

Simple method to distinguish tracks of snow leopard and lynx

A. Jegal, E. Kashkarov, E. Matyushkin

In the Mongolian and Gobi Altai mountain ranges and also in some other mountains in this region, the distribution of the snow leopard and Eurasian lynx overlaps. In some cases, local hunters cannot distinguish the tracks of both these animals. Therefore we outline a simple method to distinguish tracks of the snow leopard and lynx.

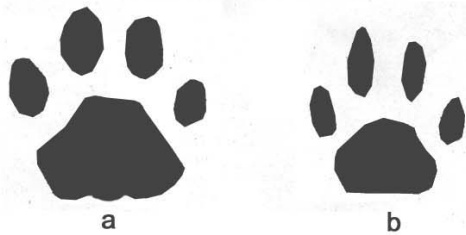
The size of their tracks can be difficult to distinguish from each other because unexpectedly large lynx tracks may be encountered that are no less in width and length than tracks of the snow leopard. This lynx is known in local areas as "horse lynx" and small tracks of the lynx are named "sheep lynx". Zoologists put forward the hypothesis that small "sheep lynx" tracks belong to cubs, and "horse lynx" may be a mature male lynx. Unfortunately there is no research on this issue at present.

Therefore, tracks of snow leopard and lynx are distinguished not by size but by their shape. Firstly, in snow less than 18 cm deep, or in soft soil without snow, snow leopard tracks show an imprint as in Picture 2a (below) and lynx as in Picture 2b. But in snow thicker than 18 cm, snow leopard tracks are overlaid on the previous one. Moreover, the next snow leopard goes by the tracks of the previous snow leopard, following exactly step by step. This is related to the advantage gained in expending less energy when wading through deep snow. Therefore it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of snow leopards in thick snow.

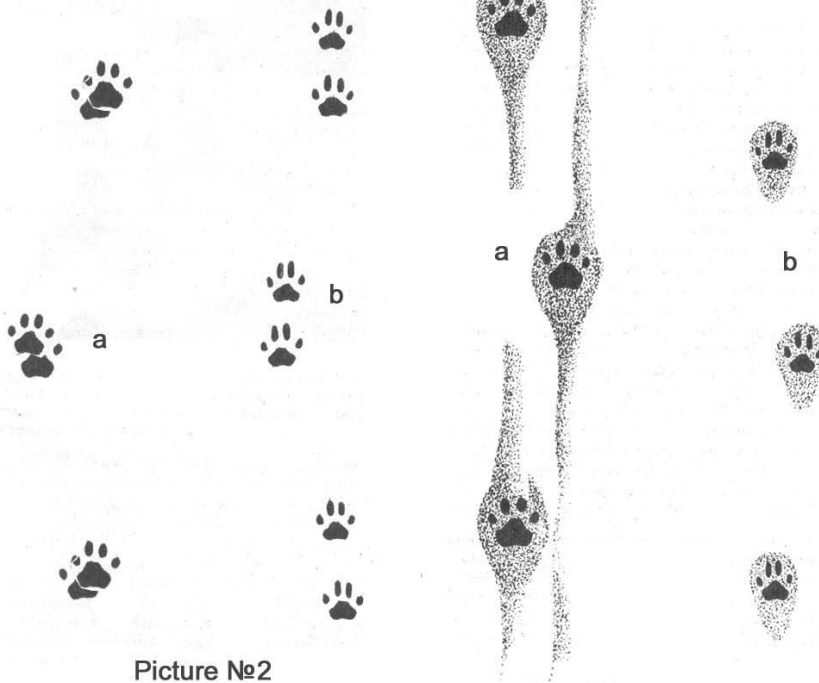
Secondly, snow-leopard tracks in snow do not show their claws, but lynx tracks do show the claws. We can therefore conclude that the lynx lives in warmer places than snow leopards.

Thirdly, the easiest way to distinguish tracks of the snow leopard and lynx is that the toes of the snow leopard are stumpy and thick (Picture 1a) but lynx toes are thin and long (Picture 1b). Therefore snow leopard tracks look almost round but lynx tracks look longer and have a sloping 'shoulder'.

Fourth, snow leopard tracks in snow show lines between their tracks (Picture 3a), but lynx has no line (Picture 3b)



Picture №1



Picture №2

Picture №3

Translation by David Mallon:

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