

## Snow Leopard



VERTEBRATA  
Order: Carnivora  
Family: Felidae  
Genus: Panther  
Category: 1 – Endangered species.

The snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*) is a typical plateau animal, preferring alpine wildness around 5,000 m altitude in summer and down to 3,500 m in winter. It symbolizes the majestic, mysterious, and rigorous world of the Central Asian Mountains. It was considered as 'threatened to extinction' on the Threatened Category by IUCN (2000); 'Very rare' by Mongolia (1997); 'Threatened to extinction at the edge of the range' by the Russian Federation (2001) (The First category).

### Distribution of Snow Leopards (as of 2011)



**Source: IUCN Red List of Threatened Species**

### Distribution and Population

It was estimated that all together 4,500 to 7,500 snow leopard remain in the wild. In 2003, the estimates were that 500 to 1,000 lived in Mongolia; 50 to 150 in the Russian Federation; and 2,000 to 2,500 in China. About 2,000 snow leopards are in captivity<sup>1</sup>.

In the Russian Federation, distribution of the snow leopard is limited basically to the Southern Siberian Mountains, including Altai, western and eastern Sayan, Mountains in Tyva, and the Tunkin and Kitoy Mountain ranges. In China, it is found in the Himalayas, Kunlun Mountains, Hengduan Mountains, Qilian Mountains, Tianshan Mountains and Altay Mountains. In Mongolia, highest densities are thought to be in the South Gobi, Central Trans-Altai Gobi and the Northern Altai Mountains: Kharkhiraa and Turgen

Mountains<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Japan Wildlife Conservation Center (2005). *op.cit.*

<sup>2</sup> WWF (2002). *op.cit.*

### **Physical features and habitats**

Being at the top of the food chain, the snow leopard can be seen as a flagship species for the conservation of all animal species of Central Asian highlands. Snow leopards have the camouflage of exquisite smoky-gray fur tinged with yellow and patterned with dark grey, open rosettes on the flanks and spots on the head and neck, similar to jaguars. Their tails are striped and proportionately longer than those of similar species. Being opportunistic feeders, they can ambush prey three times their size, including domestic livestock. They can jump as far as 50 feet, helpful for ambushing prey and traversing through mountains. Their diet mainly consists of ungulates (ibex and mountain sheep) and a wide range of other species<sup>3</sup>.

Snow leopards are generally solitary mountain rangers (up to 5.8 km straight-line distance per day) and well adapted to harsh, cold climates of its range. Despite their name, snow leopards avoid deep snow, as it threatens their survival. High mobility of certain sex and age groups of snow leopard allows for quick re-colonization of suitable habitats, thus preventing fragmentation of the population and inbreeding in local groups, hence genetic soundness.

Mating usually occurs between late January and mid-March, a time of intensified social marking.

Snow leopards are active during the day and the most active at dawn and dusk in the places which are hardly accessible to human beings, but become nocturnal in more populous places. 2-3 three years after their birth, the snow leopards are sexually mature. One to five cubs are born after the females' gestation period of 93 to 110 days, generally in June or July. Cubs are independent of their mother at 18-22 months of age. Average life span of snow leopards is 20 years in the wild and longer in captivity<sup>4</sup>.

### **Priority actions for NEASPEC**

1. Encourage and support range countries to take appropriate actions for law enforcement to prevent poaching and any other illegal actions
2. Ensure the law enforcement in each member country on both international and internal trade of snow leopard specimen, parts and derivatives
3. Encourage and support three range countries to establish information exchange mechanism to improve international cooperative actions
4. Encourage and support three range countries to involve local public in planning and implementation of conservation work as well as local development to reflect their interest and needs and to address human-wildlife conflict
5. Support range countries to monitor population, distribution and habitat status of the snow leopard

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<sup>3</sup> Red deer, roe deer, musk deer and reindeer marmots, hares, picas and partridges.

<sup>4</sup> Info retrieved from <<http://www.agarman.dial.pipex.com/snowlep.htm>> on 7 August 2006.

6. Promote awareness raising on conservation needs of the species in each Government as well as general public and international community by providing regularly updated information of conservation status and collaboration activities.
7. Support the participation of NGOs in conservation activities.