

Snow Leopard

Uncia uncia

Mammal

Scientific Name:

Uncia uncia

Other Names:

Ounce

Range:

Central Asia, including Russia, Mongolia, China, Nepal, Bhutan, India, and Pakistan

Habitat:

Alpine meadows, high rocky mountains, mountainous steppe scrub and high alpine forests

Average Size:

Length:

Body: 35 - 60 in.

Tail: 31 - 39 in.

Weight: 60 - 120 lbs.

Description:

Male: Large cat with a small head, pale eyes, short ears, large paws and an extremely long, thick, tail. Long, dense, smoke-grey fur with large, dark rosettes and spots.

Female: Smaller than male

Lifespan

In the wild: Unknown

In captivity: 18 years

Diet:

In the wild: Ibex, blue sheep, musk deer, pika, marmots, hares and birds

In the zoo: Prepared feline diet and bones

Gestation:

90 - 103 days

Litter Size:

1- 4 cubs

Sexual Maturity:

Estimated at 2 years

Predators:

Humans

Population Status:

Endangered

**Conservation**

The snow leopard is listed as endangered. Although they are protected in most of their range and trade in their products is illegal, poaching still occurs. Their beautiful fur and bones used in traditional medicines are in high demand on the black market. Regional priorities and lack of conservation officials often hinder enforcement of laws to protect these cats.

Because this species lives in such rugged, mountainous regions, obtaining exact population numbers is difficult. There could be as many as 5,000 individuals, but they are isolated from one another. Human encroachment and loss of habitat have caused many populations to become fragmented. Loss of suitable prey, due to hunting by local people, is also a major threat to this species. Lack of wild prey drives the leopards to hunt domestic livestock.

The Sacramento Zoo participates in the International Snow Leopard Trust by donating funds for educational materials and conservation programs in the regions where snow leopards live. The zoo also works with the Species Survival Plan® for the snow leopard by actively breeding our cats and increasing awareness of the problems facing this big cat.

Behavior

The snow leopard is very elusive and rarely sighted. Depending upon where they live, these solitary cats are either nocturnal or crepuscular, active at dawn and dusk. Because their prey lives on high, rugged terrain, snow leopards are excellent rock climbers. They hunt in the same manner as other large cats, using the stalk and pounce method. Snow leopards are not extremely fast runners and must use stealth to sneak up on their prey. They also follow migrating herds of mountain goat and sheep, moving to a new location each day. When they make a kill, usually every 10 to 15 days, the snow leopard remains with the carcass for a few days before leaving.

Snow leopards have specific territories that range from 10 to 40 square miles. Although the density of snow leopards in any given area is low, home ranges may overlap. Both males and females mark the boundaries of their ranges with ground scrapings, urine, feces, and markings from scent glands. This allows neighboring cats to share common resources with a minimum of competition, which can be fatal, especially among males. Well-spaced

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leopards also have a better chance at successfully stalking prey.

Reproduction and Breeding

Because the snow leopard lives in a very harsh environment, cubs are born in the spring, between April and August. Mating occurs in the winter months. They make their den in a cave in the rocks or in a tree hollow. The cubs are born blind and helpless and remain in the den for three months. At two months they are weaning and able to eat solid foods, but do not begin to accompany their mother on hunting trips until they are at least three months of age. The cubs remain with their mother for around two years, learning hunting and survival techniques before leaving to set up their own territories.

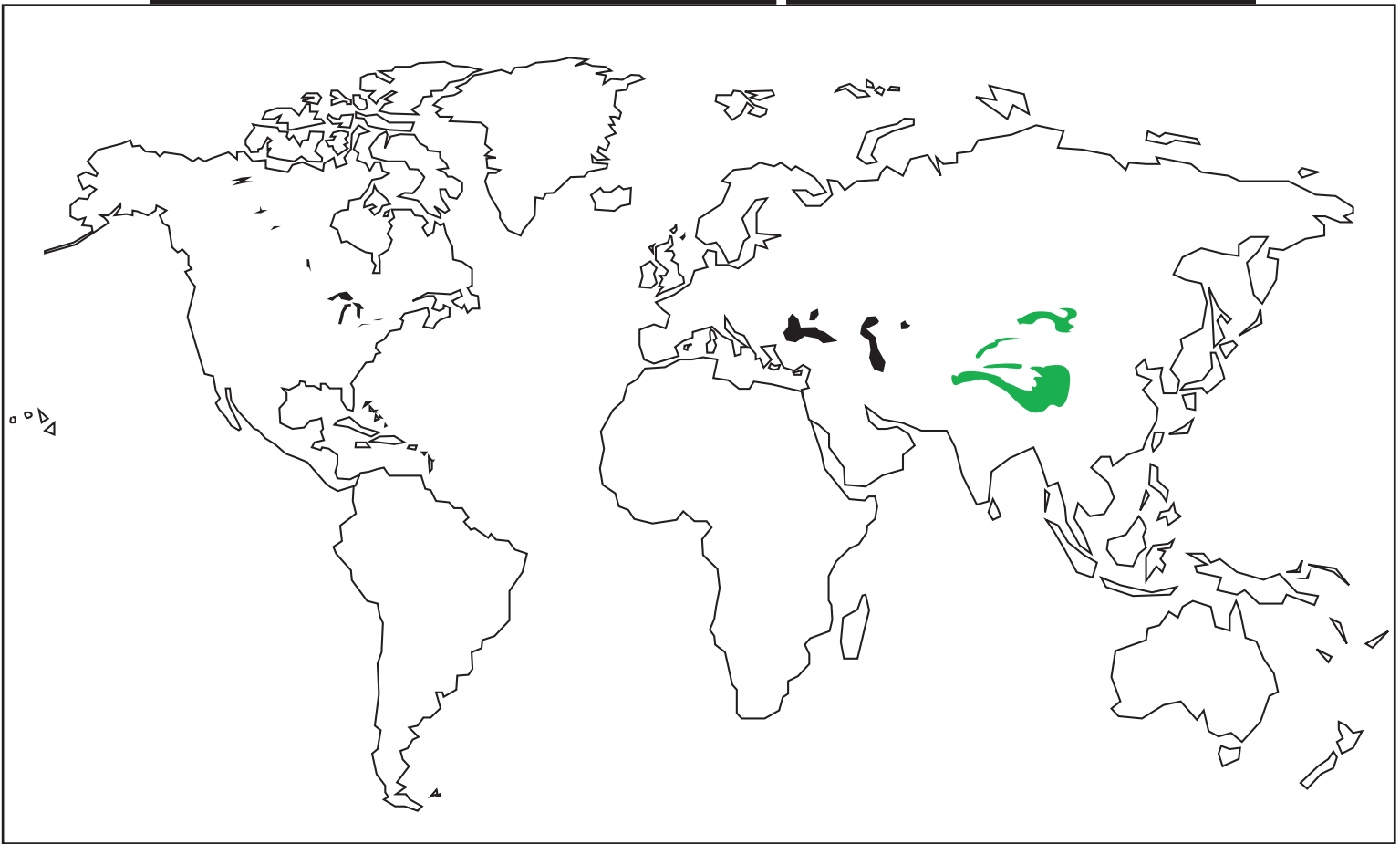
Amazing Facts

Snow leopards were discovered by westerners in 1791!

A cushion of hair on the bottom of their feet increases the surface area, acting like snow shoes. This also protects their feet from the cold!

Snow leopards do not patrol their range boundaries, but return to certain areas at regular intervals!

Snow Leopard



International Snow Leopard Trust

You can help save the Snow leopards. Just go to www.snowleopard.org

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