



c.4,080 - 6,590 REMAINING IN THE WILD

# SNOW LEOPARD *Panthera uncia*



## POPULATION

As a reclusive animal living in very remote and harsh landscapes, it is hard to monitor and best estimate global snow leopard populations. They are currently listed as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). However, limited population data across key habitats implies the species are more threatened than officially classified.

## HABITAT & DISTRIBUTION

Snow leopards have sadly been eradicated from many parts of their historic range and their populations have declined by up to 40% over the past three decades. Snow leopards are now found in 12 countries in central Asia spread across two million km<sup>2</sup>. 65% of their habitat found in China alone.

## SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Due to their elusive nature, very little is known about the life of a snow leopard in the wild. However, new technology, including GPS collars and camera traps, are providing researchers with a better understanding of their natural behaviours.

Snow Leopards are generally solitary cats, except when they come together for breeding or whilst a mother is raising cubs. Breeding occurs in the late winter and 1-5 cubs are born after a gestation period of approximately 100 days. The cubs start to learn to hunt from around 3 months old and remain with the mother until they reach independence around 18 months. The average life span of a wild snow leopard is 15 years.

## CHARACTERISTICS

Snow leopards are perfectly adapted to living in cold and barren landscapes and have a few characteristics that aid their survival:

- Round, short ears that **reduce heat loss**.
- Wide short nasal cavities that **heat the chilled air** before it reaches their lungs.
- Extra-large furry paws that act as **snowshoes** to stop them from sinking in the snow and to keep their toes warm.
- Long tails up to **1m long** with dense fur that acts as a scarf to keep them warm when sleeping.
- Spotted coat patterns which makes them seamlessly **camouflaged**.
- Short strong legs and a long tail that helps them to climb, balance and **leap up to 50 feet**.

## PREDATORS & THREATS

Humans are snow leopard's sole predator and therefore sit at the top of the food chain as an apex predator.

Their main threats to survival are human induced, including habitat loss and fragmentation, climate change and retaliation killings by herders following snow leopard attacks on livestock. These threats have created an uncertain future for these beautiful cats.

Despite national and international laws to protect them, snow leopards continue to be affected by human population growth through unsustainable development, an increase in mining and a loss of prey due to humans hunting for meat within their range.

Snow leopards are also poached for their exquisite fur which is used as rugs, luxury décor, and taxidermy. However, snow leopards are more commonly poached for their bones which are used as a substitute to tiger bones and used in traditional Chinese medicine.

## ABOUT DAVID SHEPHERD WILDLIFE FOUNDATION (DSWF)

As we witness staggering rates of global biodiversity loss, environmental and wildlife protection has never been more important in safeguarding the future health of our planet. Our mission is to Fight, Protect, and Engage on behalf of endangered wildlife around the world. Our ground-based conservation partners, operating on the front line in the fight against wildlife crime, are protecting some of the world's last wildlife strongholds and pristine wilderness landscapes.

### OUR WORK WITH SNOW LEOPARDS

DSWF has been a proud supporter of the snow leopard for many years, partnering with ground-based conservation partners in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan.

By funding holistic conservation initiatives, DSWF are working alongside communities, governments, and conservation experts to provide snow leopards with the most robust form of protection to ensure they have a secure future.

We work to protect existing snow leopard habitats by ensuring key areas are protected without threats from human and industrial encroachment. Without the room they need to hunt and survive, populations don't stand a chance of recovering.

Acknowledging that one of the prime threats to snow leopards in Mongolia remains retaliatory killings by herders after cattle is killed, DSWF also supports the construction of corrals to keep livestock safe and has helped to implement a comprehensive insurance scheme to reimburse herders whose livestock is killed by snow leopards.

DSWF also supports rigorous scientific studies to further help inform conservation strategies alongside a community-based income-generating programme designed to support both wildlife and local communities who share a common landscape.

### BY ADOPTING A SNOW LEOPARD, YOU ARE HELPING TO:

- Provide insurance schemes and the development of predator proof corrals to ensure retaliatory killing of snow leopards is averted in Mongolia.
- Enable educational and eco-workshops to encourage the positive co-existence of snow leopards and local communities.
- Provide camera trapping and monitoring programmes to study behaviour patterns, prey density and population growth.
- Enable population data studies to better understand distribution and global population numbers.
- Provide alternative livelihood schemes for rural communities in snow leopard areas to limit their encroachment on the environment.



IMAGE CREDIT: BEHZAD LARRY