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The elusive snow leopard. Opposite, the state is home to many rare species of deer.

## Wildlife

The highest, youngest and largest chain of mountains in the world, the Himalayan range is one of the most fascinating and spectacular natural wonders on earth. It is more than that: it is one of the richest stores of animal life. For instance, it is remarkable that almost one third of the world's mammalian species that may be called true mountain animals are native to these mountains.

Jammu and Kashmir, with its variety of geographical regions, climates and vegetation, has many delights to offer the wildlife enthusiast. Perhaps no animal better epitomises the character and concerns of the mountain environment than the snow

leopard, a beautiful and elusive survivor from the frigid Pleistocene era. Though its range is immense, extending over the entire Himalayan range, it is most advantageously sought in Jammu and Kashmir, especially in the high ranges.

Another rare animal is the hangul or Kashmir stag, one of the most endangered species of red deer in the world. An enigmatic mammal is the bharal; the controversy over whether it is a sheep or a goat is not yet settled. Many unique species of antelope, goat and sheep are found in the state.

In winter, high-altitude bird species move to the lower valleys and into the tourist's purview. Cinnamon sparrows, the black and yellow gros-

beak, black bulbuls and monal pheasants (the male splendidly coloured) may be seen now. At this time, too, large troops of the impressive Himalayan gray langur visit for the duration.

But nothing strikes the eye and imagination so much as in spring and summer, when the long foothills and deep valleys awake to life. Now also awakes the imposing Himalayan black bear, and as the winter avifauna return to higher quarters the birds of the summer return. Among these is the lovely golden oriole. The langurs and hangul, too, make their way to higher valleys that are not, however, inaccessible.

Though wildlife conservation in Ladakh began fairly recently, there is much here that

is not found in the lower ranges. Ladakh's ecosystem, lying at the confluence of three zoogeographic zones, is fascinating and uniquely varied. A dozen important mammals and over 100 species of birds make their home in this rugged terrain — most of them, though, endangered or rare.

The wild yak is native only to this area. Other animals include the ibex, blue sheep, bharal, docile marmot and mouse hare. The snow leopard roams here too; so does the wild horse, and the rare musk deer inhabits lower altitudes. Unfortunately, some species are still outside the tourist's domain.

Jammu and the Kashmir valley, however, have led wildlife conservation efforts. Several National Parks





*The splendidly plumaged Kaleej pheasant. Opposite, Kashmir offers serene delights to the angler.*

and Sanctuaries have been established in the state. They are briefly described below.

**Dachigam National Park:** amidst forests of silver birch and conifer roams the hangul. Rare and on the verge of extinction till a few years ago, the national park at Dachigam contains the last viable hangul population in the world. Related to the red deer of Europe, this breed is characterised by its white rump patch and impressive spread of antlers.

Of all the many sanctuaries in the state, the one at Dachigam is the best known. At one time the exclusive hunting preserve of the Maharaja of Kashmir, it was declared a national park in 1951, and owing to a strictly enforced conservation programme,

the hangul population, once 150, now stands at over 400 animals.

Dachigam, spread over an area of 141 sq. km, is the home of 20 mammal species including the leopard and over 150 species of avifauna. Open throughout the year, there is no prime viewing season, as the visitor will find something of interest all through the year. At Panzgam, Laribal, Sangargulu and Gratnar are huts for overnight stay. For passes to the sanctuary and reservations for accommodation, contact the office of the Chief Wildlife Warden at the Tourist Reception Centre, Srinagar.

