

CALL OF THE WILD: INDIA PLANS FIRST-EVER SNOW LEOPARD SURVEY

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India will commission its first-ever survey to estimate the population and geographical range of the snow leopard, an elusive and endangered predator.

The snow leopard is found along the upper reaches of the Himalayan range and, in India, it is reported to have a presence in Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. However, the inhospitable terrain and the reclusive nature of the animal have so far made a scientific estimation impossible.

“This is the first time that we’ll use technology such as camera traps and scientific surveys to estimate the numbers. This is critical to its conservation,” said Anup Kumar Nayak, Director, National Tiger Conservation Authority. This organisation, which is part of the Union Environment Ministry, will play a crucial role in coordinating the survey.

The snow leopard is found in 12 countries — India, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Mongolia, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Officials announced the survey at a meeting on Wednesday of the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) programme being organised by Union Environment Ministry. The meeting has officials from Nepal, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and China. China, according to a representative, has nearly 2000 snow leopards.

“We will strive to double the snow leopard population in the world in the coming decade,” Prakash Javadekar, Union Environment Minister, said. “We must start thinking about capacity building, livelihood, green economy, and green pathway even in the snow leopard areas of the Himalayan range and cross-country cooperation.”

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