



Winter 2010

Snow Leopard Tracks

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The newsletter of Snow Leopard Trust

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Winter 2010

Through innovative programs, effective partnerships, and the latest science, the Snow Leopard Trust is saving the magnificent snow leopard and improving the lives of people who live in the snow leopard countries of Central Asia.

Please Donate Today: right now, all donations are being matched! Support these amazing cats and have double the impact.

Matching funds provided by Barbara Blywise, Walter Pereyra, and other long-time Trust supporters.



Cat Tails

Here Comes the Sun

We are happy to announce that a complete solar power system was installed at our research camp in Mongolia! The beautiful blue array of solar panels with a capacity of 2.38 Kw not only provides electricity to the gers (yurts) that make up the research camp but also benefits the local community by providing electricity directly to the neighboring community center.

We can now power snow leopard research, training, and community meetings in the area for years to come. Many thanks to Stephen Gold at WCN Solar Power Project, Turner Foundation, Cat Life Foundation, and Ben Morlang for making this project possible.

Thank You Martin King & Marilyn Fite

We are sad to report that two great friends of the Snow

Leopard Trust passed away this fall. Involved in the Trust since its founding in 1981, Marilyn was fearless in her pursuit of support for the cats she loved. Martin King stepped in to support the Trust in 2000 and remained a source of creative ideas and generous support for the cats.

Getting into the Spirit of India

A big THANK YOU to the many donors, volunteers and supporters who made this year's "Spirit of India" event a big success! Nearly 200 attendees celebrated snow leopards with music and dance, and then contributed much-needed funds. We're grateful to the generous spirit of everyone who came and supported us! Email Antonia@snowleopard.org if you are interested in advance notice of next year's event.

Upcoming Events

Here's where to catch us this holiday season...and on the flip side in the new year:

- Dec. 1**
Seattle Tennis Club Holiday Bazaar, Seattle, WA
- Dec. 4**
St. John's Episcopal Church Holiday Bazaar, Globe, AZ
- Dec. 4**
St. Elizabeth's Holiday Bazaar, Burien, WA
- Dec. 5**
St. Anne's Parish Fair Trade Bazaar, Seattle, WA
- Jan. 22-23**
Cat Fancy Cat Show, Del Mar, CA
- Feb. 25-27**
Go Green Expo, Los Angeles, CA

For more info please check the events calendar on our home page www.snowleopard.org.

A Magical Snow Leopard Encounter

One researcher's story of two wild snow leopards in India

Editor's Note: Last March, Kulbhushansingh Suryawanshi (Kullu), a researcher with our India partner Nature Conservation Foundation, had a remarkable encounter with a pair of wild snow leopards at their base camp, in the village of Kibber in the state of Himachal Pradesh. Here's the amazing story in his own words, beginning as Kullu stares out the research station's big picture window at a familiar snow-covered slope....



Courting pair? Researcher Kullu was gifted with the rare sight of two wild snow leopards, and pondered the mysteries of this secretive cat.

There was a peculiarly shaped rock protruding out of the snow. I ignored it at first but then I knew I hadn't seen this one before. Suddenly I felt the rush of adrenaline. Takpa, an associate, and I quickly grabbed two pairs of binoculars. Confirmed! The rock was a snow leopard!! Actually two snow leopards!!!

They were about 300 meters from the village, across a deep gorge. Hidden from the snow leopards' view we sneaked up to the edge of the gorge. The cats were still sitting, cuddled together, in the same place. What was the relation between them? Mother and cub? A courting pair? Siblings just weaned off? Their behavior and interactions with each other could perhaps provide us a clue.

Seeing one snow leopard is rare, but seeing two of these mostly solitary cats together is even more remarkable. However, some of the radio telemetry studies have shown that snow leopards are not as territorial as other large cats. Even males, at times, show a 100% overlap in their home ranges. In India, our camera

trapping studies show that about five adult snow leopards simultaneously use the area around Kibber. Are these overlapping individuals related to each other or is it just a random mix of "everybody's welcome?" One of the two snow leopards got up, stretched and

started walking. The other one followed. I was waiting for some interaction between them that might hint at their relationship. Without a warning the leading snow leopard broke into a run then turned around and challenged the second one. They got into a playful fight and started tumbling down the snow

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slope. Seeing this display, a herd of about 25 ibex that had been feeding nearby got into a fright and started whistling in alarm, interrupting the snow leopards' play. This was repeated a few times until darkness fell. Then we could not see the cats, but we hoped to pick up their moving silhouette on the snow lit up by the bleak light of the stars.

Snow leopards are nocturnal and soon the pair did move on. We sighted two ghostly shadows slipping across the snow and soon disappearing into the mosaic of ice and rock on the cliffs. The mercury had also fallen below freezing. It was time to head back home. All the way back I was thinking of the leopards playing and trying to understand their relationship with each other. Although I can't say anything conclusive about it, I think they were a courting pair.

We were back at the same spot early next day. We scanned the entire valley for their signs. We looked for an ibex carcass that they might have killed; scanning the sky for vultures hovering. But there was no trace of the snow leopards. The wind had even cleared their pugmarks from the cliffs.



SLT/NATURE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION, INDIA

India: A Novel Conservation Approach

There aren't too many conservation biologists whose eyes light up at the mention of "four-tier structures" and "steering committees." But Yash Veer Bhatnagar, the Snow Leopard Trust's India Program Director, is one such rare creature, and he's passionate about working with bureaucracies for one simple reason: because doing so is crucial to saving India's wild snow leopards.

