

Opening Remarks to Seventh International Snow Leopard Symposium

Full Text:

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Director, Northwest Plateau Institute of Biology

Ladies and Gentlemen, My Friends:

The Seventh International Snow Leopard Symposium is ceremoniously opening. Please allow me, first of all, on behalf of Northwest Plateau Institute of Biology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, to express my warmest welcome to all of you.

Qinghai Province is in the inland of China with the area of 720,000 km². QinghaiXizang (Tibet) Plateau, the roof of the world, called the third pole in the Earth, possesses abundant natural bioresources and various geographical regions. Qilian Mountain, Arejin Mountain, Kunlun Mountain and Tanggula Mountain compose the topographic skeleton of the whole province. Here is the largest salt lake in China, Qinghaihu lake. The Yellow River, Yangtse River and Lancangjiang River all rise in Qinghai Province, and Chaidamu Basin is the largest inland basin of China. The province has 85% of its area at elevations of 3,000 m and above, with the highest altitude reaching 6,860 m. Because of the special and unique geographical location and natural diversity, many kinds of peculiar and unique animal populations inhabit the region and its resources have been on the top position in China. Among these, 67 species have been classified into the first and second class protected animals and most of them are rare, unique and endangered species on QinghaiXizang Plateau such as wild camel, wild yak, wild ass, whitelipped deer, Tibetan gazelle, argali, black stork, Chinese monal pheasant etc. with important valuation.

The Northwest Plateau Institute of Biology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, was founded in 1962 and has focused on the studies of fauna, flora and its classification, wild animal behavioral ecology and protection on the plateau such as whitelipped deer, musk deer, wild yak, blacknecked crane, Tibetan gazelle, argali, Tibetan antelope, snow leopard and fishes and has published *Economic Flora of Qinghai*, *Economic Fauna of Qinghai*, *Tibetan Medicine*, and *The Fishes on QinghaiXizang Plateau*. We have organized over 30 surveys and expeditions of the plateau animals and plants with Chinese Academy of Sciences and Qinghai government, and participated in many international professional meetings. As a unique biological research body on the QinghaiXizang Plateau, the Institute has provided substantial advice and consultation to local governments for wildlife protection and management. During 1986-1988 the Institute organized a joint survey with the U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, on west China's large animals. After that, it established a sister institution agreement with the University of Montana on wildlife behavior and ecology. We have also cooperated with Colorado State University on ferret studies, and with Arizona State University and Auburn University on plateau pika behavioral research. The Institute provided special Institute Director Funds for wild snow leopard research and protection, and sent scholars abroad to get training in wildlife biology. So far, the Institute has become a very special biological research center on the QinghaiXizang Plateau. We hope that scientists around the world who are interested in wildlife research will join us in this valuable and mutually beneficial work.

Along with the open door policy of China, more and more scientists and travelers have come here for expeditions, scientific research, teaching and travelling. We have established cooperation relationships with many scientists throughout the world. I sincerely hope that, through this symposium, we can make more friends and set up closer contact with international colleagues to improve the protection of wildlife not only in China and her neighboring countries, but also in other nations.

Chinese people are hospitable and hospitality is a Chinese traditional virtue. Xining city means "peace in western China", so I hope all participants and friends here will pass the days with enthusiasm in a pleasant atmosphere. I hope our symposium, as the current Olympic torch burns in Barcelona, Spain, will lead to world cooperation in the development of snow leopard research and protection.

I wish all the participants high spirits, and wish the symposium great success.

OPENING REMARKS

Jin Ji-peng

Governor, Qinghai Province, China

Ladies, Gentlemen and Guests:

Good morning. The 7th International Snow Leopard Symposium begins. It is a major event for our Qinghai Province to hold such a significant meeting in its capital, Xining. Please allow me to extend to you, on behalf of the people's government of Qinghai Province and its over four million residents of different ethnicities, my warmest welcome!

Qinghai Province, with its land of more than 700,000 square kilometers and its unique geography, has the world famous Qinghai-Tibet Plateau that has attracted attention from scientists from all over the world. Qinghai has been marching forward rapidly in the past few years in all areas. Since China's reforms, many international friends have been here doing research, visiting, and conducting academic and technical exchanges. It is the great honor of our province to have this symposium held in Xining. I believe this event will have positive impact on scientific research in our province.

Qinghai is a sparsely populated but vast land with a variety of natural resources, especially animal and plant life. The distribution center of snow leopard is in Qinghai, which provides an advantageous condition for wildlife research. We sincerely hope that a close network will be established among all participants at this meeting. We warmly welcome scientists from all over the world to come to Qinghai to do joint research.

Ladies, gentlemen and every guest, may your stay in Xining be pleasant and healthy; may the symposium a great success! Thank you.

