

THE BREEDING OF SNOW LEOPARDS (*Uncia uncia*) in the Krefeld Zoo

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On the 12th of July, 1962 the Krefeld Zoo came into the possession of a female snow leopard through a Dutch animal dealer. Since snow leopards are caught with iron traps, they frequently sustain wounds on the forepaws and injuries to the canine teeth. Likewise with our specimen "Nuschka", who also was a wild animal caught in iron, these injuries could be determined.

Our new arrival was housed in a large 50 square meter shady, out-door enclosure with a suitable night stall 4 meters square. However, Nuschka hardly used the stall but mostly used to lie rolled up and hidden behind a thick bush.

The animal quickly became used to us and soon the keeper could unconcernedly walk in the out-door enclosure. Of course he had to be careful that Nuschka lay behind her bush. From there she showed not the least desire to attack; if she sat on a tree branch, however, it was impossible to enter the enclosure.

Snow leopards are to be found in the high mountainous region of central Asia. Except for the winter months, in which they descend with the game animals to the edge of the coniferous forest at about 1800 meters elevation, these animals live in the rugged regions of the high mountains.

They catch their prey, as do the jaguars and leopards, from above, and it may be that they feel insecure on the ground. Apparently the difference of location as to the restraint of our leopardess as regards the animal keeper is perhaps traceable to that fact.

In December the large appetite of our snow leopard began to diminish and in January and February she took hardly any food. Now she came often to

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the bars of the cage and enjoyed rubbing, scratching and purring. In the night she yoweled in long held tones. At this time the keeper could no longer enter the enclosure and it was apparent that Nuschka was in heat. This condition repeated itself each year at this time. Unfortunately, all our efforts concerning a male snow leopard were of no avail. The snow leopards are under strict protection and each year only a few animals from the Soviet Union are permitted to be caught. Therefore, and because of the difficulty in catching them at all, (snow leopards live singly and in very inaccessible areas) it is extremely difficult to get such an animal. Since the Arnheim Zoo possessed a splendid pair of snow leopards, we established contact in order to breed, and, with the friendly support of Mr. Van Hoff, our female leopard was brought to Arnheim on February 24th, 1966. On the next day both the animals, who had already seen one another through the bars of the out-door enclosure, were to be placed together. In pouring rain they lay curled up, each in its cage, and showed no interest in each other. In the afternoon the bolt between the cages was opened for the first time, to be sure, not without a hose held at the ready. After a short time the male leopard approached the female, which remained lying down and forced him back with hisses. After the male snow leopard had marked the enclosure, he came five minutes later, excitedly censured, nearer this time and established himself at a distance of five meters away from the female. Nuschka pretended to sleep, but did not let the leopard out of her sight. The latter, after he had marked in the adjoining cage, went in a large arc around the leopardess, drank out of her trough, showed his disinterest however, while she hissed. Now the male leopard looked for some 10 minutes for her box, then returned to the nearby enclosure and lay down. For a good hour the sliding doors were again closed. When they were again opened, the leopard went immediately to Nuschka, who hissed and attacked him. Thereupon, he rolled over on his back

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while she rubbed her head on the stones and trees, and finally lay in the sand and also rolled back and forth. The male animal now attempted several times to approach the female; the attempts were repulsed but noticeably more weakly and finally both animals lay rolling opposite each other. After each period of activity of five to ten minutes came a rest period of some 20 minutes. As soon as the male animal discontinued his activity, the female approached him almost to the point of touching. The only audible sound were a hiss, a short meow and a quiet purring from the male. At the approach of darkness the observations were broken off. On the 11th of March our female leopard returned to Krefeld after it had been mated from time to time about 9:00 o'clock on the morning of the 26th and 27th of February, according to the statement of the curator.

Six weeks before the assumed birth date, the 10th of June, the outer cage of our leopardess was provided with large sheets of wood so that every disturbance could be kept away from the animal. In the cage itself a roomy whelping box, 200 X 180 X 80 cm. with an opening 50 X 30 cm. was set up shortly after the return from Arnheim.

On the same day Nuschka accepted this box in which from now on she spent almost the entire day. On the 11th of June the leopardess appeared nervous and the enclosure could no longer be entered. Since it was very hot and sultry during these summer days - the temperature rose to 30 degrees C. - in the shade - we set up a lawn sprinkler for cooling in the vicinity of the enclosure. On the 12th of June Nuschka rejected all food and on the 13th she no longer came out of her box. After a gestation period of 106 to 107 days she appeared to have given birth and did not leave the box in the following days, and also took neither food nor water. Only on the 16th of June did the leopardess begin again to take nourishment and we could ascertain

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two kittens in the box. During the next 14 days Nuschka remained almost always in the whelping box; only occasionally could a faint sound be heard. On the 28th of June the leopardess nursed the kittens at the entrance of her box for the first time; however, she concealed the kittens so cleverly with her tail that they were hardly discernible. On the 3rd of August one of the young left the whelping box for the first time and from now on, one could frequently observe the young outside in their awkward play. If someone should approach the enclosure, Nuschka would be at the bars in one leap, while the young in the same instant disappeared into the box. Soon the leopardess lay preferably on the roof of the box and returned only for nursing and at night to the young. The gradual removal of the sheets of wood around the enclosure began on the 10th of August and six days later the young lay together with the mother animal on the roof of their dwelling. On the 6th of September it could be observed how Nuschka enticed the young with a piece of meat out of the box to the roof and then let them have the tidbit. The animals became more unconstrained in their play whenever humans came near so that they became a real attraction to our visitors.

The coloring of the young animals is darker than that of the adults. The weight on the 20th of September, 1966 amounted to 5,700 grams and 6,000 grams, on the 15th of November, 1966, ~~XXX~~ 12,000 grams; consequently an average daily weight increase of 100 grams could be determined.

Since there are two male young, one will soon leave the Krefeld Zoo, while Boris, the second one, will be used for further breeding.