

# Endangered Indian snow leopards to be tracked by GPS

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Snow leopards, like these seen at Basel Zoo in Switzerland, are often poached for their luxuriant spotted coats

Six snow leopards in the icy Indian state of Himachal Pradesh will be fitted with satellite-linked collars in a project aimed at deepening understanding of the endangered mountain cat, wildlife officials said Wednesday.

The \$40,450 project will help the state wildlife department study the movement of the snow leopards in the Himalayas where climate change and human settlements are affecting their habitat.

"Half a dozen snow leopards will be tagged by GPS collars and the behaviour of these elusive cats will be observed," said Vivek Mohan, a senior state wildlife department official.

The Indian northern belt is home to as many as 700 of the world's 7,000 snow leopards, whose natural mountain habitat is fast depleting, according to the conservationist group WWF.

Snow leopards are found across 12 central and South Asian countries, including India, China and Pakistan.

As a result, the wild cats are often left without prey, poached by hunters for their luxuriant spotted coats and killed by livestock owners who see the leopards as a threat to their animals.

Snow leopard bones and body parts are prized by smugglers who sell them for use in traditional Chinese medicine.

A research centre will also be set up by the state near the Tibet-bordering Spiti Valley—considered an important habitat for the mountain cats.

It is estimated that there are less than 30 snow leopards left in Himachal Pradesh.

The WWF launched a fund-raising campaign earlier this month to build awareness through online media and improve conservation projects like camera traps and predator-safe pens for livestock.

In rare sightings, two snow leopards were caught on cameras late last year in northern Uttarakhand state, springing hope in [wildlife](#) conservationists.

Wildlife experts in Nepal have been tracking a rare [snow leopard](#) since last December using a similar collar with a GPS tracking system.

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