



# Snow Leopard

*Uncia (Panthera) uncia*

**Range:** Mountainous regions of Central Asia

**Habitat:** Alpine and sub-alpine areas. Snow leopards follow the movement of their prey, moving up in elevation in the summer months to meadows and rocky areas. In the winter, cats move down the mountains to lower elevation. They often sleep in crevices or caves.

**Diet:** Musk Deer, Pika, Marmot, Bharal Sheep, and will prey on livestock if available

**Lifespan:** Unknown in the wild, between 17-19 years in captivity

**Description:** Medium-sized cat about 6'-7.5' long from head to tail (their tail is about 3.3' of that total length). They stand about 2' tall and weigh between 60-140 lbs. Snow leopards are most easily recognized by their thick light gray fur, covered with dark "rosette" shaped spots. Adult Snow Leopards have distinct, grayish green eyes.

**Breeding:** Mating typically occurs in late winter and cubs are born between 90-100 days later. Females can have anywhere between 1-5 babies, but typically produce 2 or 3. The mother usually gives birth to her cubs in a cave that she has lined with fur. Cubs begin nursing right away, and open their eyes after about a week. They are able to eat solid food at around 3 months of age, and stay with their mother until they are able to survive on their own at 18-20 months of age.

**Behavior/Adaptations:** Snow leopards have several specialized behaviors that allow them to survive in severe, mountainous environments. The long, furry tail is used to help the cat steer and balance during long jumps and protect the nose/face during freezing weather. Snow leopards are able to leap 50 feet (horizontally). Their large, furry paws act like snowshoes and assist in movement through snowy areas. Snow leopards can make several different sounds including yowls and a low purring referred to as prusten. However, they cannot roar. Mostly active at dawn and dusk, snow leopards are difficult to find due to their camouflage and solitary lifestyle.

**Predators:** Humans

**Conservation:** Snow leopards are listed as an endangered species. Several factors contribute to their dwindling numbers including illegal hunting, loss of prey and habitat, and lack of protection. Snow leopard parts are sold on the black market for large sums of money despite their protected status. They are also targeted as problem animals because, as opportunistic hunters, snow leopards will eat livestock when they can get it. It is difficult to determine how many exist in the wild, but researchers estimate there to be 3,500 and 6,500 individuals left.

**The Zoo's Snow Leopard:** Kiran is male and was born on 7/21/2011.

## Interesting Facts:

- It is illegal to transport any snow leopard parts across international borders. Transportation of a snow leopard hide is punishable with up to a \$25,000 fine!
- Snow leopards are so difficult to find that researchers must often rely on signs that a cat has been in an area such as scat, scrape marks, and scent markings.

Information taken from the following sources:

[http://www.snowleopard.org/external\\_files/media/Snow-Leopard-Fact-Sheet.pdf](http://www.snowleopard.org/external_files/media/Snow-Leopard-Fact-Sheet.pdf)

[http://www.zoo.org/factsheets/snow\\_leopard/snowLeopard.html](http://www.zoo.org/factsheets/snow_leopard/snowLeopard.html)

<http://stlzoo.org/animals/abouttheanimals/mammals/carnivores/snowleopard.htm>