Snow Leopard Conservation

What is the issue?

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- Conservation status of the snow leopard was downgraded from ‘endangered’ to ‘vulnerable’ recently.
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- Also WWF-India recently discovered photo evidence of the species in Arunachal Pradesh for the first time.
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- However it does not mean that the big cat is safer than it was earlier.
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Why was the Conservation Status Downgraded?

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- To be considered an “endangered” species, the global populations have to be fewer than 2,500 mature adults.
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- Additionally, the decline rate must also be over 20% in past decade.
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- It was found that there are more than 2,500 mature adults in the world and the estimated decline rate is at least 10%.
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- While the earlier estimates got it worng, currently, snow leapords doesn’t meet the two criteria for being classified as endangered.
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- Thus, the downgrading of conservation status was not due threat reduction to the species, but due to an earlier assessment error.
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- Notably, the population of the snow leopard continues to decline, and the threats to its existence continue to multiply.
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Where was the Leapord Camera Trapped?

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- The snow leopard is rarely sighted or photographed.
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- The animal was found in a camera trap set up at Thembang, one of the Community Conserved Areas in Arunachal Pradesh.
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- Only a part of the state’s snow leopard habitat falls in the protected ‘Dibang Biosphere Reserve’ and ‘Namdapha National Park’.
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- Large tracts are under the custodianship of the local communities, whose support is crucial for its protection.
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Are Snow Leapords Safe?

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- Snow leopard’s range extends for 2.8 million square kilometres and is spread acrpss 12 countries.
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- It covers regions of - Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.
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- Research on the species, including estimates of its range, remains thin — and climate change poses a constant threat to its habitat.
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- The current estimates based on expert knowledge place the population at between 4,000-6,500 globally, it is largely disputed.
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- Hence, while the severity of threat is indeed imminent, it is only the technicalities that has pushed it to the Vulnerable catogry.
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How does the future look?

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- Coordinated response from governments is needed for ensuring the survival

of the species.
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- The first Global Snow Leopard Summit was held at Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan recently.
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- This was an extenstion on the “Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme” (GSLEP).
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- The Indian government also had launched Project Snow Leopard in January 2009 along the lines of Project Tiger.
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- Also, a Rs75 crore, six-year conservation programme for the Himalayan ecosystem was recently launched.
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- These measures is hoped to hold the key for the survival of the Himalayan cats in India.
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Quick Facts

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International Union for Conservation of Nature - (IUCN)

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- It is an international organization working in the field of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.
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- It is involved in data gathering and analysis, research, field projects, advocacy, and education.
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IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

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- Founded in 1964, it is the world's most comprehensive data trove of the global conservation status of biological species.
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- It is set upon precise criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species and subspecies.
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- Species are classified by the Red List into nine catogries based on various criteria like - population size, area of geographic distribution, rate of decline etc...
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- Depending on emphrical evidence, species are either upgraded or downgraded on this priority list for conservation.
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Source: Indian Express

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