

## Interactions between Wild Dogs and Snow Leopards in Ladakh

by Joanna Van Gruisen

The *phara*, or Asiatic wild dog, also known as the *dhole* (*Cuon alpinus*), was known in India to live almost exclusively in dense forests and thick scrub jungles. Until recently there had been no confirmation of the dhole's continuing presence in the trans-Himalayan regions.

During a two-year stay in Hemis National Park we saw *dholes* on two occasions. At one of our sightings we were able to film an interaction between dholes and a snow leopard. A pack of four dogs had just killed a domestic goat and had begun feeding when a snow leopard approached from the opposite bank of a small, steep valley. As the leopard came up the bank beneath the kill, the wild dogs backed away. While the dholes watched from a distance of approximately 20 meters, the snow leopard carried the carcass by the throat back across the valley and moved up the opposite open slope towards the broken terrain of the ridge.

The four dholes remained at the kill site momentarily, then moved after the leopard. Part way up the open slope the dholes faced the snow leopard but did not make a serious attempt to rescue their kill. The snow leopard watched them but showed no signs of aggression.

The next morning we found the remains of the goat at the base of the broken terrain. We spotted the snow leopard lying on a rock above the kill remains. It watched us for a while before disappearing behind rocks on the ridge top. We did not see it again. From the tracks, we saw that it returned the next night to investigate the kill, then moved out of that valley. There was no sign that the *dholes* had returned.

The dholes in this area of Ladakh are arguably the snow leopard's only serious competi

tor. Bharal form the major portion of the snow leopard's diet here and thus the dholes would appear to be more serious competitors than wolves. From Ladakh no direct interaction between wolf and snow leopard has been recorded. The event we saw was the first recorded interaction between a snow leopard and dholes.