

Snow Leopards Find Allies in Ladakh Villages Through Community-Led Conservation



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Leh, June 23: A remarkable conservation effort in the high-altitude landscapes of Ladakh is demonstrating how wildlife protection and rural development can go hand in hand.

Over the past two decades, the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-IT) has worked with local communities to reduce conflict between villagers and snow leopards, transforming an animal once viewed as a threat into a source of livelihood and pride.

The organisation says it has built 214 predator-proof livestock corrals across Ladakh, reducing livestock losses inside these enclosures by about 95 per cent. The initiative addresses one of the main causes of retaliatory killings of snow leopards—attacks on livestock kept by herding families. Similar conservation models in the Himalayas have shown that predator-proof corrals can dramatically reduce losses and improve local attitudes towards wildlife.

SLC-IT has also expanded economic opportunities for mountain communities through its award-winning Himalayan Homestays programme. More than 190 families now earn income by hosting tourists, helping offset losses from occasional livestock predation while promoting responsible tourism in remote Himalayan villages. The programme has received several national and international awards for community-based conservation and sustainable tourism.

Beyond tourism, the organisation reports having trained over 2,500 women in handicrafts and 550 young people as nature guides, creating alternative livelihoods linked to conservation. More than 5,600 students have participated in environmental education programmes designed around Ladakh's unique ecology, while over 100 research projects and wildlife surveys have helped generate scientific knowledge about snow leopards and their habitat.

The trust has also helped establish community-conserved areas and livestock-free zones for wild herbivores, strengthening the region's fragile mountain ecosystem. Conservationists say these efforts have changed perceptions of the snow leopard from a livestock predator to a valuable ecological and economic asset.

India is home to an estimated 718 snow leopards, with Ladakh supporting the country's largest population. Conservation experts believe community participation has been a key factor in improving the species' long-term prospects across the Indian Himalayas.

As snow leopards continue to roam the mountains above Ladakh's villages, conservationists hope the model pioneered by local communities can be replicated across more Himalayan regions, ensuring a future where both people and wildlife thrive together.

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