

IUCN

SNOW LEOPARD

Panthera uncia (Schreber, 1776)

Order CARNIVORA

Family FELIDAE

STATUS Endangered. Occurs in high altitude ranges in Himalayas, Pamirs, Hindu Kush, Tian Shan and Altai mountains. Has been very seriously depleted by over-hunting for furs and because of stock thefts, although depletion of prey species has been a factor in the decline. Protected over parts of its range and occurs in a number of reserves, but further reservation and adequate protection of these areas is required to ensure its survival.

DISTRIBUTION There is some dispute over the former range of this animal. It may have occurred from Northern Iran and Turkmenistan eastwards and northwards into China, Mongolia and USSR. The southern edge of its range was in northern India. (5; 7; 8) Present: USSR: Limited to the mountains of Central Asia and southern Siberia. Encountered in most mountain ranges of Tadzhikistan (except in the south-west), particularly on Gissar, Zeravshan and Darvaz mountains, and the Pamirs (chiefly in the west); also in the mountain systems of Tian Shan, Chatkal, Talass Alatau, Kirgizia, Trans-Ili and Dzungarian Alatau, Tarbagatai, Saur etc.; less frequent in parts of the Altai and in the Tuva Autonomous Region. (10) China: Occurs at several points around the mountainous periphery of Sinkiang, notably on the northern central Tien Shan, the Pamirs and Astin Tagh. The range extends across the Tibetan Plateau to the north-eastern part of Tsinghai Province to the Kilien Shan on the Tsinghai/Kansu border, and into extreme western Szechwan. (12) India: The entire Himalayan chain from Kashmir to the north-eastern part of N.E.F.A. (3; 11) Pakistan: From Chitral through Gilgit, Baltistan and the northern region of Azad Kashmir. (T.J. Roberts 1971, pers. comm.) Afghanistan: The Hindu Kush.

POPULATION A number of population estimates have been made for the Snow leopard in various regions but, in the absence of more precise data, these estimates are little more than informed guesses. Probably the only reliable figure is approximately 100 animals for Pakistan (1) which is disproportionately high for the Himalayas as a whole, because of an originally denser population and greater density of prey species. Current status of populations is as follows: USSR: Rarer than many other large cats and numbers are rapidly decreasing. Numbers of skins procured in recent years: 1961: 27; 1962: 54; 1963: 38; 1964: 18. At the international fur auction in Leningrad, in July 1967; only 10 pelts were on offer. (9; Gustav Kirk 1967, pers. comm.) China: No accurate data available but numbers of skins available and captures of living specimens suggest that population cannot be large. (12) Mongolia: Very rare. Despite vigorous persecution of predators, the total annual kill is only about 40 to 50. (4) Bhutan: One person reports having seen 50-60 shot during the past six years; the number of skins coming into Calcutta for curing from Bhutan is considerably higher. (A. Wright 1971, pers. comm.) India: Reliable data are lacking, but appears to be uncommon to rare throughout the Himalayan sector of its range. (2) Pakistan: Status probably much better than in other parts of Himalayas (see above) but under very severe hunting pressure. Grimwood has reported that one furrier in Peshawar admitted that his annual turnover of skins might be as high as 50. (1) Afghanistan: Unknown, but as the range is very small, numbers are probably low. The main cause of decline is uncontrolled hunting for skins (which fetch very high prices), because of stock thefts, and because the mere existence of a large cat constitutes a challenge to the hunting instincts of many hill people. (1; 4; 9)

HABITAT Occurs between the tree line and the permanent snow but descends into upper valley bottoms in winter months. Occurs in woodlands but appears incapable of permanent occupation of a true forest habitat. (1)

Habitat destruction is unlikely to have been a serious factor in the decline of this high altitude species, although depletion of prey species has undoubtedly constituted a problem in some areas.

CONSERVATION MEASURES TAKEN In 1952 the Indian Board for Wildlife placed this animal on the protected list. Export of furs from Pakistan is prohibited. Legally protected throughout its range in the USSR, but animals are still killed supposedly in defence of stock. The species is represented in the Aksu-Dzhabagli Reserve (75,000 ha) in Kazakh SSR, in Zaaminski Gorno-Lesnoc Reserve (10,500 ha) in Uzbek SSR, and in the Dachigam Sanctuary (170 km²) in Kashmir. Importation into the United Kingdom and United States is prohibited, except for scientific, educational or propagation purposes, under the terms of the UK Animals (Restriction of Importation) Act, 1964 and the US Endangered Species Act, 1969. Furs may not be imported into either country. In 1971, the International Fur Trade Federation agreed to a voluntary ban among its membership on the use of snow leopard furs.

CONSERVATION MEASURES PROPOSED More accurate data are required on the status of populations; the creation of some strategically sited, inviolate reserves at the present time could probably still ensure the future of the species.

REMARKS In 1971, 43 males and 55 females were held in 44 collections. (6)

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Mr. Michael D. Hutchins
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23 October 1975

Dear Mr. Hutchins,

Thank you for your letter of 13 October concerning the snow leopard which has been passed to me for attention.

I am enclosing for your information and use a copy of the data sheet on the snow leopard, which is taken from IUCN's Red Data Book volume 1 on mammals. This sheet provides the most recent data we have available on the status of the snow leopard.

Yours sincerely,

Colin W. Holloway
Ecologist, Research and
Planning Group

Enclosure

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