



The View From Here

For any big problem, there cannot be an easy answer. Wildlife conservation is a "big problem" because it is complicated; solutions can be controversial and seldom satisfy everyone.

With this introduction as a caveat, I want to discuss the permit hunting of snow leopards, an emotional issue if ever there was one.

To the International Snow Leopard Trust the issue is clear-cut: the snow leopard is a highly endangered species and should not be hunted. It is formally classified as such by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). In addition, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has listed the snow leopard under Appendix I, the section which has the most stringent regulations governing trade. So how can there be legal hunting permits?

The Conference of the Parties to CITES recognized that in certain rare circumstances, hunting of Appendix I species may be favorable to the conservation of such species. A resolution was adopted which defines the conditions under which hunting trophies may be transferred from one country to another. This resolution states that hunting trophies of species listed in Appendix I should be permitted only if accompanied by an export permit from the country in which the animal was taken and an import permit issued by the country into which it is being brought.

Although 105 nations have signed CITES, the Mongolian People's Republic has not. Therefore Mongolia can issue an export permit on an Appendix I species even if it has not been shown that a hunting program is favorable to the conservation of that species. However, unless the foreign hunter was able to get an import permit--and this is very difficult, for the individual has to demonstrate that his or her action is going to be favorable to the species' conservation--the trophy could not legally be taken into North America, Europe, and most of the rest of the world.

Mongolia has had a commitment to wildlife management for over 40 years. Policies have included

giving protected status to vulnerable species and restricting the grazing of domestic stock in areas which are fragile. However, Mongolia is not a wealthy country and sport hunting produces a good financial return. When foreign currency generated by wildlife programs goes back into the local economy, it can be an excellent incentive to long-term game management.

Mongolian tourist officials say a result of these wildlife programs has been a significant increase in the numbers of Argali sheep and Siberian ibex and these increases can be maintained under carefully monitored hunting programs. But the foreign firms who coordinate the hunts state in their promotional material that there is also a corresponding "overabundance of snow leopard in Mongolia" and the cats are killing off too many of the sheep and ibex. As a result, they point out, Mongolia needs to crop off some of the leopards. Other reports say that the sheep and ibex are declining due to over-hunting by the local people and that the cats have little choice but to turn to livestock. This is doom for the snow leopard because losing even a few livestock is unacceptable to a subsistence herder. A big problem.

Unfortunately, there is no mention of these other aspects by the hunting organizations. Instead they emphasize in their material that although the snow leopard is on endangered species lists and cannot be brought back as a trophy, it can be legally hunted in Mongolia. The foreign hunting firms are exploiting a unique situation for their personal profit and promoting it as a conservation measure. To me it is a question of being legally correct but morally wrong.

Such a rare "opportunity" does not come cheaply. Klineburger Worldwide Travel (3627 1st Ave. South, Seattle, WA 98134, USA) will set up a 14-day snow leopard hunt for you in Mongolia for \$7,000 plus an additional trophy fee of \$13,000 if a snow leopard is taken. If you only want to accompany the hunter, just watch the snow leopard being shot, there is an observer cost of \$3,000. In the eighteenth century Samuel Johnson warned us of "the insolence of wealth and the arrogance of power." It is still a consideration two hundred years later.

We should recognize that foreign income to a beleaguered wildlife department can be critical; and



when a program which produces such funding is taken away, something of value has to be put in its place. I believe there are as many or more individuals who would wish to see and photograph a snow leopard than there are those who wish to shoot it. The ISLT would support alternatives in place of hunting, such as expeditions to observe and photograph the snow leopard and other wildlife. Mongolia may be one of the very few places in the world where that is even remotely possible.

There is some concern among Mongolian tourist officials that they do not have the infrastructure to accommodate tour groups, but in actuality they could use the same type of program currently in place for the hunters. Income would continue to be generated, as there would be an on-going need for skilled guides and expensive back-country travel; and instead of one hunter, there would be four or five tourists in the group paying a fee.

It is obvious that the reports are too limited to determine if there is a surplus of snow leopard in Mongolia and if the snow leopard is actually causing a decline in ibex and Argali populations. An extensive survey is necessary and a moratorium regarding hunting the snow leopard should be instigated while such a survey is conducted. Following is ISLT's policy on permit hunting and specific Trust recommendations on the snow leopard. We would be interested in your comments and thoughts.

*Helen Freeman,
President*

International Snow Leopard Trust Policy Regarding Permit Hunting

In some instances sport hunting in developing countries of species which are not endangered may be a viable method for obtaining foreign currency if:

1) the population of the species or subspecies has been determined by detailed survey work to be so abundant that a harvest has no negative impact and is sustainable;

2) the population is continually monitored in such a manner that the harvest is regulated;

3) a significant proportion of the money brought in from the hunt directly benefits the local people; and

4) sport hunting may be demonstrated to be a deterrent to poaching.

In the case of a rare animal, however, to promote hunting for profit gives a contradictory message about conservation to both local and foreign communities.

The International Snow Leopard Trust strongly objects to the sport hunting of snow leopard in any area of its range because:

1) the species is generally rare throughout its range and accurate knowledge of population size in local circumstances is scarce and of questionable reliability;

2) the species is listed as "highly endangered" by international and national conventions;

3) international trade in the snow leopard is prohibited by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Wild Species of Fauna and Flora;

4) the snow leopard is an indicator species for the conservation of the Himalayas and high altitude reserves.

Because the species is extremely difficult to census and its exact status is unknown, ISLT recommends that detailed surveys be conducted and these results be circulated for comment by internationally recognized authorities on snow leopard distribution and biology *before* permit hunting is considered as a mechanism for revenue or management of snow leopard. Therefore, based on the above, the ISLT is opposed to permit hunting of the snow leopard. ISLT recommends that alternative methods, such as game viewing and photographic opportunities, be encouraged as sources for foreign currency.

The International Snow Leopard Trust is an independent, non-profit tax exempt foundation dedicated to the conservation of the snow leopard and the mountain wilderness it represents. To join, send \$30 for Associate membership, \$100 for Patron, or \$250 for Life to the ISLT office at 4649 Sunnyside Ave. N., Seattle, WA 98103, USA. Send address changes to the same address. Office telephone and FAX number: (206) 632 2421.