

India leopards at risk of decimation, study finds

September 28 2012



An Indian leopard sits inside its enclosure at the Kamla Nehru Zoological Gardens in Ahmedabad. India's leopard population is at risk of being decimated as a result of rampant poaching fuelled by a thriving black market for its skins, according to a study by animal conservationists.

India's leopard population is at risk of being decimated as a result of rampant poaching fuelled by a thriving black market for its skins, a study by animal conservationists said on Friday.

The report by a network of wildlife groups known as TRAFFIC said at least four leopards have been killed every week by [poachers](#) in India in the last decade, and their plight mirrored that of the tiger, which is now an endangered species.

WWF, one of the groups behind TRAFFIC, said it was vital for India's

government to come up with an effective strategy to combat the trade in leopard skins.

"The leopard is among the most charismatic large animals in the world, and plays an important ecological role in the forests it inhabits," Ravi Singh, the secretary general of WWF-India, said at the report's launch.

"Any increase in external market demand could easily lead to a decimation of leopard numbers in India, but I am hopeful this latest analysis will provide the impetus to catalyse effective conservation action."

The report estimated that since 2001 more than 2,000 leopards have been poached in India before their remains were then sold on.

The leopard, whose population was pegged at 1,150 in an official 2011 census, is prized for its richly spotted fur coat, with close to 90 percent of reported leopard parts seizures in India comprising solely of skins.

Their bones are also sometimes used in traditional Asian medicine as substitutes for tiger parts.

The capital New Delhi is the "epicentre of [illegal wildlife trade](#)" while most [leopard](#) parts come from northern states Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, said the study.

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Citation: India leopards at risk of decimation, study finds (2012, September 28) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-india-leopards-decimation.html>

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