

SNOW LEOPARD FACT SHEET



POPULATION

Researchers estimate that there are between **3,500 and 7,000** snow leopards left in the wild. No one has an exact count because snow leopards are so elusive and inhabit such harsh and remote habitat that they are rarely seen. There are about 600 of these cats in zoos around the world.

Adaptations for mountain life:

- Well developed chest
- Short forelimbs with large paws for walking on snow
- Long hind-limbs for leaping
- Long flexible tail for balancing

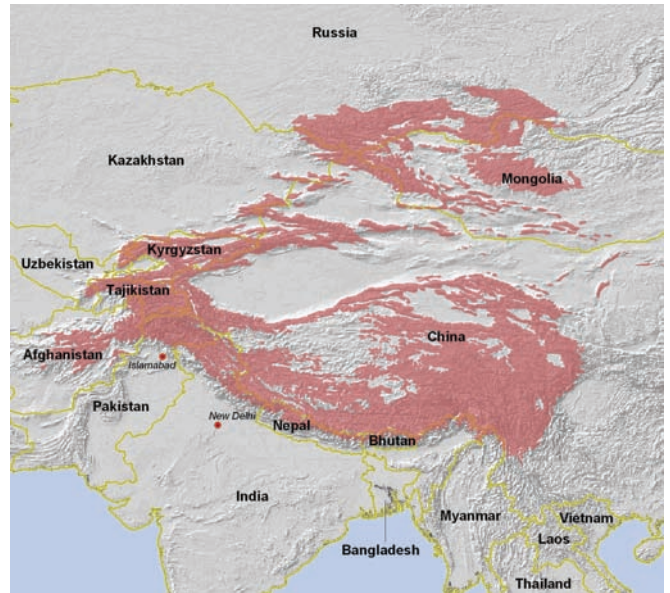
Adaptations for cold:

- Enlarged nasal cavity
- Long fur with wooly undergrowth
- Thick furry tail for wrapping around body and face



BEHAVIOR Snow leopards are usually **solitary**, except when females are raising cubs. Mating occurs in late winter and 1 to 5 (usually 2 or 3) cubs are born 90-100 days later. The cubs remain with their mother until they become independent—normally after about 18-22 months.

These cats are most active at **dawn and dusk**. They may stay in an area for several days and then abruptly move many miles.



RANGE Snow leopards live throughout the mountains of Central Asia in Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Snow leopard range covers 2 million square kilometers, about the size of Greenland or Mexico, but is spread across the twelve countries. China contains as much as 60% of snow leopard habitat. The cats have already disappeared from some areas where they formerly lived, such as parts of Mongolia.

THREATS

Poaching – illegal hunting for the fur trade, and trade in bones for traditional Asian medicine

Loss of prey – a decline in numbers of wild prey due to hunting and competition with livestock for grazing

Problem animals (depredators) – snow leopards kill livestock and are killed by herders in retribution

Loss of habitat – more people and livestock move into snow leopard range fragmenting habitat, so snow leopards become isolated and vulnerable

Lack of effective protection – most protected areas are too small to protect the home range of even a single snow leopard, and many countries cannot afford to pay rangers living wages

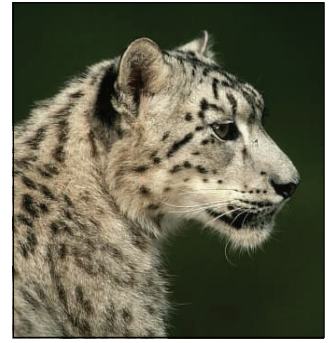
Lack of awareness and support – herders living with snow leopards sometimes do not understand why they are important elements of the ecosystem and why they need to be protected



**Snow
Leopard
Trust**

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PHYSICAL FEATURES Snow leopards are medium sized cats, weighing between 60-120 pounds. Their scientific name is *Panthera uncia*, the same genus as most large cats (*Panthera*). Body length ranges from 39-51 inches, and their tails can be almost as long as their bodies! They have thick, smoky-gray fur patterned with dark gray open rosettes. In the mountains they blend perfectly with the rocky slopes, making them practically invisible.



PREY Snow leopards are predators, which means they eat other animals. The diet varies across snow leopard range. In the Himalayas they eat mostly **blue sheep**, which are also known as **bharal** (*Pseudios nayaur*).

In the Karakorum (Pakistan), Tian Shan (China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) and Altai (Russia and Mongolia) Mountains, their main prey is **ibex**, a wild goat (*Capra siberica*) and wild **argali** sheep (*Ovis ammon*).

Across their range snow leopards also take small prey including marmots and hares, and they hunt larger birds like snow cock and chukor. Snow leopards are opportunistic hunters, and they will attack livestock that are in their range.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

C.I.T.E.S. (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) Snow leopards are listed on this treaty, which makes it **illegal** to transport any snow leopard parts across international borders. Attempting to import a snow leopard hide into the USA is punishable by a fine of up to a \$25,000. In Nepal such trade could mean a 5-15 year jail sentence!

The Snow Leopard Trust works with **governments** in snow leopard countries to strengthen conservation policies and programs.

Most importantly, the Trust works with local communities and herders on **reducing conflict** between people and snow leopards. We help them find ways of limiting livestock losses and offer them opportunities to increase their income. The Snow Leopard Trust markets handicrafts made by people in snow leopard habitat in return for a commitment to conservation.

EVIDENCE OF SNOW LEOPARDS

Because snow leopards are so difficult to see, researchers rely on other evidence of snow leopard presence to study them.

Scrapes: snow leopards scrape their back legs in loose soil leaving a small depression with a mound of soil next to it.

Scent marks: they mark rocks, bushes and boulders with pungent spray from a scent gland near the tail. Cheek rubbing spreads the scent.

Scat: or more commonly called feces. This is also a way for cats to say "I was here."

Using these marks snow leopards make sure they stay out of each other's way or, during the breeding season, males and females can find each other.

EXTINCTION IS FOREVER

There are many ways you can help save these amazing cats. One of the best ways is just by raising awareness about the plight of the snow leopards.

You can also get involved by becoming a member of the Snow Leopard Trust, donating money towards conservation work, or volunteering your time. To find out more, please visit us at www.snowleopard.org

