

# *Cats of the world*

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other, but when pitted against greyhounds they easily caught them up and leaped gracefully over them.

#### THE SNOW LEOPARD (Plates 18, 19)

Also called the ounce, this is one of the big five roaring cats, the others being lion, tiger, leopard and jaguar. This classification is based on its anatomy, for there seems to be no record of anyone hearing it roar. Because of its short muzzle and other slight peculiarities of its skull it is sometimes placed in a special genus of its own. Externally, it is a most beautiful animal, a soft grey above, shading to white on the belly. The solid spots of the head and lower limbs become rosettes on the body and tail, and there is a black streak along the back. The tail is long, with heavy fur, and a thick body pelage is acquired in winter. The ears are black-edged with a white spot behind. The combined length of head and body is from three feet three inches to three feet eight inches, and the tail is from two feet nine inches to three feet; the shoulder height is about two feet.

Essentially adapted for mountain life, the stronghold of the ounce is in the great massifs of central Asia: the Altai, Hindu Kush and Himalaya; in the Himalaya it ranges from six thousand feet to eighteen thousand feet according to the season, and, though it is said not to be particularly shy, it is seldom seen by European observers; one recorded twelve sightings in over twenty years. Stanley Jeeves, who was one of my cameramen on the expedition to look for the Yeti, saw one in the distance, 'a blue-grey shadow against the stony hillside'; this was at fourteen thousand feet in the Chola Khola valley, close under Everest. It also occurs or has occurred northwards into China. Supposed records from Asia Minor by British sportsmen

refer to the pale leopards found in the hill areas there.

The ounce's haunts are from the birch, pine and scrub zone in winter, over the grassland to the snow line. It is nocturnal and feeds on the wild sheep 'burhel' (*Pseudois nayaur*), ibex, musk deer, marmots and other rodents. It may also attack sheep, goats and dogs; one stayed near a flock of sheep all night, though pelted with stones. It has not been known to attack man. Most specimens have been shot or trapped in winter at lower altitudes. I can find no information about its breeding in the wild; in zoos two young have been born in a litter.

#### THE CLOUDED LEOPARD (Plate 20)

The clouded leopard is the largest Asian member of the purring cats, those with continuous hyoid bones. Large males may be three-and-a-half feet from head to tail-base, with a three-foot tail; females are smaller - total length five feet to five-and-a-half feet. Males from the Darjeeling area weighed thirty-nine pounds to forty-nine pounds and stood about twenty-one inches at the shoulder. A female from Sarawak weighed thirty-seven pounds.

The coat is variable in colour, as with most cats, from grey or dark brown to a yellowish tint, becoming almost white on the belly. The head and face are strongly marked with darker streaks and spots, and it has been suggested that the pattern of the forehead may have a mesmeric effect. Two broad bands, with narrower bands between, run down the back, while the clouded appearance of the flanks is due to large blotches partly etched in dark brown and surrounded by pale spaces. There are spots and blotches on legs and belly, and dark rings round the bushy tail. The backs of



*opposite (Plate 18):*  
Snow leopard snarling

*above:* Snow leopard in close-up  
*below:* Snow leopard,  
showing the thick fur