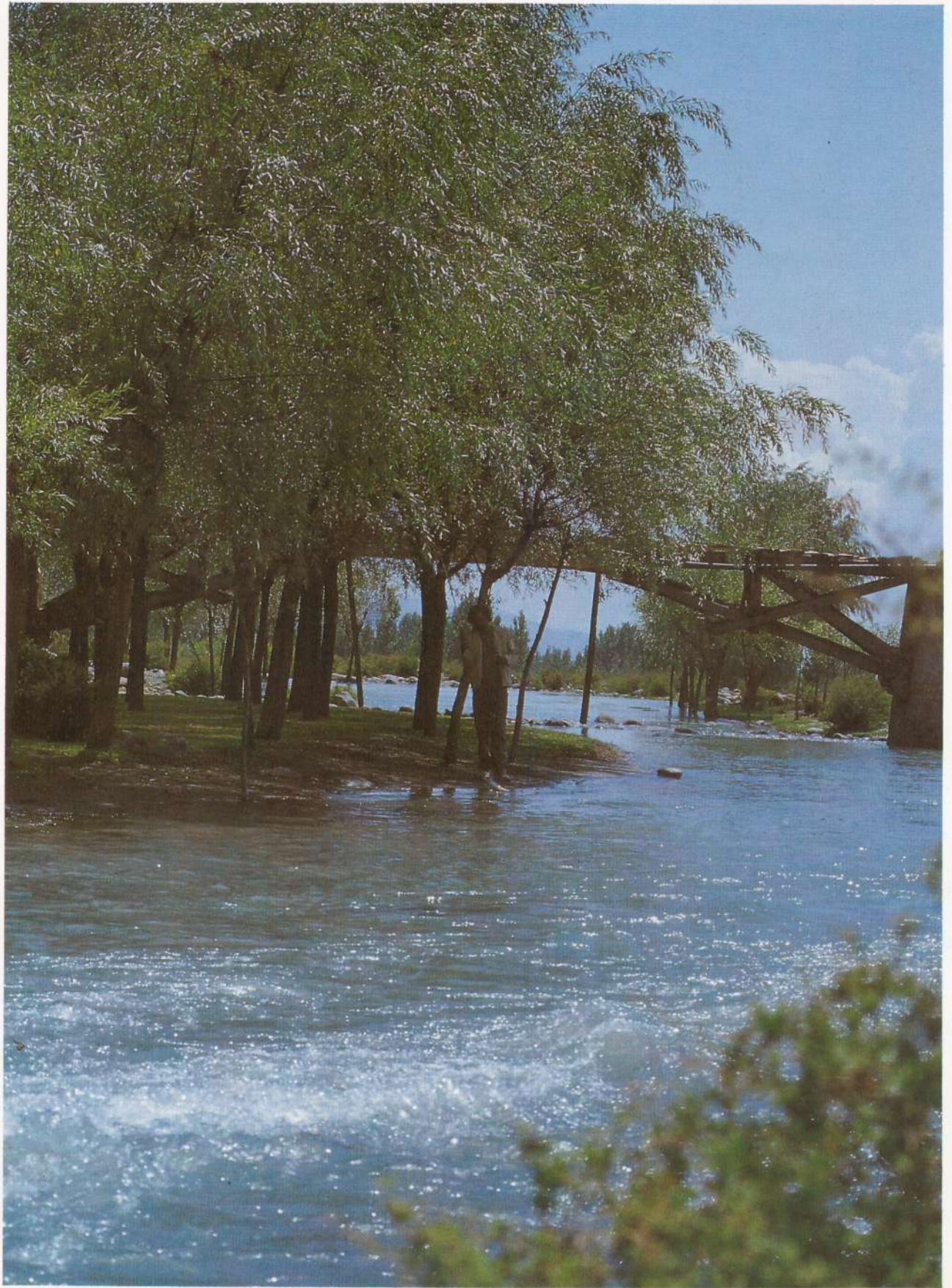
The **Hemis High Altitude National Park** includes the catchments of two valleys which drain into the River Indus. It is

named after the famous monastery and sprawls over 600 sq. km. Approachable by road from Leh, this national park contains several camping sites. The area is barren and rocky, covered only sparsely with vegetation. Most of the ten species of mammal here are extremely rare — shapu, bharal, great Tibetan sheep, ibex and snow leopard. The avifauna too comprise species which are not seen at lower altitudes: Himalayan snow cock being an example. The best season for mammal viewing is September to May and for bird viewing March to May and September to December. For passes contact the Wildlife Warden, Leh.

The **Overa Wildlife Sanctuary**, located 76 km from Srinagar, near

Pahalgam: it has an area of 32 sq. km, and is famed for its many species of pheasants. It sustains 13 species of mammals and over 80 species of birds. The best time to visit the sanctuary for mammal viewing is September to April and for bird viewing from March to August. For overnight stay there is a two-bed-roomed hut as well as a 10-bedded dormitory. For passes and reservations, contact the office of the Chief Wildlife Warden, Tourist Reception Centre, Srinagar.

**Overa-Aru Biosphere Reserve:** located 76 km from Srinagar, near Pahalgam, it has an area of 32 sq. km. Several species of birds as well as fauna are found here — musk deer, brown bear, leopard, to name a few. The altitudinal range





The trout is a wily creature, and requires all the angler's skills. But it is in plentiful supply.

varies from 3,000 to 5,425 metres above sea level. Prime viewing time for the upper areas is from May to August. In the lower areas, for bird viewing the best time is March to May and for animal viewing from September to March. Accommodation in two-bedroomed huts is available. For passes contact the Regional Wildlife Warden, Srinagar.

**Gulmarg Biosphere Reserve:** 48 km from Srinagar, the reserve has an area of 180 sq. km, and an altitudinal range of 2,400 to 4,300 metres above sea level. Fauna include the Himalayan musk deer, red fox, brown and black bear. Among avifauna are upland birds, both resident and migratory. The best time for animal viewing is September to March and for bird viewing March to May.

