

Position Statement of the Snow Leopard Network Regarding the collection of wild snow leopards from the wild

September 7, 2023

It is a regrettable reality that snow leopards (*Panthera uncia*) are sometimes removed from the wild across their range for what are stated as research and conservation purposes. The exact extent of these occurrences remains uncertain, but it is likely that such situations will continue to arise. In light of these ongoing concerns, the Snow Leopard Network recognizes the need for a position statement. This statement emphasizes that snow leopards should not be brought into captivity for research or conservation purposes, unless there are exceptional circumstances where an animal is diseased or otherwise unfit to be left in the wild.

Snow leopards are threatened with extinction, listed as Vulnerable under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and protected by national and international laws. International trade or movement of live or dead animals and their body parts is strictly controlled by CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). Various research methods, such as GPS telemetry, camera trapping, fecal DNA analysis, fecal microhistological analysis, and anecdotal behavioral observations, have played a pivotal role in advancing our understanding of the species. Additionally, studies of captive individuals have provided valuable insights into answering basic questions about the snow leopards physiology, anatomy and behavior. Recent breakthroughs in developing the snow leopard genome is based on genetic samples from captive and wild individuals.

There is a broad consensus amongst scientists and conservationists worldwide that wild snow leopards should not be brought into captivity for research, conservation purposes or conflict management, unless there are exceptional circumstances where an animal is diseased or otherwise unfit to be left in the wild. In a conflict situation, it is recommended that every effort is made to rehabilitate and release the snow leopard back into its natural habitat, while also actively supporting local communities to reduce the potential for future conflicts. Captivity should only be considered as a last resort when all other viable solutions have been exhausted. A large captive population of snow leopards already exists in the world's zoos, overseen by government authorities or regional and global alliances, including the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). For example, WAZA oversees stud-books for endangered and rare species in captivity and mandates close monitoring of these captive populations. In accordance with the WAZA guidelines, there is a consensus that fresh collections from the wild are not needed, as the genetic and demographic diversity of the captive population is considered robust, numbering about 450 individuals. This is deemed sufficient to withstand any potential mass mortality leading to extinction of the species in the wild. The captive population is maintained in zoos worldwide, rescue centers and rehabilitation facilities, including countries within the snow leopard range.

Snow leopards deserve to live freely in Asia's majestic mountains. Except in rare and exceptional cases, capturing and condemning wild snow leopards to life in captivity is unethical, and serves no scientific or conservation purpose.

The Snow Leopard Network (SLN) is a worldwide organization dedicated to facilitating the exchange of information and insights between individuals around the world for the purpose of snow leopard conservation.

The Mission of the SLN is to promote sound scientifically-based conservation of the threatened snow leopard through networking and collaboration between individuals, organizations, and governments.

The position statement was prepared by the Snow Leopard Network Steering Committee, consisting of the following members:

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