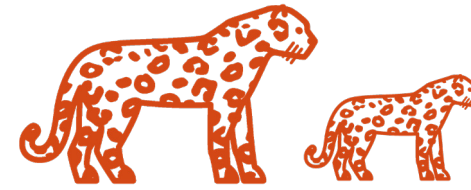
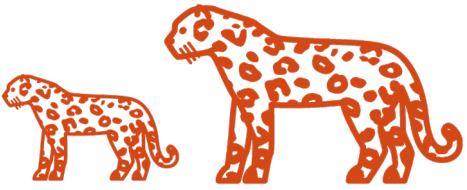


# SNOW LEOPARDS



Snow leopards are part of the big cat genus,\* *Panthera*,\* which includes tigers, lions, leopards and jaguars.

**Snow leopards can leap up to 10m!**

**LATIN NAME:** *Panthera uncia*

**POPULATION:** It is believed there are between 3,500-6,500 snow leopards left in Asia. There is no exact figure because snow leopards live in extremely remote places, making them hard to find.

**WHERE TO FIND THEM:** Snow leopards are found in 12 different countries. Around 60% of snow leopard habitat is in China, the rest live in: Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

**HABITATS:** High up in the mountains (3,000-5,400m above sea level) where it's very cold and dry and the air is thin.

**IUCN STATUS:** *Vulnerable\**

The IUCN Red List is a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity.

|         |                     |                       |            |            |                 |                 |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| EX      | EW                  | CE                    | EN         | VU         | NT              | LC              |
| EXTINCT | EXTINCT IN THE WILD | CRITICALLY ENDANGERED | ENDANGERED | VULNERABLE | NEAR THREATENED | LEAST CONCERNED |

**LIFESPAN:** 15-18 years (up to 25 years in captivity)

**SIZE:** Height 55-65cm, length 90-115cm. Tail: 100cm.

**DIET:** Snow leopards are carnivores; this means that they eat meat. They prefer to eat animals with hooves, like wild goats, wild sheep and ibex, but they will also take smaller prey such as hares and partridges (a type of bird), as well as much larger prey species, like camel and yak.

**COMMUNICATION:**

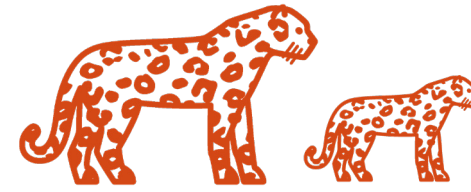
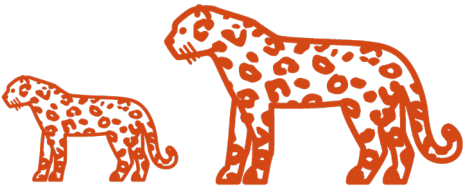


**FOR YOUNG READERS:** Snow leopards are the only one of the big cat family that can't roar, instead, they make yowling and chuffing sounds. To let other snow leopards know that this is their space they leave their smell on rocks.

**Scent:** snow leopards will leave scent trails to mark their territory, spraying urine under over-hanging rocks to avoid the scent being washed away, they will also scrape their claws into trees, leave dung and rub their facial scent glands onto rocks.

**No roar:** they are the only member of the *Panthera* genus (big cats) who cannot roar, instead they have a loud 'yowl' and also make a quieter sound called a chuff.

# SNOW LEOPARDS



## BEHAVIOUR



**FOR YOUNG READERS:** Snow leopards like to live on their own unless they are mother snow leopards with their cubs. They like to have a lot of space to live in. To catch the animals that they want to eat they sneak up on them slowly and quietly and then pounce!

**Solitary:** snow leopards are solitary animals, preferring to live on their own, unless it is mating season, or they are mothers with cubs. They are crepuscular animals; this means that they are most active at dawn and at dusk.

**Territory:** each snow leopard has its own *territory*,\* sometimes up to 1,000km<sup>2</sup>. The size of the territory depends on the availability of prey animals. If there are plenty of prey animals then their territories can be smaller, as they don't need to look as far to find food.

**Ambush:** snow leopards prefer to live where there are lots of rocks, cliffs and ledges to hide behind so that they can sneak up on their prey and *ambush*\* it, usually dropping down onto their prey from above. They can take animals which are three times heavier than they are.

**Non-aggressive:** these *elusive*\* cats are not a threat to humans.

## LIFECYCLE:



**FOR YOUNG READERS:** Snow leopards have between 1-3 cubs in a litter, cubs stay with their mothers for around 18 months before going off on their own.

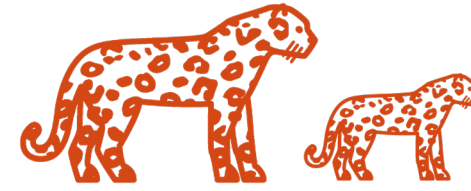
**Cubs:** a female snow leopard can produce a litter of cubs from age three. She gives birth 93-110 days after mating to approximately 2-3 cubs in a den (although the number of cubs can be between 1-5). The snow leopard mother raises the cubs on her own. The cubs open their eyes when they are seven days old. At two months old they can eat solid food and at three months they start to learn how to hunt by following their mother. Between 18-22 months the cubs leave their mother and go off on their own.

The fur on their stomachs is nearly five inches thick to help them survive in cold, harsh mountain climates.





# SNOW LEOPARDS



## ADAPTATIONS:



**FOR YOUNG READERS:** Snow leopards like to live high up in the mountains where it can get very cold. To help them to stay warm they have thick fur and long thick tails which they can wrap around themselves when they sleep to stay warm.

