

LEOPARD, SNOW

RANGE:

Mountains of Central Asia (Afghanistan, China, Mongolia, Russia, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Pakistan) such as the Himalayas.

HABITAT:

In summer the snow leopard is found in the barren highlands as high as 18,000 feet above sea level. In winter it follows prey to rhododendron forests as low as 2000 feet.

SIZE:

Adult males are 6 – 7 feet long and females average around 6 feet. The tail is 2 ½ to 3 ¼ feet long. Snow leopards stand about 2 feet at the shoulder and weigh 55 to 165 lbs.

REPRODUCTION:

- Late winter (January through March) is breeding season.
- Females are in heat from 5 to 7 days.
- Births of 2 – 5 young occur from April to June after a gestation of 90 – 103 days.
- The young are born in a hidden den lined with the mothers fur, and weigh just under a pound at birth.
- The young are able to crawl after about 10 days, open their eyes after about 7 days, and eat their first solid food and run well at about 2 months.
- The first 6 weeks the mother makes only quick hunting forays from the den.
- The young hunt with their mother through their first winter and reach sexual maturity at about 2 years of age.
- Females rarely bear young after the age of 14.

DIET:

Wild: bharal (blue sheep), ibex, markhor, and tahr (3 species of wild goats), yaks, musk deer, wild boar, piping hare, bobak (marmot), pikas, rodents, birds and domestic livestock.

Zoo: 2 lbs. meat each for 5 days a week. 1 trout, 6 mice, or 6 chicks a piece.

LIFE EXPECTANCY:

Have lived 19 years in captivity. Likely live 10 – 12 years in the wild.

BEHAVIOR:

- The snow leopard is a shy, mountain dweller that lives in forested sections below permanent snow line or on bare rocks and rugged cliffs.
- The snow leopard is active by day, especially early morning, late afternoon and evening.
- It is extremely agile and can leap up to 49 feet.
- Since the central Asian highlands are sparsely populated with large animals the snow leopard requires a large territory in order to obtain enough food.
- It traverses its territory in the course of a week, marking it with urine, droppings and scratchings on tree bark.
- The low food supply leads to solitary hunting although males and females hunt together during the breeding season. Snow leopards either stalk or ambush their prey.
- A 50 lb. subadult snow leopard does not roar, but has high pitched yowls and it feeds crouched over its food, characteristics shared with small cats.

theZOO
LOUISVILLE



Order:	Carnivora
Family:	Felidae
Genus:	Uncia
Species:	uncia

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POINTS OF INTEREST:

- The snow leopard has smoky gray fur, dappled with black rosettes.
- Its paws have cushions of hair that prevent the animal from sinking in the snow, that protect from rough stones, and the cold, and that increase traction on slippery surfaces.
- Its mammoth paws and thickly muscled shoulders are adaptations for scaling steep slopes.
- The snow leopard's green eyes are unusually high on its face. This enables it to see over rock edges without the prey seeing its position.

STATUS:

The snow leopard is an endangered species, listed on CITES Appendix I. It is endangered due to man's desire for its soft thick fur (poaching), and adaptation to keep the leopard warm in its harsh mountainous environment. Leaping cats are impaled on wooden bamboo spears the poachers have tipped with deadly poison from the monkshood plant. A high quality coat would sell for \$60,000 and more on the black market.

Destruction of its habitat is also contributing to the leopard's demise. In addition, in many areas, its natural prey has been forced out by livestock overgrazing causing the leopard to seek domestic stock for food. This often leads to its death at the hands of herdsman protecting their stock. Captive snow leopards are managed collectively by zoos under a SSP which makes use of captive breeding techniques for their survival.

According to ISIS, as of January 2006, three hundred and fifty-eight (358) snow leopards reside in zoos worldwide (158 in the United States and Canada) with approximately 2,500 living in the wild.

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