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Gangotri National Park Reopens — Ecology, Wildlife, and Climate Significance

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ENVIRONMENT**GEOGRAPHY**

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Gangotri National Park Reopens — Ecology, Wildlife, and Climate Significance

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✍ WHY IN NEWS

Gangotri National Park in Uttarkashi district, Uttarakhand reopened its gates on April 1, 2026 after the winter closure, allowing summer access to key trekking routes including Gaumukh Tapovan, Kedartal, Gartang Gali, and Nelang Valley.



GANGOTRI NATIONAL PARK: OVERVIEW

FEATURE	DETAILS
Established	1989
Area	1,553 sq km (core zone)
Location	Uttarkashi district, Uttarakhand
Part of	Gangotri Biosphere Reserve / Western Himalayan landscape
Altitude range	1,800 m to 7,083 m (Gangotri glacier area)
Seasonal access	April 1 to November 30 (closed December–March)
Entry barriers	Kedartal, Bhaironghati, Gartang Gali, Kankhu

The park is named after the **Gangotri glacier** — one of the largest glaciers in the Himalayas (~30 km long, 2–4 km wide) and the **primary source of the Ganga river**.

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Flora

- **Alpine meadows (bugyals):** Rich in medicinal herbs including Aconitum (Vatsanabha), Brahmi, Kutki
- **Subalpine forests:** Birch (Betula), Rhododendron, Juniper above 3,500 m
- **Conifer zone:** Deodar cedar, blue pine, spruce at middle altitudes



Fauna

SPECIES	IUCN STATUS	NOTES
Snow Leopard	Vulnerable	~35 individuals (2025 winter count)
Himalayan Brown Bear	Vulnerable	Apex predator
Asian Black Bear	Vulnerable	Lower altitudes
Musk Deer	Endangered	Targeted for musk; heavily poached
Blue Sheep / Bharal	Least Concern	Key prey for snow leopard
Himalayan Tahr	Near Threatened	Cliff-dweller
Himalayan Monal	Least Concern	State bird of Uttarakhand; national bird of Nepal
Koklass Pheasant	Least Concern	
Western Tragopan	Vulnerable	One of rarest pheasants

Key Trekking Destinations

- **Gaumukh (Cow's Mouth):** The actual snout of the Gangotri glacier at 3,892 m — origin of the Bhagirathi river (a tributary that joins others to form the Ganga)
- **Tapovan:** Alpine meadow at 4,463 m above Gaumukh; views of Shivling peak
- **Kedartal:** High-altitude lake at ~4,750 m; 18 km from Gangotri town
- **Gartang Gali:** Ancient wooden bridge and cliff trail on the India-Tibet trade route; restored for tourists
- **Nelang Valley:** Former restricted border zone; opens for eco-tourism with Inner Line Permits

THE GANGOTRI GLACIER: CLIMATE CHANGE CONCERN

The Gangotri glacier has become a **global symbol of Himalayan glacier retreat**:

- **Retreat rate:** ~22 meters/year (recent decades; accelerating)
- **Total retreat since 1935:** ~2 km
- **Climate driver:** Rising temperatures in the Himalayan cryosphere; reduced winter snowfall
- **Downstream implications:** Seasonal water availability for the Ganga basin (800 million people dependent)

IPCC projections warn that if global warming exceeds 1.5°C, most Himalayan glaciers will lose 50–70% of their mass by 2100.

National Programme: National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)

India's **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE)** — one of eight missions under NAPCC — specifically focuses on:

- Monitoring Himalayan glaciers (through institutes like NIDM, GSI)
- Biodiversity conservation in the Himalayan ecosystem
- Safeguarding traditional knowledge of mountain communities

GANGOTRI: PILGRIMAGE, TOURISM, AND REGULATION

The Gangotri Dham (the temple town, not the national park) is one of the **Char Dham** pilgrimage sites in Uttarakhand. Entry to Gangotri National Park for trekking requires:

- **Registration** with the forest department
- **Daily quota limits** for the Gaumukh trek (150 trekkers/day) — NGMA ruling (National Green Tribunal in 2013 set initial limits)
- **No camping** within 5 km of Gaumukh (NGT order)
- Permits for Nelang Valley (Inner Line Permit due to proximity to LAC)

PROTECTED AREA NETWORK: CONTEXT

- Gangotri NP is part of the **Uttarakhand Protected Area Network** which also includes Corbett Tiger Reserve, Rajaji National Park, Nanda Devi National Park (UNESCO World Heritage), and Valley of Flowers National Park (UNESCO World Heritage)
- Part of the Western Himalayan landscape — globally significant for snow leopard conservation under **GSLEP (Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program)**

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 1 — Geography

- Himalayan glaciers: formation, recession, and water security
- Ganga river system: tributaries, basin area, significance



GS Paper 3 — Environment

- Biodiversity conservation in high-altitude ecosystems

- Climate change impacts on Himalayan cryosphere
- Protected area management: balancing tourism and ecology

Prelims Facts

- Gangotri NP: 1989; 1,553 sq km; Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand
- Gangotri glacier: ~30 km; primary source of Ganga (via Bhagirathi)
- State bird of Uttarakhand: Himalayan Monal
- GSLEP: Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program

FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

GANGOTRI NATIONAL PARK:

Established: 1989; Area: 1,553 sq km

Location: Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand; Altitude: 1,800 m to 7,083 m

Reopened: April 1, 2026 (seasonal; closed December–March)

Key trekking: Gaumukh (3,892 m), Tapovan, Kedartal, Gartang Gali, Nelang Valley

KEY WILDLIFE:

Snow Leopard (Vulnerable; ~35 individuals)

Musk Deer (Endangered); Western Tragopan (Vulnerable)

Himalayan Monal — state bird of Uttarakhand, national bird of Nepal

GANGOTRI GLACIER:

Length: ~30 km; Retreat: ~22 m/year; retreat since 1935: ~2 km

Primary source of the Ganga (via Bhagirathi river)

KEY PROGRAMMES:

NMSHE: National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (under NAPCC)

GSLEP: Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program

NGT limit: 150 trekkers/day to Gaumukh

Sources: [Uttarakhand Forest Department](#), [Down to Earth](#), [Wildlife Institute of India](#)



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