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India has 718 snow leopards, 1/6th to 1/9th of global total

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NEW DELHI: Amid the great white vastness of the Himalayas, now you see it, now you don't. Snow leopards, those elusive predators in grey-white fur, number just 718 and are spread over two Union Territories and four states in the Himalayan mountain range. Sparsely distributed across 12 countries, India may be home to one-sixth to one-ninth of the global population of these 'Ghosts of the Mountains' as these majestic animals are often called. Released by environment minister Bhupender Yadav on Tuesday, the country's first-ever scientific exercise of snow leopard population assessment in shows that the UT of Ladakh has the highest number of snow leopards (477) followed by Uttarakhand (124), Himachal Pradesh (51), Arunachal Pradesh (36), Sikkim (21), and J&K (9).

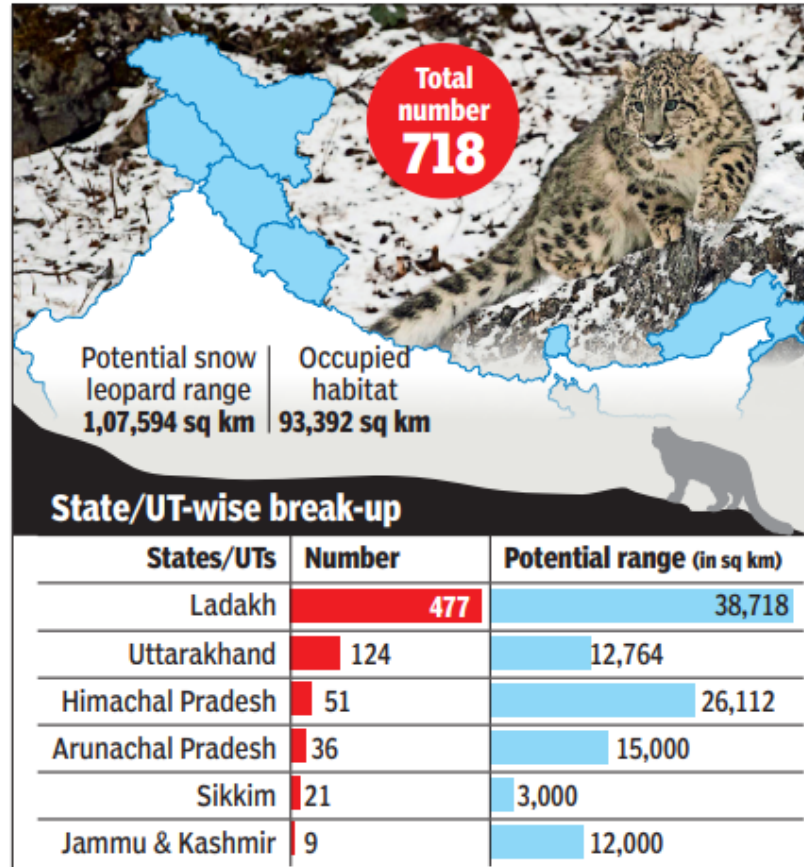
The enumeration assessment was conducted in these states/UTs from 2019 to 2023. There is now a plan to conduct periodic population estimation every fourth year in the snow leopard range that spreads over one lakh sq km.

India's first ever Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India was conducted by the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India with the support of all snow leopard range states, and two conservation partners, the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru and WWF-India.

Calling the SPAI a pivotal step in safeguarding the future of these "elusive mountain spirits", Rishi Kumar Sharma,

head of Himalayas Conservation Programme, WWF-India, said, "The data not only quantifies their numbers but unveils the narrative of coexistence between local communities and snow leopards. Conservation is not just about protecting a species. It's about preserving the delicate balance that sustains life in the majestic Himalayas."

LION'S SHARE OF SPOTTED CATS IN LADAKH



According to Global Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Protection Programme, the total snow leopard population in the world is roughly estimated at between 4,000 and 6,500.

Globally, snow leopards can be found in 12 countries covering a range of 18 lakh sq km with the largest share in Tibetan plateau of China, followed by Mongolia and India. Other countries include Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

"During the exercise, efforts included 13,450 km of trails surveyed for recording snow leopard signs, while camera traps were deployed at 1,971 locations for 1,80,000 trap nights. A total of 241 unique snow leopards were photographed," the ministry said.