



Summer 2011

## Snow Leopard Tracks

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The newsletter of Snow Leopard Trust

# Snow Leopard Tracks

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Snow Leopard Trust: celebrating 30 years of protecting the magnificent snow leopard



## Name that cat!

See page 2 for your chance to name a snow leopard in India.



## Cat Tails

### New Travel Mugs

The Snow Leopard Trust is excited to announce our newest addition to our product line! We now have 16 oz. Stainless Steel Travel Mugs available for purchase for just \$12. A mug would make the perfect Father's Day (June 19!) gift for any coffee-loving Dad, or help the new grad in your life stay fully caffeinated for all those long nights of studying (or all those



early mornings of 9-to-5 life). Order one of these exclusive mugs today online at [www.snowleopard.org/shop](http://www.snowleopard.org/shop) or by calling our office at 206-632-

2421. Thank you to Julie Felton who donated the design on these mugs.

### 10,000 Actions Reached

Many thanks to everyone who supported our recent 10,000 Actions to Save Snow Leopards campaign! Our goal was to reach 10,000 transactions in our online store by the end of April—and we met that goal with plenty of time to spare. We got over 200 orders in the month of April alone, and hit order #10,000 on April 22. Thank you for making a contribution online whether through a donation, product purchase, or snow leopard adoption! All of your support helps us protect snow leopards in the wild. And the best news of all: the store is still open, so please continue to visit [www.snowleopard.org/shop](http://www.snowleopard.org/shop).

### Upcoming Events

This summer you can find us at:

**June 18-19:** Fremont Fair, Seattle, WA

**June 25-26:** Black Sheep Gathering, Eugene, OR

**July 16:** Duvall Days, Duvall, WA

**Aug. 12-14:** Mt. Si, North Bend, WA

**Aug. 24-28:** AAZK Conference, San Diego, CA

**Sept. 1-4:** AZAD Conference, Memphis, TN

For complete info on upcoming events, see our events calendar at [www.snowleopard.org](http://www.snowleopard.org).

If you live near an event and would like to volunteer at our booth, please e-mail [volunteer@snowleopard.org](mailto:volunteer@snowleopard.org) or call 206.632.2421. We would love to have your help!

## Trailblazing in India

### Can a tiny village offer salvation to snow leopards worldwide?

By Brad Rutherford  
Executive Director

Few people outside of India have ever heard of Kibber, a community located two and a half miles above sea level among snow-capped Himalayan peaks. Yet this small, unlikely village, ringed by green pastures and overlooked by ancient temples, is at the forefront of a revolution in snow leopard conservation. The conservation approach pioneered in Kibber is becoming a model for India as a whole, and one that we believe will also apply in China, Mongolia, Pakistan, and throughout the cat's range.

Kibber is located in the Spiti Valley, which contains some

*Our efforts have ended the risk of retaliatory killing of snow leopards and other wild carnivores.*

of the most important snow leopard habitat in India. A decade ago, it was not uncommon for herders here to destroy wolf litters and persecute snow leopards to protect their livestock. In addition, overgrazing of grasslands had led to severe declines and even



Glimpse of success: Motion-sensing research cameras have captured snow leopards in the mountains around Kibber, India, and shown that our approach to snow leopard conservation is working.

local extinctions of wild snow leopard prey. This fueled snow leopard predation on livestock, contributing to growing human-snow leopard conflict.

But over the past ten years, we have broken this destructive cycle. In Kibber, for the first time in any of our program sites, we can say that our efforts have ended the risk of retaliatory killing of snow leopards and other wild carnivores.

The work began in 2000, when Dr. Charu Mishra, now the

Trust's director of science and conservation, collaborated with Kibber's village council to form a grazing-free reserve. The community agreed to set aside a portion of those rolling green pastures—at first about five square kilometers, later expanded to 15—and protect this area from all resource use to encourage the return of wild prey.

Today, the population of blue sheep in the Kibber reserve has increased four-fold, and ibex are increasing as well. At least

three and possibly as many as seven snow leopards have been repeatedly seen around the reserve, and captured on film by motion-sensing cameras.

The grazing-free reserve was a great first step but herders continued to lose livestock to predators and conflict was still an issue. In 2002, again working with the village council, Dr. Mishra set up India's first community-run livestock insurance program. By compensating

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PHOTO: SNOW LEOPARD TRUST/NATURE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

# TRAILBLAZING

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participants for livestock lost to predators, this program protects herders from the economic disaster of losing livestock, effectively removing the impetus behind snow leopard persecution.

Finally, in 2006 we initiated an environmental education program for children and teachers. High on the Kibber plateau, we host eco-camps so that children can explore nature, and inside Kibber's grazing-free reserve scientists mentor young adults by teaching them about wildlife monitoring.

The programs piloted in Kibber have now spread to engage over 200 herders in two Indian states. Nine communities are running insurance programs, education reaches nearly 1,500 children, and there are now four grazing-free reserves safeguarding blue sheep, ibex, argali, and Tibetan gazelle. And the approach recently went national, as our team advocated for, drafted, and helped secure approval for Project Snow Leopard, a policy that will provide greater protection to the cats and their habitat across five Indian states. In March, the Indian government named our team as its official technical consultants for all snow leopard matters in the country.

This multi-faceted conservation approach is also guiding our work throughout the snow leopard's global range. We are in the process of identifying large landscapes in China, Mongolia, and Pakistan that could benefit from the same powerful combination of multi-faceted conservation programs. This focused, in-depth approach is already taking shape in Mongolia and will complement our existing efforts within the country.

