



SNOW LEOPARD

CARNIVORA

Family: Felidae

Genus: *Panthera*

Species: *uncia*



Range: Central Asia ~ Afghanistan, Bhutan, Tibet, India, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Habitat: high altitude cliffs above tree line up to 20,000ft, with arid and semi-arid shrubland, grassland or steppe vegetation

Niche: generally crepuscular, terrestrial, carnivorous

Wild diet: Bharal (Blue Sheep), ibex, Marco Polo sheep, musk ox, marmot, ptarmigan

Zoo diet: fortified horsemeat

Life Span: (Wild) 10 - 13 years (Captivity) 21 years

Sexual dimorphism: males are about 30% larger than F

Location in SF Zoo: East side of Lion House

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Coat has soft gray shading to white on belly; belly fur is up to 5" in length. Head and lower limbs are marked with solid black or dark brown spots. There is a black streak along the back and the tail is round and heavily furred and is nearly equal to body length. The ear pinnae have black edging. The winter coat is overall lighter in coloration and thicker than the summer coat. Paws are well developed hairy cushions and not only ideal for padding over snow and distributing the animal's weight but also protecting the paws from hot rocks during summer heat.

Adaptations for high-altitude life include long hair with dense, woolly under-fur, an enlarged nasal and chest cavities with strong lungs, allowing them to get enough oxygen in the high altitudes. Relatively longer hind limbs and short forelimbs snow leopards agility in the steep and rugged environment. They have well-developed chest muscles for climbing and they are able to leap up to 30 - 50 ft. The long tail is thought to aid in balance, and they often wrap their tails around themselves when resting for added warmth. Their high red blood cell count allows more oxygen to be delivered to the muscles with each breath. The enlarged nasal cavity helps them warm the cold air they breathe and helps retain water.

Weight: M - 100 - 155 lbs F - 60 - 120 lbs
Length: 2.5 - 4.5 ft TL - 2-4 ft SH: 1.5 - 2 ft

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Classified as endangered on IUCN Red List and Appendix 1 of CITES. Snow leopards are endangered for three main reasons. First of all, they are hunted for the illegal wildlife trade for their beautiful fur and for the demand of their bones in traditional Asian medicines. Secondly, depletion of its natural prey by hunting or overgrazing forces them to increase their feeding on domestic animals. Obviously, the herders do not want the leopards preying upon their livestock and will often kill snow leopards even if there is no proof that the leopard killed the livestock. Thirdly, there is habitat loss and defragmentation as the land is being converted for agricultural uses. Estimates of the wild population are difficult to compile because of the remoteness of the snow leopard's range but most scientists agree that 3,500 to 7,000 animals remain in the wild.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

These cats are unable to roar, but do purr and grunt. Loud moans are used to attract mates. Cats are solitary (except mother with cubs). With such rugged territories these cats depend on a range of scent markings to determine who's in the area and their sexual status. Feces and sprays are used to mark areas.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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. Breeding season is from January - mid-March. Births occur in concealed den that has been lined with fur from the mother. Females breed every other year. Cubs open their eyes at 7-9 days and they become very active by 2 months, cubs have a daily average weight gain of approximately 48g (1.68 oz) per day and stay with their mothers until they are over 18 months old.

Estrous: polyestrous	Sexual Maturity: F 2-3 yrs / M c.4yrs
Gestation: 95 -105 days	Weaning Age: 2 mos
# of Mammae: 2-4 pair	Weight at birth: 320-708g (11.2 - 24.78 oz)
# of Young: 2-3	

MISCELLANEOUS

Also known as a rock leopard or Ounce. It is still being debated as to whether the Snow Leopard should be lumped into the genus *Panthera* or placed in its own genus *Unica*. The snow leopard does not roar despite the partial ossification of the hyoid bone. It is a transitional species between the small and large cats and is more closely related to the tigers than leopards.

Home ranges can vary greatly in size. In Nepal, where prey is abundant, a home range can be as small as 30-65 km²; whereas, in Mongolia, with sparse prey, the Snow Leopard needs over 1,000 km² to survive. Fragmented home ranges have led to possibly several subspecies.

Snow Leopards are part of the Felid TAG and are managed under the Species Survival Plan (SSP)

Sources:

Grzimek 1991 / MacDonald 1984 / Nowak 1992

<http://www.snowleopardconservancy.org/>

<http://felid-tag.org/snow-leopard/>

<http://www.snowleopard.org/>

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