higher altitudes of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Camera trapping exercises by researchers from Nature Conservation Foundation (India), partnering with J&K's Department of Wildlife Protection, also raised hopes for other important and rare species such as the Asiatic ibex, brown bear and Kashmir musk deer in the upper reaches of the northernmost part of India.

"It is the first record of snow leopard from the Baltal-Zojila area. In fact, we have very limited records of the presence of snow leopards across J&K," Munib Khanyari, programme manager at NCF (India), told *The Hindu* on November 6.

But not much is known about the number of snow leopards in J&K and Ladakh.

"The Snow Leopard Population Assessment of India (SPAI) has been concluded so far in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The estimated population of the great cat is 50 and 100, respectively, in these two States," he said.

Various teams have been conducting surveys across the nearly 12,000 sq. km potential snow leopard territory of J&K for a few years now covering Gurez, Thajwas, Baltal-Zojila, Warwan, and Kishtwar. The surveys have often focused on the neighbouring areas of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

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