

Indian Leopard

The Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*) is a subspecies of leopard native to the Indian subcontinent.

Along with the Bengal Tiger, Asiatic Lion, Snow leopard and clouded leopard, it's one of the big cats inhabiting the forests of India

This article will give further details about the Indian Leopard within the context of the Civil Services Examination.

Characteristics of the Indian leopard

The Indian leopard has a well-developed tail, short ears and strong legs. Their eyes are yellowish grey with light grey ocular bulbs. It's spots fade towards the underbelly and the lower part of the legs. The white-tipped tail is 60-100 cm long. Its rosetts are the most prominent among all leopard subspecies of Asia

Its fur colour varies as per geography. They are more pale in arid regions, gray in colder climates and golden in colour in rainforests.

Further characteristics of the Indian Leopard is given in the table below:

Characteristics of the Indian Leopard	
Size	Male: Between 127 cm and 142 cm Female: Between 104 cm and 117 cm
Tail Length	Male: 76 cm to 91 cm Female: 76 cm to 87.6 cm
Weight	Male: 50 and 77 kg Female: 29 and 34 kg
Latin Name	<i>Panthera pardus fusca</i>
Habitat	India, Nepal, Bhutan and parts of Pakistan

Behaviour and Hunting Traits of the Indian Leopard

The Indian Leopard is solitary and active at night. It is skilled in climbing trees from where it rests, observes its area and feasts on its prey. Along with being a good swimmer (though not as good as the Bengal Tiger), the leopard can run at the speed of 58 kms per hour and jump upto 3 m vertically.

Where tiger populations are high, leopards are not commonly found. This is due to the fact that the tiger becomes the apex predator in the region driving them off to locations with the least tiger population, at times near human settlements. Examples of this is Nepal's Bardia National Park and Sariska Tiger Reserve

In Gujarat's Gir National Park, the Indian leopard is cohabited with the Asiatic lion. In the Himalayas, it also exists along with the snow leopard up to an altitude of 5,200 m (17,100 ft), but the leopard usually prefers forested habitats located at lower altitudes compared to the snow leopards.



Conservation of the Indian Leopard

The Indian Leopard Population stands at 12,172 to 13,535 individuals. They inhabit India's forest landscapes.

The Indian Leopard is listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List. Their population has been on the decline for the following reasons:

1. Poaching
2. Habitat Loss
3. Human-Leopard conflict

Of all the threats to the Indian Leopard population, poaching is the most prominent. If a haul consisting of illegal tiger skins is busted, chances are that there will be leopard skins in that same haul as well.

Despite such factors in play, efforts to preserve the leopard population in India is still underway. More rescue and rehabilitation centres are being planned. But wildlife conservation experts are of the opinion that this may not be enough. Long term solutions such as raising awareness among humans, land use of grazing patterns and implementing sustainable development practices will be far more effective.