

Ladakh snow leopard trip

Short report of our trip to Ladakh after Christmas 2024.

We arranged the Lakakh leg of our Indian Christmas 2024 trip with Stanzin Tharpa (stanzintharpa@gmail.com, +91 96220 29925) who we highly recommend. He is a great and reliable young man that speaks English very well.

We arrived at Leh airport on 28 December already acclimatized after visiting other parts of the Indian Himalayas. We had planned to spend 3 nights at Rumbak village in Hemis NP for snow leopard spotting but Stanzin changed to the Sham valley because of snow leopard sightings there in days before. The Sham valley proved very beautiful, especially because of recent snow fall. The Sham valley homestay was new and good, with very friendly hosts. We saw a snow leopard on our third day in Sham valley, unfortunately quite far away. We also saw Golden eagles, Blue sheep and Urial.

After a quick shower and overnight on New Year's Eve in Leh, we moved to Hanle to focus on other species with our targets being lynx, Pallas cat, Sand fox. The homestay in Hanle was a fine with local wildlife keeping us company overnight (we found a mouse in the night running across our sleeping blankets). Sightings in Hanle proved to be far away as well but our spotters have very good eyes and managed to find Pallas cat. We also found a (Tibetan) Sand fox and wild ass quite close which produced decent photos.

As sightings at Hanle were quite distant and difficult and we were hoping for better snow leopard sightings, we discussed the possibility to go back to Hemis NP for one night to try our luck there with Stanzin. He was open to that and we decided to cut our Hanle visit short, staying only 2 nights.

Stanzin used his local contacts and knowledge to discover there had been a recent, reliable sighting of a snow leopard mother with 2 cubs at Uley valley where we stayed 1 night in a Saspochoy homestay. We were happy to spend time (afternoon & next morning) observing the mother with cubs before going back to Leh for overnight before flight home. The flight was very much delayed because of a missed Air India connection. Definitely do not recommend Air India: ground support for our delay and the hotel they arranged was far below what you would expect from a reputable airline.

Stanzin and his team took very good care of us during our short Ladakh trip. The spotters were excellent and knowledgeable. The support crew and cook were very friendly; food was excellent throughout catering to our vegetarian diet. The equipment and vehicles used were of very good quality. All communication was easy and his flexibility in changing plans based on local conditions and sighting was very much appreciated by us.

Some photos from our trip below



Sham valley



(Tibetan) Sand fox



Pallas cat



Wild asses



Snow leopard on kill



Snow leopard

Frank Wierckx
June 2025