

Asian leopards are rapidly losing their habitat and prey species. Wild sheep and goats, the natural prey of species such as the snow leopard, have been hunted out of many areas in the central Asian mountains, and growing human and livestock populations are putting increasing pressure on the remaining leopards and their prey.

Decline in prey species

Domestic livestock in Mongolia have increased from 20–25 million to around 33 million over the past 10 years, squeezing out wild sheep and goats, the main prey species for leopards in this region. The habitat of the Central Asian leopard has declined from several million hectares in the mountains of Turkmenistan, southern Uzbekistan, south-western Tajikistan and parts of the Caucasus, to less than 600,000-800,000 hectares today.

Habitat loss or fragmentation

Increases in livestock and a decrease in natural habitat have inevitably resulted in livestock predation by leopards, and subsequent retaliation by herders. In the summer of 2003 in Mongolia, snow leopard predation caused the death of 20 horses (worth an average of US\$100-150 each) in a WWF project area. Between 1996 and 2002 at least 16 snow leopards were reported killed in Zaskar in northern India, eight in one village alone.

Amur leopard

The Amur leopard is particularly vulnerable in the Russian Far East, where

farmers raise captive deer for human consumption and to produce antlers for the Asian medicine market. Deer are the natural prey preference for leopards, and in absence of wild prey, leopards venture into the deer farms in search of food. Owners of these farms are quick to protect their investment by eliminating leopards attacking their stock. Presently, the Amur leopard's most immediate threat comes from such retaliatory or preventive killing.

Wildlife trade

In many countries, conflict killings and the trade in big cat parts go hand in hand; the bones and pelts of leopards killed primarily due to retaliation for livestock losses also enter illegal trade.



Snow leopards live in mountain steppes and coniferous forest scrub at altitudes ranging from 2000 to 6000 meters.

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