OPENING REMARKS

Zhang Chang-xing

Assistant Director, Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Qinghai Province, China

Dear Guests:

In this ancient town on the Qinghai Plateau, on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Forestry of Qinghai Province, I warmly welcome everyone coming for the 7th international Snow Leopard Symposium. Qinghai, located on the "roof of the world", the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, enjoys complex and unique geographic features. The Yellow River originates from our province. Eighty-five percent of Qinghai's land is more than 3000 meters above sea level. Due to its unique geography, Qinghai is the habitat of varied wildlife and plants with 67 nationally protected species, of which many are unique to the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau.

The snow leopard is widely distributed in our province. According to research, its distribution covers 22 counties including Haixi, Yushu, Guoluo, Haibei, Hainan, Huanghauzho and Haidong. Snow leopards inhabit rocky areas 2,500 to 5,300 meters above sea level. Our province has implemented successful programs on snow leopard conservation and its captive management. In 1980 at Qinghai's fifth congressional session, the "Qinghai Province Wildlife & Resources Conservation" was enacted, in which the snow leopard was identified as a specially protected species, with a ban on random hunting. This protection was strengthened in the "China Wildlife Conservation Law" passed by Congress in March 1990 in which the snow leopard was identified as a "first class" species protected from any hunting. Up until the present, our province has established local community conservation networks and 33 no-hunting areas where snow leopards are present. Unfortunately, snow leopards are still being poached in some areas.

We are going to establish conservation areas where snow leopards are currently abundant. Meanwhile, there should be progress in captive management. This symposium should definitely catalyze China's conservation of the snow leopard. We look forward to learning from other countries and making our contribution. May we strengthen friendly cooperation, as well as the exchange of information and understanding with representatives of all countries present in our joint venture of snow leopard habitat conservation.

OPENING REMARKS

Helen Freeman

President, International Snow Leopard Trust

Welcome to the Seventh International Snow Leopard Symposium. Some of you may not know that the first symposium was held fourteen years ago in Helsinki, Finland. I remember that meeting fondly for it generated a spirit of cooperation which endures to this day. It was a modest beginning there were only ten of us and our discussions focused entirely on how to improve captive management and the breeding of snow leopards in zoos.

This emphasis on captive management continued over the next three symposia and there were positive results. Zoos began to have a higher rate of success in breeding snow leopards, more cubs survived, and as the snow leopard population in zoos became sustainable through captive breeding, the need for taking animals from the wild was eliminated.

In 1986, at the 5th International Snow Leopard Symposium in northern India, a major shift in emphasis was made, the focus now becoming the conservation of the natural habitat. It was agreed at the India conference that the highest priority for action should be identification of reserves so gaps in critical habitat could be protected. The status of the wild snow leopard and its habitat was a major topic of concern at the next symposium in Kazakhstan in 1989.

Now we find ourselves at the 7th Symposium with a more expanded agenda and participants from Pakistan, Nepal, India, Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, the various regions of China, the United States, Norway, United Kingdom, Canada and Switzerland the largest representation ever at a snow leopard symposium.

This conference is about "Parks, People, and Snow Leopards". The theme recognizes the snow leopard as an indicator species for high altitude habitat, and discussions over the next few days will address the status of the snow leopard and how this relates to the needs of people, other wildlife and mountain reserves.

Such a broadening of scope at this juncture is essential. It is time to formally recognize that the endangered species problem is not a single problem. This is conservation in a narrow sense. The deeper problem is the decreasing biological diversity and the increasing human populations in the highaltitude environments where the snow leopard is found. If attendance at a symposium is to be worthwhile, the reasons for meeting must undergo this type of reevaluation. Programs have to constantly evolve and be redefined if they are to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex world.

China is a perfect setting for this symposium. To many foreigners China is a land of endless fields and rice paddies. But twothirds of China's 9.6 million square kilometers are hills, mountains and high plateaus. There are 100 mountains more than 7,000 meters high, and the highest peak in the world is Qomolangma at 8,848 meters. China is truly snow leopard country.

China is also home to the ancient belief that, if humans are to flourish, man and nature have to exist in harmony. A similar notion, expressed in a different way by the Native American Indians of my country, is the belief that if we wish to have a good life we must use the land in such a way that we have thought ahead unto the seventh generation. It is on these two concepts that I base my hope for this, the 7th Symposium.

Conservation, by its very nature, is an international business. It is a business of partnerships. Let the spirit of partnership be the order of business for us, the participants of the China symposium. With the

beautiful and elusive snow leopard as our symbol, may we welcome an open exchange of information and ideas. May we work together to ensure positive results. And, most importantly, may we set in motion future opportunities for humans and nature to exist in harmony.