**Ramnagar Wildlife Sanctuary:** situated only 6 km away from Jammu city, this

sanctuary occupies an area of 31 sq. km. The area sustains 8 mammal species including nilgai and barking deer, and 15 species of birds. The best season for mammal viewing is September to March and for bird viewing March to May. Within the sanctuary is a two-bedroomed hut. For passes contact the Regional Wildlife Warden, Jammu (near Jammu Ashok Hotel).

Other sanctuaries near Jammu are:

**Nandni Wildlife Sanctuary:** (26 km) the sanctuary has an area of 33 sq. km.

**Surinsar Mansar Wildlife Sanctuary:** named for the two lakes on each corner of it, this sanctuary comprises an area of 98 sq. km, and supports a mammal population of 8 species, and 15 species of birds.

**Jasrota Wildlife Sanctuary:** spread over an area of 10 sq. km, the sanctuary houses an appreciable variety of bird as well as animal

life, most notably cheetal or axis deer.

**Kishtwar High Altitude National Park** in Jammu is interesting for the marked variations in topography and vegetation that occur here. Spread over an area of 400 sq. km, the park contains 15 mammal species including the musk deer, and Himalayan black and brown bear. There are 50 species of birds. Prime mammal viewing season is from March to May.

## Fishing

Kashmir has been rightly called an angler's paradise, with a network of rivers and streams as well as high altitude lakes all abounding in trout — both brown and rainbow. Trout fishing in Kashmir is far, far cheaper than it is in any other part of the world. And most importantly, the Department of Fisheries, which controls angling in the valley, works hard to

ensure that there is no depletion of stock by indiscriminate fishing, which means that you can revel in angling in ideal conditions.

Kashmir's fabled natural beauty needs no introduction here. Crisscrossing the state are the well-known Sind and Lidder rivers, their tributaries and a silvery network of smaller rivers and streams. The geographical variation along the course of each river is immense, affording endless possibilities for the angler. Nearer the source of each river, the gradient is steeper and the waters faster flowing. The landscape is generally hilly, with dark brooding pines towering all around. As the river runs its course, the gradient evens out, and the flow of water loses its torrential force. You are now in open countryside where the horizon is wide and sweeping, and where trees are willow, poplar and walnut.

Do not be deceived



Only reels and flies are required on Kashmir's rivers. Fisheries officials are always at hand to advise.

into thinking that fishing in Kashmir is the somewhat somnolent sport that it is elsewhere, for the trout is a crafty fish, and you will have to practise all your skill to get him to bite.

Early mornings and late evenings are the best times for fishing, and in these quiet hours, the illusion that the world is yours will be heightened. If using one type of fly does not meet with success, you will have to experiment with another type. And cast and recast repeatedly. To increase your chances of success, you might like to shift to another spot — after all, your permit allows you to fish at any point in one beat which measures two kilometres. And it ensures that nobody else is allowed the use of that beat for the days allotted to you. But in case you need information or assistance, you are not alone. Our beat guards — there are two per beat — are familiar

with the habits of the fish and are there to advise you, should you wish.

Rivers and streams are divided into approximately 100 beats, most of which are within a two hour drive from Srinagar. Most beats have nearby a Department of Fisheries or a J&K Tourism hut, at which you can stay overnight. You require a permit to fish, and not more than one permit is given on any beat. One permit allows you to catch six fish. And as experience has shown reels and flies are all that are needed. Spoons and spinners are not allowed.

Six days a week permits are issued only to tourists. Residents of Kashmir are allowed to fish only on Sundays. And to ensure that nature's bounty remains plentiful always, the Department of Fisheries has collaborated with a Danish firm for largescale trout breeding. This ambitious project at Kokernag

