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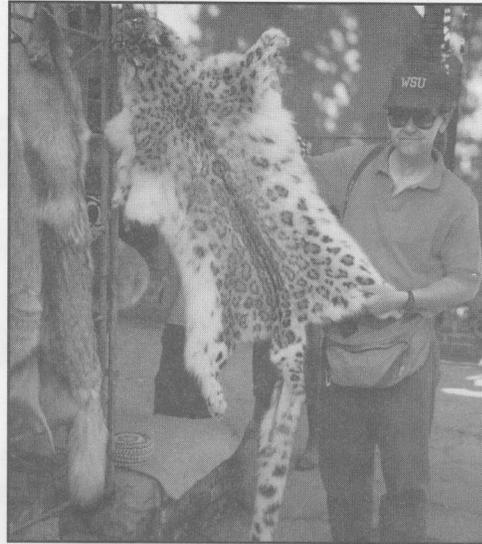
TRADE CONTINUES IN SNOW LEOPARD SKINS

Recent communications from observers passing through parts of central Asia indicate that trade in snow leopard pelts is still going on.

Joseph Crapanzano and Laura Mujica report that while en route to northern China from Pakistan they stayed in Kashgar, China, a far-western outpost at the base of the Tien Shan mountains and once a stop on the legendary Silk Road. They said snow leopard pelts were sold openly in the central market.

Crapanzano said the Uyghur, Turkic people who inhabit the area, see the snow leopard as a pest and a threat to livestock.

Mark L. Ufkes of Seattle is an economic and political advisor in central Asia. He traveled through Tajikistan and Kazakhstan in the former Soviet Union, where he was offered snow leopard skins along with the heads of other endangered species. He also stayed in Kashgar, where he saw more than 30 snow leopard skins, including those of several cubs, in the market.



A snow leopard pelt in the Kashgar market.

Photo by Mark L. Ufkes

Peter Jackson, Chair of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group, informs ISLT that his assistant saw up to 10 snow leopard furs for sale in one shop in the Kashgar market area — not visible from outside the shop, but on display inside.

THE NORTHERN LIMIT OF SNOW LEOPARD RANGE

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By Eugene P. Koshkarev, Institute of Biology, Irkutsk University

Until last year it was not known if a permanent population of snow leopards inhabited the Sayan and Hovsogol areas of Siberia.

In 1995 I conducted field work in this area, with support from the ISLT, Kathleen Braden, Fritz Maier and Merdad Nazari, and observed both adult and juvenile snow leopard tracks in the region. Visual sightings and capture by hunters are evidence of not only a transitory population, but also of a sustainable permanent group.

I followed the transects of two snow leopards and found that both animals' tracks showed that they are well acquainted with the region.

Repeated encounters with snow leopards and their tracks in recent years along the Tunkinskiy Mountains indicate that this may be the most northeasterly known extent of range for permanent groups of snow leopards.

I unexpectedly found evidence of a permanent group of snow leopards in the Kropotkinskiy and Okinskiy Mountains. The landscape is atypical of snow leopard habitat: a high, narrow tree line, smooth relief, an alpine belt, lava outflows from ancient volcanoes, and deep snow everywhere. Despite this, snow leopards are indeed found in the region.

The existence of a well-established core population of snow leopards in west and south Hovsogol remains to be confirmed, although tracks have been found in the northern area.

I conclude that Munku-Sardyk Massif, in the northeast corner of snow leopard range, is the last and best corridor that allows the animal to move between Mongolia and Russia and requires a high degree of protection.

Regular evidence of females with young in regions where they have not been noted indicates that snow leopards should be considered permanent groups and may be pushing out from existing cores.