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# Arabian Leopard

The Arabian Leopard (Panthera pardus nimr) is a leopard subspecies native to the Arabian Peninsula and classified as Critically Endangered by IUCN since 1996. Fewer than 200 wild individuals were estimated to be alive in 2006. The population is severely fragmented. Subpopulations are isolated and not larger than 50 mature individuals. The population is thought to decline continuously.

## History[]

The Arabian leopard is one of the smallest leopard subspecies. It was tentatively affirmed as a distinct subspecies by genetic analysis from a single captive leopard from Israel of south Arabian origin, which appeared most closely related to the African leopard.

The Arabian leopard has pelage hues that vary from pale yellow to deep golden or tawny and are patterned with rosettes. At a weight of about 30 kg (66 lb) for the male and around 20 kg (44 lb) for the female, the Arabian leopard is much smaller than the African leopard and other Asian subspecies.

The geographic range of Arabian leopards is poorly understood but generally considered to be limited to the Arabian Peninsula, including Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. They live in mountainous uplands and hilly steppes, but seldom move to open plains, desert or coastal lowlands.

There was a very small population in Israel's Negev desert, estimated at 20 in the late 1970s. Leopards were hunted until the early 1960s. By 2002, less than 10 isolated individuals were estimated to survive in the Judean Desert and the Negev Highland. The last confirmed sighting in Jordan dates to 1987. Leopards are considered extinct in the United Arab Emirates.

Until the late 1960s, leopards were widely distributed in the mountains along both the coasts of the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. In Saudi Arabia, leopard habitat is estimated to have decreased by around 90% since the beginning of the 19th century. Of 19 reports obtained from informants between 1998 and 2003, only four are confirmed including sightings in one location in the Hijaz Mountains and three locations in the Asir Mountains, with the most recent record in 2002 south of Biljurashi. No leopard was recorded during a camera trapping survey conducted from 2002 to 2003. Although the leopard is officially protected in the country, its remaining range is not encompassed by protected areas.

In Oman, leopards occurred in the Al Hajar Mountains until the late 1970s. The largest confirmed sub-population inhabits the Dhofar Mountains in the country's southeast. In the Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve, 17 individual adult leopards were identified between 1997 and 2000 using camera traps. The home range of Arabian leopards in this reserve is roughly estimated at about 350 km2 (140 sq mi) for males and 250 km2 (97 sq mi) for females. The Dhofar mountain range is considered the best habitat for Arabian leopards in the country. This rugged terrain provides shelters, shade and trapped water, and harbors a wide variety of prey species, in particular in escarpments and narrow wadis.

In Yemen, leopards formerly ranged in all mountainous areas of the country, including the western and southern highlands eastwards to the border with Oman. Since the early 1990s, leopards are considered rare and close to extinction due to direct persecution by local people and depletion of wild prey.

Arabian leopards are predominantly nocturnal, but are sometimes also seen in daylight. They seem to concentrate on small to medium prey species, and usually store carcasses of large prey in caves or lairs but not in trees. Scat analyses revealed that the main prey species comprise Arabian gazelle, Nubian ibex, Cape hare, rock hyrax, porcupine, Ethiopian hedgehog, small rodents, birds, and insects. Since local people reduced ungulates to small populations, leopards are forced to alter their diet to smaller prey and livestock such as goats, sheep, donkeys and young camels.

Information about ecology and behaviour of Arabian leopards in the wild is very limited. A leopard from the Judean desert is reported to have come into heat in March. After a gestation period of 13 weeks, females give birth to two to four cubs in a cave amidst boulders or in a burrow.

Leopard cubs are born with closed eyes that open four to nine days later. Captive-born Arabian leopard cubs emerged from their den for the first time at the age of one month. Cubs are weaned at the age of about three months, and remain with their mother for up to two years.