



Conservation: WWF Nepal's conservation programs for snow leopards range from policy-level efforts to grassroots-level activities. WWF Nepal has supported the Government of Nepal in developing the Snow Leopard Conservation Action Plan which is now endorsed.

WWF Nepal has helped establish local groups called Snow Leopard Conservation Committees in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape and Dolpa who have been instrumental in conducting community-based snow leopard monitoring, and implementing a community-managed livestock insurance scheme to help reduce human-snow leopard conflict.

Cutting-edge monitoring technologies using non-invasive methods such as fecal DNA and camera traps have also been introduced to help provide scientific estimates of snow leopard populations in the wild.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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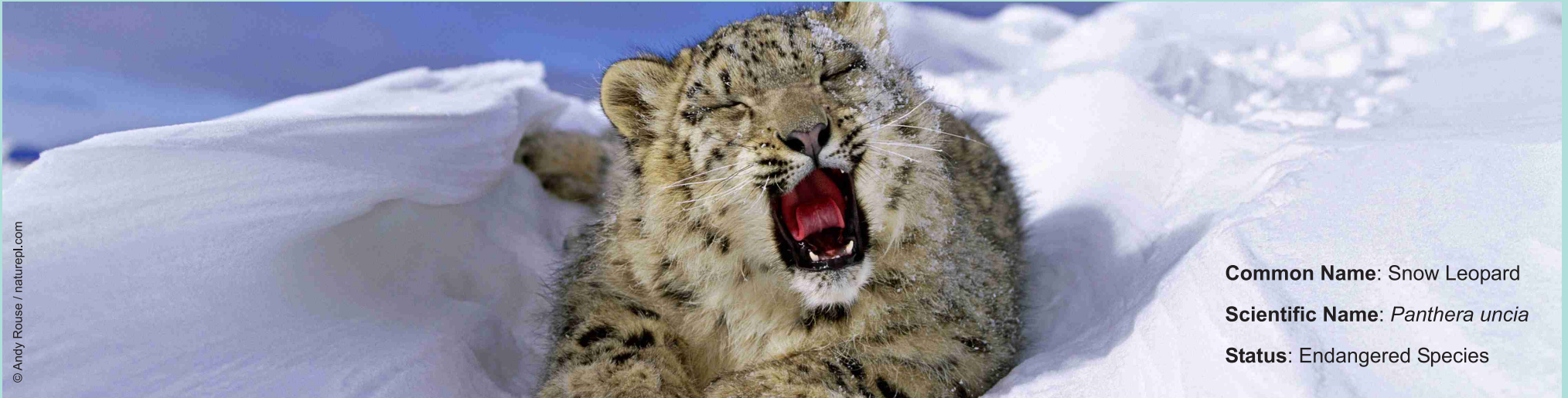
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FACTSHEET

Snow Leopards



Common Name: Snow Leopard

Scientific Name: *Panthera uncia*

Status: Endangered Species

Description: The snow leopard is classified as the sole member of the genus *Panthera Uncia*. Having known for its beautiful thick fur that has a white yellowish or soft gray coat with black and brown ringed spots, snow leopards are perfectly adapted to the cold and dry habitats in which they live. The unique marking on its fur help them camouflage it from prey and their enemies. Snow leopards have light green or gray eyes, unusual for big cats, which usually have yellow or gold eyes. They have very large and fur-covered paws that acts as snowshoes to protect them from the cold. The snow leopard has an average body length of 6–7.5 feet including its 1 meter long tail length. Snow leopards weigh between 35 and 55kg. Female snow leopards are 30% smaller than males.

Habitat: Snow leopards prefer to inhabit steep cliff areas, rocky outcrops and ravines. Such habitats provide them with the camouflage they need to ambush unsuspecting prey. They are found at the altitudes between 3000-5400m in the high rugged mountains of central Asia. Their range spans from Afghanistan to Kazakhstan and Russia in the north to India and China in the east. In Nepal's Himalaya snow leopard is inhabited widely from eastern Kangchenjunga to western Darchula, but, patchily distributed at about 13000 sq km.

Diet: Snow leopards primarily hunt for wild goat such as Naur (Blue sheep), Jharal (Himalayan tahr) and Argali goats. Other prey include Musk Deer, marmots, and various species of hare and birds. In Nepal, about 30% of snow leopard diet is dependent upon domestic livestock.

Reproductive Cycle: Due to the often harsh weather conditions that prevail, cubs are always born in the spring, with mating taking place some three months earlier in late winter i.e. between January and mid-March. They have a gestation period of 3-3.5 months (approx.98 days).

The cubs weigh between 320-708gm at birth and have a daily average weight gain of approximately 48gm per day. The young follow their mother on hunts when three months old and remain with her until they are over 18 months old and until their first winter is over. The size of their brood is 2-3 cubs.

Life span: Snow leopards have a very reclusive nature which makes it hard to determine their lifespan in the wild. They however have been known to live up to 15 years in captivity; in the wild it is about 10-12 years.

Population: Because of the inaccessibility of their habitat the exact numbers left in the wild is unknown, but some estimates place the figure as low as 4,500 to 5,000. In Nepal it is estimated that there are around 301 to 400 snow leopards in the wild.

Threats: Snow leopards face and have faced several very severe threats, especially retaliatory killing by herders, being excluded from their habitat, and poaching for their beautiful pelt. Now, however, there is another threat looming over snow leopards; the ubiquitous, but inevitable impacts of global climate change that have begun to pervade even the remote areas of the Himalayan mountains. Warming at high elevations in the Himalayas is occurring at 3 times the global average, and is causing the treeline to ascend, intruding into the alpine region. Along with habitat loss, this habitat change could also sever latitudinal connectivity, resulting in isolation of contiguous populations, and ultimately impacting the viability of snow leopards. It is listed as an Endangered species in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Fun facts: Snow leopards are mostly active at dawn and dusk. Unlike other big cats, snow leopards are unable to roar due to the under-development of the fibro-elastic tissue that forms part of the vocal apparatus. Solitary in nature, they pair only during the breeding season.