

## University of Ladakh Celebrates International Snow Leopard Day 2025 in Collaboration with WWF-India

Leh, October 23, 2025: The snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), often known as the “Ghost of the Mountains”, is one of the most elusive and magnificent big cats of the world. Inhabiting the high-altitude regions of Central and South Asia, this apex predator plays a vital ecological role in maintaining the balance of fragile mountain ecosystems. However, snow leopards are increasingly threatened by habitat loss, climate change, retaliatory killings, and declining prey populations.

For Ladakh, the snow leopard is not only an emblem of its unique biodiversity but also a keystone species essential to the ecological stability of its cold desert landscape. Its conservation is closely tied to the well-being of local communities, sustainable pastoral practices, and eco-tourism-based livelihoods. Protecting the snow leopard therefore also means protecting Ladakh’s natural heritage, water sources, and traditional ways of life.

In recognition of its importance and to mark International Snow Leopard Day 2025, the University of Ladakh, in collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature – India (WWF-India), organized a three-day celebration from 21st to 23rd October 2025. The event aimed to raise awareness, promote environmental education, and encourage community participation in snow leopard conservation and human–wildlife coexistence.

The three-day event began on 21st October 2025 with a painting competition at Government Middle School, Taru. The programme commenced with introductory remarks by Mr. Rohit Rattan, Landscape Coordinator, Western Himalayas Programme, WWF-India. Students from the school participated enthusiastically, showcasing their creativity and concern for wildlife through art.

Prizes were distributed among the winners, encouraging them to continue engaging in environmental conservation. Dr. Amjad Hussain, Coordinator, Department of Zoology, University of Ladakh, expressed heartfelt thanks to the Headmistress, staff members, and students of Government Middle School, Taru, for their active participation and support.

The second day, held on 22nd October 2025, commenced with a welcome address by Mr. Rohit Rattan, followed by the National Anthem. The day’s activities included a food web activity conducted by Mr. Manu Mohan, Senior Project Officer, WWF-India, and Ms. Phunstog Angmo, Senior Education Officer, WWF-India, where students enthusiastically participated in an engaging wildlife-related exercise.

Subsequently, Mr. Preet Sharma, Senior Project Officer, WWF-India, delivered an enlightening talk on the snow leopard and the mammalian diversity of Ladakh, highlighting the region’s rich biodiversity. The session was followed by an Ideathon, conducted by Dr. Amjad Hussain, where University of Ladakh students presented innovative ideas on mitigation strategies for human-wildlife conflict.

Mr. Manoj, a student of M.Sc. Forensic Science, secured the first position in the Ideathon.

The day concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Mr. Preet Sharma, who extended his gratitude to Prof. Saket Kushwaha, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, University of Ladakh, for his support and collaboration in organizing such an important event. He also appreciated the enthusiastic participation of the students, research fellows and faculty members from the Departments of Zoology, Forensic Science, Botany, Geology, and RS & GIS.

The indoor session was followed by a nature walk to Likir, where students were provided practical insights into wildlife tracking techniques, such as identifying pugmarks, pheromone signs, and the use of camera traps. The field activity concluded with a group photograph capturing the spirit of collaboration and conservation.

The final day, 23rd October 2025, featured a special talk by Ms. Padma Angmo, Project Coordinator, Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust, on Human-Wildlife Conflict and Mitigation Strategies. Her address provided deep insights into the challenges and solutions for promoting peaceful coexistence between local communities and wildlife. The session concluded with an engaging Q&A session.

A formal vote of thanks was delivered by Dr. Irshad Ahmed, Faculty, Department of Zoology, University of Ladakh. He expressed his heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Padma Angmo, Project Coordinator, Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust, for her valuable and insightful talk, and extended appreciation to the participating faculty members and students from various departments for their enthusiastic involvement in making the event a grand success. Dr. Irshad also conveyed his deep gratitude to Prof. Saket Kushwaha, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, University of Ladakh, for his continuous encouragement and guidance in organizing such significant academic and outreach programmes. He further thanked the World Wide Fund for Nature – India (WWF-India) for their valuable collaboration and support in promoting environmental awareness and snow leopard conservation in Ladakh.

The three-day celebration of International Snow Leopard Day 2025 served as a comprehensive awareness and educational campaign that blended school-level outreach, university-based discussions, creative expression, and field-based learning. Through the combined efforts of the University of Ladakh and WWF-India, the event fostered greater understanding of the ecological and cultural importance of the snow leopard and the urgent need to address human-wildlife conflict in Ladakh.

By engaging students, educators, and conservation experts, the programme successfully highlighted practical strategies such as community engagement, habitat monitoring, early warning systems, and compensation schemes that can reduce conflict between humans and wildlife. The initiative reaffirmed the University's commitment to aligning higher education with real-world environmental challenges, ensuring that Ladakh continues to stand as a model region for coexistence and conservation in the Himalayas.

