

Snow Leopard

Panthera uncia



ANIMAL FACTS



Photo courtesy of Joel Vanderbush

Physical Characteristics

- To insulate from the cold, they have approximately 26,000 hairs per square inch covering their body, the densest fur of all cats. They even have fur between their toes.
- The long, thickly furred tail acts as a scarf to cover their face and body. Their tail makes up over half of their body length and helps them balance while jumping or walking on the rocky terrain.
- The entire body is covered with gray/white fur with a pattern of gray/black rosettes. Rosettes are larger rings encircling smaller spots which visually break up the body outline, which helps these cats camouflage into the mountainous background of their habitat.

Size

- Length: Body: 36 to 51 inches (91 to 130 cm). Tail: 31-39 inches (79-99 cm). Total: 67-90 inches or 5.5 – 7.5 feet long
- Weight: 55 to 165 lbs. (25 to 75 kg)

Lifespan

- Wild: 8-15 years
- Zoos: Average of 18 years (21 is the maximum recorded)

Behaviors

- Activity Cycle: Crepuscular, meaning that they are most active during dawn and dusk.
- Snow leopards are solitary but pair during mating season as well as share each other's home ranges.
- They actively avoid one another by marking travel lanes with scrapes, feces and pungent scent sprays, which disclose details about the sex and reproductive status of individuals.

Diet

- Wild: Blue sheep and ibex are typical but also eats smaller prey (marmots, hares, birds).
- Zoo: All big cats are fed what is called "feline diet," standard for zoos. These formulas include different proportions of beef and horse meat, and each cat's diet is weighed out and formulated specific to that cat's dietary needs. They may also get rabbit or venison on occasion.

Reproduction

- When females are in estrous, they make a continuous yowling sound to attract males.
- Gestation period is roughly 90 to 105 days, and the cubs are born between April and June.
- The litter generally consists of 2-3 cubs.
- For roughly the first year of life, snow leopards are dependent upon their mother.
- Female snow leopards reach sexual maturity at about 2 to 3 years of age while males may take up to 4 years.

Habitat and Range

- Habitat: Steep, mountainous, rocky alpine terrain
- Range: Approximately 2.3 million square kilometers throughout the high mountain ranges of the Himalayas in Central Asia. They are found in 12 countries, including Russia, Mongolia, Bhutan, Nepal, India, and Pakistan, however 60% of the range occurs in China.

Conservation

- Status: Vulnerable to extinction
- Global population is estimated between 2,500 - 10,000 mature individuals



- While poaching appears to have declined since the late 1990s, it is estimated that 221-450 Snow Leopards were poached annually since 2008
- Significant conservation measures through organization such as Snow Leopard Trust have been undertaken to reduce the threat to Snow Leopards:
 - establishment of new protected areas in Snow Leopard range;
 - more effective anti-poaching measures;
 - training conservation professionals in the home countries for the Snow Leopard
 - a number of independent initiatives to reduce conflict with herders (e.g., strengthening livestock corrals, vaccination, handicrafts and alternative livelihoods, grazing set-asides);
 - community engagement programs
 - education programs to raise awareness of the Snow Leopard and its habitat
 - support from international conservation organizations and zoos
- Although the Snow Leopard undoubtedly is still threatened, the measures listed above are collectively considered to have contributed to improving the overall conservation situation for Snow Leopards since 2008. While populations are still in decline, they are not as steep, showing a marked improvement overall.

Classification

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| • <u>Kingdom</u> : Animalia | • <u>Order</u> : Carnivora |
| • <u>Phylum</u> : Chordata | • <u>Family</u> : Felidae |
| • <u>Subphylum</u> : Vertebrata | • <u>Genus</u> : <i>Panthera</i> |
| • <u>Class</u> : Mammalia | • <u>Species</u> : <i>P. uncia</i> |

Interesting Facts

- **Leaping Leopards!** Due to their large paws and elongated hind legs, the ability of snow leopards to jump is highly developed. They can jump 20 feet vertically and leap 50 feet horizontally which helpful when hunting on high mountain ridges.
- **Great Heights** - Snow leopards live in the high mountains at elevations ranging from 1,000 to 19,700 feet (3.7 miles). Humans suffer altitude sickness above 8000 feet due to the lower availability of oxygen in the thin air at high elevation.
- **The High Life** – Adaptations for survival at high elevations for snow leopards include ways to access more oxygen in the thinner air utilizing wide nasal passages and large chest cavities. To increase the uptake of oxygen in the blood, they employ smaller, more numerous red blood cells than most cats.