For the past four years, Yash Veer has been involved in Project Snow Leopard, which aims to coordinate conservation efforts across the five Indian states that harbor populations of the cat. Now Yash Veer and other members of the Trust's India staff are helping to prepare management plans for three of the five snow leopard states, a process that requires coordinating between state governments, local community leaders, and representatives from federal bureaucracies. In other words, just the job for a guy like Yash Veer.

"The Spiti management plan which has just been completed is like a test case" for this work, Yash Veer says. It covers 4,000

square kilometers, or about two-thirds of the Spiti Valley in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. "We have identified 15 snow leopard habitat core zones, ranging in size from 5 to 300 square kilometers."

About half of the core zone area lies within existing protected areas. But the Trust's detailed ecological studies of the area show that some valleys outside of protected areas provide snow leopard habitat that's just as good or even better than that inside. Conserving this habitat will require a different approach to conservation, one that takes into account the way that people and wildlife are spread out at low population densities across a very large area in the Indian Himalaya.

"Very often we joke that a snow leopard can walk all the way from Jammu and Kashmir [in the West] to Arunachal Pradesh [in the East] and not really meet a serious human barrier," Yash Veer says. "Yet at the same time, there's no industry to speak of, so the people are dependent almost entirely on agriculture and

pastoralism. So any land being taken away is a huge loss for them."

For this reason, the team focused on identifying good habitat areas that aren't currently heavily used by local people. "So we hope that it will enable easier negotiation with the communities to demarcate these areas," Yash Veer explains. Those negotiations will occur as "microplans" are worked out for each of the core habitat areas, a step that will begin next year.

Yash Veer Bhatnagar, India Program Director, shares his expertise at a conference for snow leopard conservation.



SLT/NATURE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION, INDIA

PAKISTAN UPDATE Despite Floods, Conservation Efforts Growing

This year, unusually intense monsoon rains caused Pakistan's worst flooding in 80 years, directly affecting more than 20 million people, mostly along the Indus River. Thankfully, our team in Pakistan is safe, and has even been able to make important progress on snow leopard conservation this year.

The floods were worst in southern Pakistan, but began in the North—near prime snow leopard habitat. Severe floods hit Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province (formerly known as the North West Frontier Province/NWFP), where the Trust operates a livestock vaccination program in 11 communities. Although our program areas were not critically affected, transport in the region has been difficult. Thankfully, some bridges were recently replaced and our team will be in the area again soon.

More good news: country director Ali Mohammed Nawaz successfully registered the country's first snow leopard-focused NGO, *Snow Leopard Foundation*. He has also overseen expansion of our conservation work into Gilgit-Baltistan, the province due north of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Initial surveys have confirmed the presence of snow leopards in valleys surrounding Central Karakoram National Park, the province's largest protected area.

Dr. Nawaz's team has also found that among communities living in these valleys, livestock mortality due to diseases is high, similar to patterns we saw in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa prior to forming our successful vaccination programs there. Further research and community consultations will help determine whether a similar vaccination program is the best conservation option for these new areas, and we look forward to your continued support as we undertake that work over the coming months.

A CAT BY ANY OTHER NAME

A new cat turns out to be an old friend

On September 2, researchers at our Mongolian base camp placed a GPS tracking collar on a female snow leopard. We have now collared eight cats, and this is the second female to join our study. We're glad to start to even out the gender balance, but what's even more exciting is that this new lady turns out to be an old friend!

Helping out when the cat was collared was Ganaa, a local herder who had been in the area with his livestock. He chose the name Khashaa, after his only daughter (an appropriate name, since it means "jade" in Mongolian, like the snow leopard's green eyes.)

Later, Regional Science Director Koustubh Sharma carefully compared pictures taken when Khashaa was collared and pictures earlier captured by our trap cameras. He noticed an S-shaped pattern of rosettes on Khashaa's side, markings that were not only distinctive but familiar: we've named Khashaa twice before!

In the summer of 2009, this cat was frequently photographed by our trap cameras in the foothills around our research station, and we called it "Superman" because of that S-shaped marking. Then

The long-term study in Mongolia is in partnership with Snow Leopard Conservation Fund and Panthera Foundation. Work in Gilgit-Baltistan Province of Pakistan is in collaboration with Snow Leopard Foundation, Panthera Foundation, and Wildlife Conservation Society.

Trap Camera Adoptions

For the first time ever, the Snow Leopard Trust is offering you a chance to take part in snow leopard research by "adopting" a trap camera! Our researchers use these specialized cameras to catch glimpses of elusive snow leopards. As part of the adoption package, you'll receive a disc containing hundreds of photos from trap cameras we set out in Mongolia over the summer. Just like our researchers, you'll have the opportunity to scroll through candid photos of rabbits, goats, herders, foxes, and...hopefully even snow leopards!* And the best part? Your adoption will help support our snow leopard research and conservation efforts.

Order online or call 206-632-2421.
Price: \$500

*Every camera is unique, adoption is for one field season, cameras assigned at random, all cameras are fun but some do not have snow leopard photographs.



Khashaa is Supermom! She's the second female to join our collaring study.

SLT/PANTHERA

one day a camera captured an image of Superman with three cubs, so we started calling her "Supermom" instead! (After all, three cubs is an unusually large litter for a snow leopard.) The fully grown cubs were last seen with their mother in November 2009, and we think they've likely been able to strike out and establish territories of their own.

Being able to follow Khashaa with a GPS collar adds a whole new dimension to our study. We're thrilled to be getting data on the movements of a second female cat, which we hope will enable us to understand how female home range sizes and movement patterns might differ from those of males. In addition, we know that Khashaa has already successfully raised one litter of cubs, so we have our fingers crossed that she might get pregnant and give birth again while we are following her. Get ready for celebrity baby bump watch, snow leopard edition!