

## Regional Meeting on the Protection of Snow Leopard

### Full Text:

From 12 to 18 of May in Aksu-Jabagly nature reserve, in Kazakhstan Republic there was held the International workshop on Snow Leopard protection in the region of post-soviet Central Asia. This workshop was organised with financial support of SEN - Sacred Earth Network - international NGO well known in the New Independent States as organization which helps in the development of communication facilities among environmental NGO-s, encourages their activity for the conservation of wild-life and shares the experience of grass-route ways on the special technical workshops provided in the post-soviet space. About 20 participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Russia and USA came to Aksu-Jabagly that to discuss the building of regional program on the protection of Snow Leopard in the mountains of Central Asia.

Large-scaled development of mountain territories in our century led to the declining of ranges and numbers for many mountain inhabitants. Poaching and habitats transformation are the main causes which determined the extinction of Snow Leopard in one regions and decreasing its number in others. However, the present status of Snow Leopard in Central Asia gives rise to alarm about its survival in the current difficult socio-economical conditions. Although this species is included in the Red Data Books of all Central-Asian countries and Russia, and any legal persecution of Snow Leopard is strictly forbidden in all countries, the real threats of its survival increased after collaps of Soviet Union. First of all, it happened because the borders became more opened. At past Snow Leopard was not hunted in this area for the trade by its parts (bones, skin, all inner organs) using in the traditional Chinese medicine, now traders from China and other countries of South-East Asia make the orders on the Snow Leopard in their neighboring countries - Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. On other hand, some old forgotten customs began to rebirth in the mountain areas. Thus, in ancient times subordinators in Kyrgyz and Kazakh tribes presented to the rulers and leaders the skin of Snow Leopard as symbol of their power, force and bravery. Now this custom appeared again and present subordinators give the skins of Snow Leopard to the local chiefs of regional administrations as gifts. At the same time, all forest managers have not enough means for the good protection of natural resources, salaries of wardens are so small that many of them became the executors of orders and guides of poachers. Poaching on the Snow Leopard increased in many areas, the price of Snow Leopard skin fluctuate from 100 to 2-3,000 US\$ depending on its quality and the level of transaction. Other causes of Snow Leopard populations' declining reflect the decreasing of their preys number. After destroy of Soviet Union, the number of live-stock belonged to collective-farmers in many mountain regions reduced in several times and this circumstance led to the improving of natural pastures in the high altitudes (in meadows) and growing of number some mountain ungulates and marmots. However, owing to decreasing of live-stock number poaching on wild animals increased, many local villagers hunt now on marmots, ibexes and wild sheep for the food. In the result all these actions, the quantity of Snow Leopard reduced at least in two times. If in the end of 70-th - beginning of 80-th number of Snow Leopard in soviet Central Asia was about 2,000 individuals on the assessment of Eugene Koshkarev studied the more numerous Tien-Shan populations, now this number can be estimated only approximately in 1,000 animals (but, perhaps, this number is less) and current trends are directed to the negative for the Snow Leopard populations tendency. In several republics the special projects belonging to the protection of Snow Leopard were considered. In mountain Altay on the area of Russia the project of WWF on the conservation of wild-life at total has begun. In Kyrgyzstan the project of NABU (German Association for the Protection of Nature) is turned to the establishment of special rangers groups against the poaching. In Uzbekistan the small project of ISLT (International Snow Leopard Trust) for the analysis of present status of Snow Leopard and its preys in Gyssar nature reserve is implemented. However, the total strategy for the protection of Snow Leopard and its habitats in all region is absent. Therefore participants of workshop proposed to create the united strategy for the protection of Snow Leopard in Central Asia. For the implementation of strategy there were established the regional (international) working group for the protection of Snow Leopard called "Asia - Irbis" ("Irbis" is local name of Snow Leopard). Participants of workshop behalf of presented organizations signed Agreement on collaboration for the implementation of action plan and strategy of Snow Leopard protection in Central Asia. Members of working group plan:

- to create the regional computer data base;
- to provide the joint survey on current status;

- to work out and implement the united methods for censuses, monitoring and treatment of data;
- to work out the regional strategy for the species and their habitats conservation, preparation and analyses of projects on Snow Leopard protection and monitoring;
- to ground and make proposals for the optimization of protected areas network in Central Asia;
- to organize the special training workshop, joint expeditions and meetings of specialists;
- to ensure the wide distribution of information on the activity of working group for the public awareness.

Participants of workshop prepared the Appeal to the Governments of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan Republics and Russia with request to provide the urgent measures for the Snow Leopard protection and to promote the initiative of regional working groupe for the saving this species.