

Rare leopard returns: Camera trap captures big cat in Bandarban after decade

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Dhaka: For the first time in nearly ten years, a leopard has been confirmed in the Sangu-Matamuhuri Reserve Forest, Southeastern Bangladesh. The proof came from a camera trap installed by the Creative Conservation Alliance (CCA) as part of its year-long bear research in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

CCA researcher Saurav Chakma expressed cautious optimism: "Our cameras... recently captured an image of a leopard. The last confirmed sighting in this forest was in 2015 ... this indicates... leopards still survive here," marking a critical indication of wildlife persistence.

Conservation significance

Endangered Status: Globally, leopards are classified as "Vulnerable" by IUCN, but within Bangladesh, they are deemed "Critically

Endangered".

Ecological Hope: The photographic evidence challenges assumptions that leopards had vanished from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and sends a beacon of hope for conservationists striving to preserve Bangladesh's remaining large carnivores.

What experts say

Zoologist Professor Monirul H Khan of Jahangirnagar University explains that previous village encounters (like a recent attack in Jurachhari, Rangamati) were likely leopards—not tigers—underscoring their ongoing presence in these hills.

Meanwhile, Shahriar Caesar Rahman, CEO of CCA, revealed that camera traps set across the Sangu-Matamuhuri forest have recorded leopards three times: in 2015, 2021, and now in 2025—signaling a long-term but elusive population.

He also noted the forest's rich biodiversity, including multiple wild cat species, bears, and bison, which are under threat from road construction, poaching, and habitat destruction.

Turning momentum into action

Conservationists warn that a single camera photo is not enough for sustained protection. Muntasir Akash, a wildlife biologist, recently cautioned that celebrations over rare sightings can draw attention away from deeper issues like fragmented habitats and human-wildlife conflict.

Key steps urged by experts include:

1. Conducting systematic population surveys (occupancy and density studies).
2. Strengthening habitat protection by restricting infrastructure and deforestation in Hill Tracts.
3. Integrating local communities into conservation governance to reduce poaching and coordinate conflict mitigation.

Road ahead

This rediscovery provides an opportunity for Bangladesh to reassess its commitment to preserving large carnivores outside the Sundarbans,

focusing on remote habitats like the Sangu-Matamuhuri sanctuary. However, safeguarding the species will demand sustained policy backing, scientific rigor, and community engagement.

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