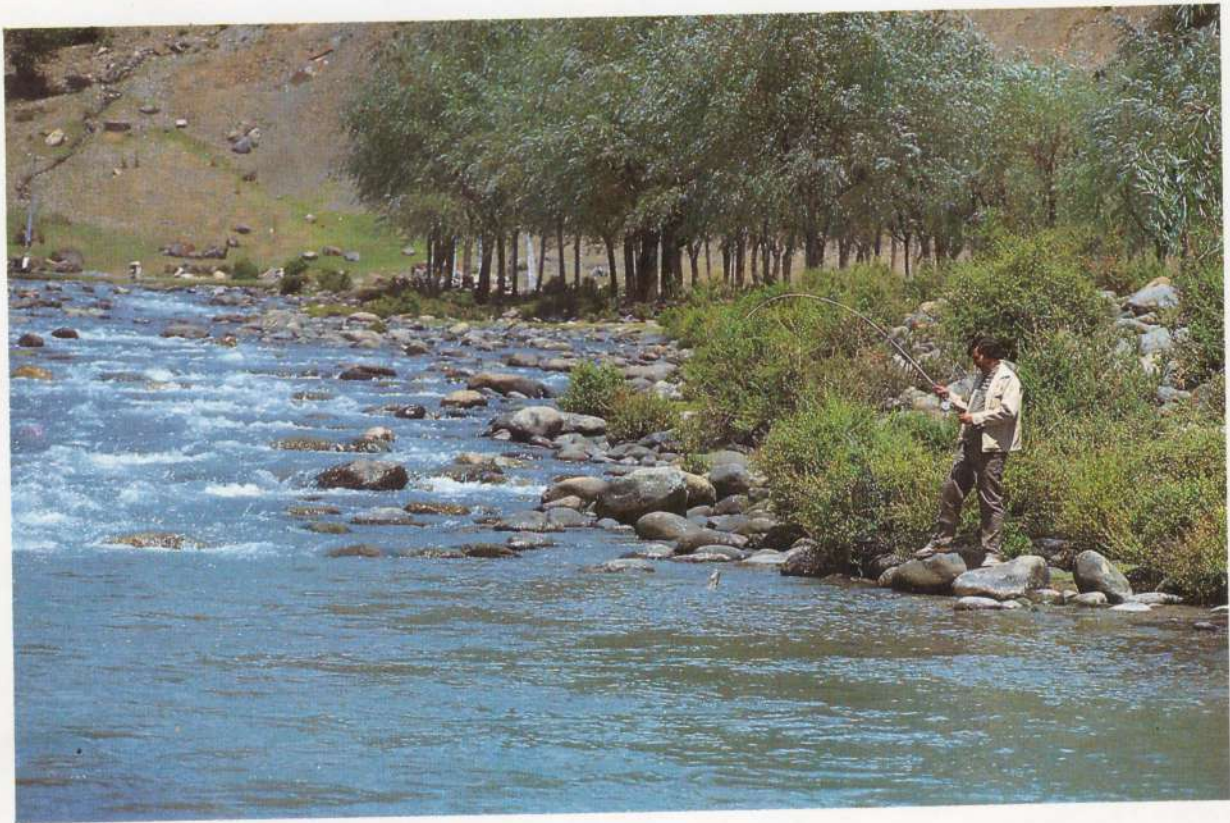
will eventually result in the induction of fish into the streams; meanwhile it is being used for the supply of table fish.

If you are more adventurous, you can fish in one of many high altitude lakes (14,000 ft. above sea level) which are reached by a trek. One trek in particular starts from Sonamarg and goes on to Vishansar, Kishansar, Satsar, Gadsar and Gangabal, all alpine lakes. The trek alone takes eight days — you will need a tent, waterproof coat, ground sheet, trekking boots and provisions for as many days as you intend to trek, as no food is available on the way. But you will be rewarded by the spectacularly lovely lakes, each with their own character, cradled by snow clad mountains. When their surface is frozen over during the winter, the fish (mainly brown trout) keep close to the bottom of the lake, rising nearer the surface as the ice melts.

In these lakes, the use of spoons and spinners is allowed.

The trekking season is from July to October while the fishing season extends from March to October.

At the Tourist Reception Centre, Srinagar is the fishing counter. Information on equipment, location of beats, transport and nearby accommodation can be had here. Also in the Tourist Reception Centre, on the first floor, is the Department of Fisheries. Permits are to be obtained from here on payment of a small fee; and as most of the officials are keen anglers themselves, you can get the most detailed information from them. Accommodation for overnight stay too can be booked from here. Should you require a rod, reel or flies, there are shops in Srinagar where these can be had on hire and the Department of Fisheries will be happy to give you their names and addresses.



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For details contact or write to the Director of Tourism, J&K Government, Srinagar. Phone 72449, 73648.  
After office hours 77303, 77305. Grams JAKTOURISM. Telex 0375-207 TSM IN. Telefax 73265.

J&K Tourist Offices at Tourist Reception Centre, Srinagar ☎ 71921 ● New Delhi ☎ 3325373. Telex  
031-61854 JKT-IN ● Bombay ☎ 216249. Telex 011-5104 APPLE IN ● Ahmedabad ☎ 20473. Telex 012-656  
APPLE IN ● Calcutta ☎ 205790. Telex 021-2458 ● Hyderabad ☎ 60144 ● Jammu Tawi ☎ 48172. 44527.  
Telex 0377-228-TSM IN ● Madras ☎ 562335.