



LONGTAIL:
An Official Snow Leopard Trust Report
March 3, 2009

Around 2am on January 1, 2009, a male snow leopard named Longtail (Bayartai in Mongolian) was shot and killed in the Tost Mountain area of Mongolia's South Gobi Province. Longtail was part of an ongoing Snow Leopard Trust research project in the region. At the time of his death, Longtail was wearing a GPS radio collar that he had been fitted with in September 2008.

The herder who shot the cat, named Octyaber, reported the incident to the Snow Leopard Conservation Fund, the local NGO arm of the Snow Leopard Trust in Mongolia. Our staff then immediately reported the incident to local police.

From January 7-13, the Snow Leopard Trust and the Mongolian Ministry of Nature and Environment launched a fact-finding investigation. The investigation team consisted of seven people, including two field biologists, a veterinarian, and the director of the Snow Leopard Trust's Mongolia program. Numerous meetings were held in the field with the district governor, police, Octyaber, the environmental inspector, and the Tost Bag community—the community in which Longtail was killed.

From these meetings, it was found that Octyaber had recently lost 26 goats to predation. Seven to eight other families had also recently lost more than 50 livestock to snow leopards.

As part of the investigation, a complete autopsy was conducted and the remains were donated to the government to use for educational purposes. Longtail's GPS collar was recovered intact and data documenting his travels have since been downloaded.

Local police initiated discussions with the South Gobi Provincial Prosecuting Office to make a judgment on the shooting. Snow leopards are classified as Endangered by the Mongolian Red List of Mammals, and the Mongolian Law on Hunting prohibits subsistence and commercial hunting. Poaching is subject to criminal penalties under the Mongolian Criminal Code and civil penalties under the Law on Hunting.

Deliberations are still underway, and it may be months before a final determination is made as to Octyaber's punishment, but he could face fines or even jail time.

In the meantime, the Snow Leopard Trust has swiftly moved to address the concerns of local herders about livestock predation, and the local government has indicated they are willing to work more closely with the Snow Leopard Trust to prevent retaliatory killings of this kind. The Snow Leopard Trust currently operates a program called Snow Leopard Enterprises in the Tost Bag community, but Octyaber's family lives outside the program area and was not a part it.

The Trust is engaging Tost Bag community members in dialog aimed at developing solutions that will meet both their needs and the needs of the region's snow leopard. The Trust is considering the possibility of expanding Snow Leopard Enterprises further into Tost Bag to reach more families. Our discussion process could also culminate in a community-managed livestock insurance system, modeled after a program successfully implemented by the Trust in India. This program will financially compensate herders for livestock losses to snow leopards. The program will simultaneously benefit snow leopards and local families by stabilizing household incomes and increasing tolerance for livestock losses.

For more information regarding this report, please contact info@snowleopard.org or call 206-632-2421.