

Snow Leopard



Called the "Ghost of the Mountains", the snow leopard is a big cat that lives on its own and is difficult to find in the mountains of central Asia.

Living as high as 5500 m, the snow leopard is specially adapted to very cold, high-altitude conditions. Long thick fur allows them to withstand temperatures as low as -40°C. In fact, they have the thickest fur of

all big cats.

Snow leopards have light grey fur with black spots, known as rosettes. This colouration provides excellent camouflage in their native habitat. It is very difficult to see a snow leopard against a snowy, rocky mountainside.

Their large paws act like snowshoes, helping them to walk on top of snow instead of sinking in.

Snow leopards have long, furry tails—the longest of all big cats. In fact, at around 100 cm long, their tails are almost as long as their bodies, which measure around 110 cm. Snow leopards use their tails as a counterweight, helping them to keep their balance on the steep, uneven surface. They also use their tail like a scarf, wrapping themselves up with it to stay warm.



Equipped with long, powerful hind legs, snow leopards are excellent jumpers. They can travel as far as 15 metres in one bound, and they can jump as high as 1.8 meters without a running start.

Snow leopards have short front legs and broad muscular chests. Their big chests are very effective at taking in large amounts of air with each breath. This is useful at high altitudes because the oxygen level in the air is very low.

Snow leopards hunt ibexes (a kind of wild goat), argali (a kind of wild sheep), and blue sheep (which are actually not sheep and are more closely related to goats). They sneak up on their prey on a higher ledge and then chase them down the mountain, travelling at speeds up to 80 kilometres an hour. They hunt every 8-10 days, and eat their catch over several days.

Family Life



Though normally solitary animals, snow leopards do get together in late winter to breed. A typical litter consists of around 2-3 cubs, but there could be as many as 5. The female will raise the cubs by herself for 18 months until they are ready to venture out on their own.

Snow leopards live around 10-12 years in the wild.

Why are snow leopards important?

Snow leopards are top predators in their environment, and their prey include mountain sheep and goats. ... So by protecting the snow leopard, we're benefitting the whole natural environment in these areas and the people who rely on it. If the snow leopard became extinct, there would be no predators to eat sheep or ibexes. If no animal is there to eat them, they'll keep reproducing and they'll become overpopulated. With so many animals, there won't be enough food to feed them all.

Conservation Status

With only 4,000-7,000 alive in the wild, snow leopards are considered vulnerable of extinction by the [IUCN Red List](#). Their population is currently in decline. Major threats include poaching for the fur trade and traditional medicines, as well as the loss of prey and habitat due to livestock farming, mining, and development. A big issue is that when their natural prey is in short supply, snow leopards will eat livestock. Herders then kill the snow leopard in retaliation.

What You Can Do to Help

You can help snow leopards by donating to the [Snow Leopard Trust](#). This organization works with local communities, encouraging and empowering herders to keep both snow leopards and their livestock safe.

Snow Leopard Range



Snow leopards live in the harsh, rugged mountains of central Asia. Their range covers about 1.4 million square km, spanning 12 countries.