

# Great Himalayan National Park, Location, Flora, Fauna, Significance

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The **Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP)** is one of India's finest protected mountain ecosystems and a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site. Situated in the western Himalayas of Himachal Pradesh, the park is renowned for its rich biodiversity, diverse alpine ecosystems, and habitat for several threatened Himalayan species.

## About Great Himalayan National Park

The **Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP)** was established to conserve the unique biodiversity and fragile ecosystems of the western Himalayas. The park was **constituted in 1984** and, after completion of legal procedures under the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, it was formally **notified as a National Park in 1999**. In recognition of its exceptional biodiversity and ecological significance, the **Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (GHNPCA)** was inscribed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 2014.

- **Location:** The park is located in the Banjar subdivision of Kullu district, Himachal Pradesh.
- **Area:** The core National Park area covers 754.4 sq. km.

- **Conservation Area:** The GHNP Conservation Area (about 905 sq. km.) includes the Great Himalayan National Park, Sainj Wildlife Sanctuary, and Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuary.
- **Ecozone:** A 265.6 sq. km buffer area surrounding the park promotes conservation through community participation and sustainable resource management.
- **Unique Feature:** Unlike most Indian national parks, GHNP has no motorable roads within its core area and can be explored only through trekking routes.

## Geography of Great Himalayan National Park

The **Great Himalayan National Park** represents a pristine high-altitude Himalayan landscape characterised by diverse terrain, river valleys, and alpine ecosystems.

- The park is **located in the western Himalayas** and its elevation ranges from lower river valleys to peaks exceeding 6,000 metres, creating a wide range of ecological zones.
- The landscape is marked by **deep valleys, steep mountain slopes, alpine meadows, glaciers, rocky cliffs, and permanent snowfields.**
- It covers the **Tirthan, Sainj, Jiwa Nal, and upper Parvati valleys**, which form distinct ecological units within the park.
- The **Tirthan, Sainj, Jiwa Nal, and Parvati rivers originate from this landscape** and serve as important headwater tributaries of the **Beas River**, which belongs to the Indus River Basin.
- The remote and rugged terrain has limited human interference, helping maintain the park's ecological stability and biodiversity.

## Great Himalayan National Park Ecological Importance

Great Himalayan National Park occupies a strategic position in the Himalayan region and plays a vital role in biodiversity conservation.

- It forms part of the **Himalaya Biodiversity Hotspot**, one of the world's richest centres of biological diversity.
- The park lies at the **meeting point of the Palearctic and Indomalayan biogeographic realms**, resulting in exceptional species diversity.
- It protects a complete sequence of Himalayan ecosystems ranging from **subtropical forests to alpine habitats.**
- The park safeguards important **watersheds** that sustain the Beas River and support downstream agriculture, hydropower generation, and human settlements.
- It also serves as a crucial **refuge for several threatened and endemic Himalayan species.**

## Great Himalayan National Park Flora and Fauna

The wide altitudinal variation supports remarkable floral and faunal diversity.

### Flora

- More than 1,000 plant species have been recorded, including numerous endemic and medicinal plants.
- UNESCO has identified 25 distinct forest types within the park.
- Vegetation changes with altitude, ranging from subtropical forests to temperate broadleaf forests, conifer forests, sub-alpine forests, alpine meadows, and high-altitude scrub.
- **Dominant tree species** include Deodar, Fir, Spruce, Oak, Birch, Rhododendron, and Juniper.

## Fauna

- The **Snow Leopard** is the **flagship species of the park**.
- **Other important mammals** include the Himalayan Brown Bear, Himalayan Tahr, Himalayan Musk Deer, Bharal (Blue Sheep), Himalayan Goral, and Serow.
- The park supports 209 bird species, including the endangered Western Tragopan and the Himalayan Monal, the State Bird of Himachal Pradesh.
- Several reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, and other invertebrates also contribute to its rich **biodiversity**.

## Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Significance

Great Himalayan National Park is recognised globally for conserving one of the largest and least disturbed ecosystems of the western Himalayas.

- It protects critical habitats for numerous threatened Himalayan species.
- It conserves the upper catchments of important Himalayan rivers that sustain downstream ecosystems.
- The park forms part of a larger conservation landscape connected with neighbouring protected areas, enhancing ecological connectivity and wildlife movement.
- Community participation through Eco-Development Committees has strengthened conservation while promoting sustainable livelihoods in surrounding villages.

## Challenges

- Climate change is accelerating glacier retreat and altering fragile alpine ecosystems.
- Seasonal grazing in parts of the surrounding protected landscape continues to exert pressure on alpine meadows.
- Illegal collection of medicinal plants and occasional poaching threaten sensitive species.
- Human-wildlife conflict involving livestock depredation persists in villages surrounding the park.
- Infrastructure development in the surrounding Himalayan region may affect ecological connectivity if not carefully managed.

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