Today, the quest to save snow leopards seems less daunting. In the most recent photographs taken by the motion-sensing cameras near

## Do you know where your teenage snow leopard is?

### A young female walks all the way to China

Human adolescents are driven to explore and test boundaries, and now it seems the same is true in the snow leopard world as well.

That evidence comes from Zaraa, a young female snow leopard and one of the cats fitted with a GPS tracking collar as part of our long-term study in Mongolia. In March, she set out from the Tost Mountains and walked all the way to China, the first southward journey by any of the collared cats.

"She made an expedition of nearly 200 kilometers in less than five days to return to exactly where she started," says Trust Regional Ecologist Koustubh Sharma. Her trek took her across a wide expanse of flat, open steppe—unusual behavior among mountain-loving snow leopards.

Zaraa is the daughter of Tenger, another of the GPS-collared leopards in our study. For several months after we placed the collar on Tenger last October, the two



PHOTO: SNOW LEOPARD TRUST/NATURE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

We need to raise \$40,000 to continue this work! Please help us today: for every \$100 you donate, your name will be submitted in a raffle drawing for the chance to name this mother and cub family you helped protect in India.

Kibber, I've seen a mother playing with her cubs (photo above). This seems to me a symbol for this work as a whole: together with the local community, we are creating conditions where these cubs, and those born elsewhere, can roam without fear of our species.

traveled together, but now Zaraa seems to be striking out on her own.

Koustubh adds, "What is most intriguing is that she touched the China border and walked along it for almost 28 kilometers" before making a wide loop through the steppe and then retracing her own footsteps back to Tost.

Although the GPS collars always tell us where a snow leopard is, they don't explain why a cat behaves the way it does. Why did Zaraa choose to walk so far in this direction, through flat, open habitat with little shelter? And why didn't she cross over into China? The research team



PHOTO: SNOW LEOPARD TRUST/PANTHERA

Secret sharer: Why did this young female snow leopard walk from Mongolia's Tost Mountains all the way to the Chinese border?

hopes to visit the border area in the coming months in order to answer some of these questions.

## Learning from Longtail

In February, a herder in Mongolia called our local field office to report that one of the GPS-collared cats in our long-term study, Shonkhor, had entered his corral and killed 10 goats.

When we learned about this incident, we were haunted by a similar situation in 2009 when Longtail, another male in our study, was shot by a herder trying to protect his livestock. In this instance, Shonkhor was close enough that this herder could have easily done the same. But he made a different choice: he called in our team for help and together they coaxed Shonkhor from the site.

Although the loss of these goats represents a heavy economic burden to the family affected, we are grateful to them for continuing to work with us to protect Shonkhor and other snow leopards. We are now helping them to join our new Mongolia livestock

insurance program, which was started shortly after Longtail's death. The program already includes nearly three dozen families and insures almost 4,000 livestock.

In 2010, the livestock insurance program paid out over \$3,000 in compensation for 139 livestock lost to wolves and snow leopards, demonstrating its effectiveness at protecting herding families from economic losses due to predation.

Meanwhile, our research team is working to understand Shonkhor's behavior in order to help avert herder-snow leopard conflicts in the future. As a younger male, Shonkhor may not yet have the skills to reliably hunt wild prey. Or Aztai, the older male who shares Shonkhor's home range, may have staked claim to the best hunting grounds.

What is certain is that more data, and efforts like the livestock insurance program,

will help us protect Shonkhor—and all the other snow leopards in the area—from Longtail's fate.

Good friends: A new livestock insurance program in Mongolia is helping reduce herder-snow leopard conflicts.



PHOTO: SHAWNA PECKHAM COURTESY OF SNOW LEOPARD TRUST

## HUNTING PERMITS REVOKED

Quick action and the global voice of the Snow Leopard Network (SLN), led by Snow Leopard Trust Science and Conservation Director Dr. Charu Mishra, has saved the lives of four wild snow leopards in Mongolia.

In early March, a Mongolian newspaper reported that the government had approved permits to kill four snow leopards for research purposes. Immediately, SLN—a worldwide network of over 400 individuals and organizations involved in snow leopard conservation—began to collaborate with Mongolian scientists and conservationists to protest the government's decision.

Charu, executive director of SLN, worked with other SLN leaders to draft a letter to the Mongolian government. "With today's technological and scientific development, killing wild species, especially endangered ones such as the snow leopard, is no longer considered necessary by the scientific community," they wrote.

Happily, the government also responded quickly. On March 21st, Charu met with Luimed Gansukh, Mongolia's Minister of Nature, Environment, and Tourism. A. Bayarjargal (Bayara), who heads the Snow Leopard Enterprises program in Mongolia through our in-country partner organization, the Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation, acted as an interpreter for the meeting. Bayara also helped draft documents and translate them into Mongolian during the campaign.

The next day, the ministry held a meeting with SLN and leading Mongolian conservation organizations. And on March 23rd, the government announced that it was rescinding the hunting permits.

This victory demonstrates the strength of the Snow Leopard Network, which is supported by the Trust, and the power of noninvasive methods for studying wild snow leopards (such as the GPS collars and motion-sensing cameras that the Trust uses in its long-term study in Mongolia). It is also a welcome sign of the Mongolian government's commitment to the conservation of these magnificent cats.

Run free: Noninvasive study methods, such as the GPS tracking collar in this photo, can yield necessary scientific knowledge about these cats—and happily, the Mongolian government agrees.



PHOTO: BY STEPHEN SPARROW COURTESY OF SNOW LEOPARD TRUST