

India's First National-Level Study on All Four Bear Species

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Why in News?

Recently, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, announced the initiation of the country's first nationwide scientific assessment covering all four bear species native to India.

- **Aim** - To generate fresh baseline data regarding population estimates, geographic distribution range, shifting habitat dynamics, and drivers of human-bear conflicts.



Parameter	Himalayan Brown Bear (<i>Ursus arctos isabellinus</i>)	Asiatic Black Bear (<i>Ursus thibetanus</i>)	Sloth Bear (<i>Melursus ursinus</i>)	Sun Bear (<i>Helarctos malayanus</i>)
Geographic Range	High-altitude alpine meadows of Upper Himalayas (J&K, Ladakh, HP, Uttarakhand).	Himalayan forest belt and hilly regions of Northeast India.	Central India, Western Ghats, Vindhyas, Satpuras, & Himalayan foothills.	Highly restricted presence in dense tropical forests of Northeast India.

Key Characteristics	Large size; herbivorous/omnivorous; adapted to cold alpine ecosystems.	Arboreal tendencies; V-shaped white patch on chest; fruit & nut eater.	Myrmecophagous (termite/ant feeder); shaggy coat; prominent V or Y chest mark.	Smallest bear species; short sleek coat; horseshoe-shaped chest mark.
IUCN Status	Critically Endangered (Subspecies level) / Least Concern (Global species level).	Vulnerable.	Vulnerable.	Vulnerable.
WPA 1972 Schedule	Schedule I.	Schedule I.	Schedule I.	Schedule I.

Strategic Importance

- **Scientific Validation of Populations** - Earlier estimates placed the sloth bear population in the Indian subcontinent at around **20,000**, but these figures lack updated, standardized empirical validation.
- Non-invasive survey techniques—including **camera trapping, scat DNA analysis, and pugmark/footprint tracking** will be deployed across diverse bio-geographic zones.
- **Mapping Shifting Habitats** - The study will identify regions where bears were historically documented but have recently disappeared, helping isolate whether habitat degradation, climate shifts, or corridor destruction is responsible.
- **Mitigating Human-Bear Conflict** - Mountainous states like **Uttarakhand** have witnessed a surge in human-bear encounters, resulting in livestock loss and human casualties.
- Mapping spatial movement corridors will allow state forest departments to implement early warning systems and localized conflict-mitigation zones.

Reference

[New Indian Express | Four bear species across India](#)