**The colour of their fur blends in with the rocks which makes it easier for them to get close to the animals that they want to eat!**

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It can get extremely cold in the mountains where snow leopards live, so they have special *adaptations*\* to help them to survive in these harsh conditions.

**Ears:** small furry ears help them regulate their body temperature and prevent heat from being lost.

**Paws:** large furry paws stop them from sinking in the snow by spreading their weight and keep them warm.

**Fur:** these fluffy cats have thick, dense fur with a woolly underlayer that thickens in winter.

**Nose:** large nasal cavities (inside their nose) gives the freezing air they breathe in a chance to warm up before it reaches their lungs.

**Tail:** they can wrap their long, thick tail around themselves when they sleep, a bit like a scarf. They can also store fat in their tails which they can use to help them to survive if hunting becomes difficult.

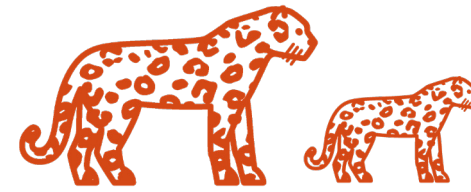
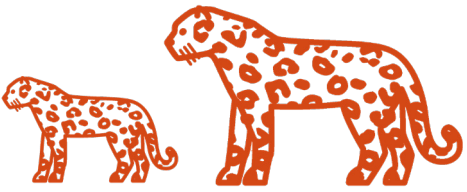
In the steep, rocky mountain terrain, snow leopards need to be able to move around easily and hunt, they have some great adaptations to help with this too:

**Camouflage:** grey fur with darker grey rosettes provides brilliant camouflage amongst the rocks. This enables them to get very close to prey without being spotted, they can then launch an ambush attack, taking their prey by surprise.

**Legs:** shorter front legs than hind legs, they can jump 10 metres in one bound.

**Balance:** long tails help them to balance as they move around the steep rocky slopes.

# SNOW LEOPARDS



## WHY SNOW LEOPARDS ARE IMPORTANT:



**FOR YOUNG READERS:** Snow leopards eat plant eating animals such as wild goats, if they didn't the grazing animals would eat all of the plants, changing the mountains and affecting all the animals that live there.

Snow leopards are a keystone species, this means that they have a large impact on the ecosystem\* where they live. They help to keep the number of herbivores down. Without snow leopards the population of grazing animals would increase, they would eat all the vegetation and would then starve and die out. Snow leopards keep the ecosystem in balance.

## WHY DO SNOW LEOPARDS NEED OUR HELP?



**FOR YOUNG READERS:** Snow leopards are losing the places that they like to live as people are hunting them for their beautiful fur and other body parts.

**Habitat loss:** snow leopards are losing vast areas of their habitats to mining companies who are digging up the mountains to get to the precious metals under the ground.

**Human-Wildlife conflict:** sometimes snow leopards kill livestock (sheep or goats) belonging to local herders and they are often killed in retaliation for this.

**Poaching:** snow leopards are poached (illegally killed) for their fur and bones, which are still being traded even though it is illegal. Some people believe that parts of the snow leopard can be used as a medicine.

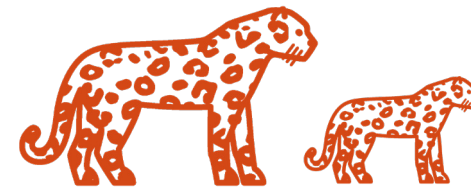
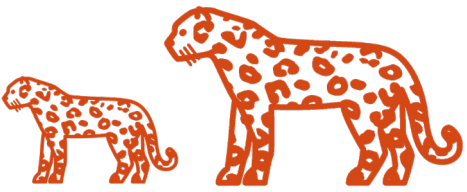
**Climate change:** is affecting the mountains where the snow leopards live, the warmer temperatures mean that trees can grow higher up the mountains, snow leopards like to live above where the trees can grow, this is shrinking the amount of tree free habitat for snow leopards.

Snow leopards live at the highest altitude ever documented for big cats.





# SNOW LEOPARDS



## HOW DOES DSWF HELP?

DSWF has been a proud supporter of the snow leopard for many years, partnering with ground-based conservation experts in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan. By funding conservation initiatives, DSWF is working alongside communities, governments, and conservation experts in Asia to provide snow leopards with protection to ensure they have a bright future.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP:

**ADOPT** - by adopting a snow leopard you will directly fund DSWF's ground-based work protecting snow leopards.

**USE YOUR VOICE** - to let others know about the problems snow leopards are facing and how you can help protect them.

**BE MORE GREEN** - Small changes to our daily lives add up to big differences for the planet when we all do them! [Click this link](#) to find out how you can help!

## \*GLOSSARY:

- *Adaptations*: a change which occurs over time which makes an organism better suited to its environment.
- *Ambush*: to attack by surprise.
- *Ecosystem*: living things interacting with one another and their environment.
- *Elusive*: difficult to find.
- *Genus*: one or more species of animal or plant that are closely related to each other
- *Territory*: an area occupied and then defended by an animal or group of animals.
- *Vulnerable*: is the status of a species that is likely to become endangered unless the circumstances that are threatening its survival and reproduction improve.

World Snow  
Leopard Day is  
celebrated  
annually on 23  
October.



DAVID SHEPHERD  
**WILDLIFE**  
FOUNDATION

