

Snow Leopard Conservation Comes of Age

Full Text

A landmark accomplishment in snow leopard management came about in Mongolia in the waning days of 1999, and as the new millennium dawned a comprehensive Snow Leopard Conservation Plan was in place. After nearly a decade of cooperative international research on snow leopard ecology, distribution, abundance, and threats, the understanding required to formulate a plan that addressed the needs of the species in Mongolia was in hand. Facilitated by the David Shepherd Conservation Foundation (DSCF) and WWF-Mongolia, representatives of government, NGOs, academia, and the public were brought together for 2 days of meetings and workshops to finalize the plan that had been circulated in draft form to stakeholders and international snow leopard experts several months earlier.

The plan addresses several needs for conservation that were broadly grouped into three categories: 1) research and monitoring, 2) snow leopard-human conflicts, and 3) legal issues. The resolution that was the output of the meeting stipulates that the parties will strive to:

- Establish and maintain a snow leopard and prey species population monitoring program and database with free and open exchange of information among all parties;
- Ensure that adequate and representative areas across the range of snow leopards in Mongolia are included in the protected area system;
- Enact and enforce national laws, statutes and regulations that are sufficient to protect snow leopards, their prey, and their habitat from degradation;
- Enforce pertinent international conservation laws and conventions to which Mongolia is a signatory;
- Educate citizens and visitors about conservation issues, and when appropriate, emphasize concerns regarding snow leopards and other endangered species;
- Educate the public and government on the cultural, ecological, and financial values to the country of a healthy snow leopard population;
- Reduce snow leopard-human conflicts, particularly in protected areas and other areas where snow leopards are abundant;

A list of specific actions to attain these goals was developed and responsible agencies for implementation of each activity identified. Several international organizations with relevant expertise, such as DSCF, the International Snow Leopard Trust, WWF, and Peace Corps, were identified in the plan as Supportive Organizations for particular activities.

The Plan has been adopted by government and signed by the Mongolian Ministry of Nature and Environment, Nature Conservation Agency, and Endangered Species Commission. All national and international supportive organizations with identified roles have also signed and pledged the necessary backing.

As with any such endeavor, it is only as good as our ability to move forward from plan to action. To that end an annual review of progress is scheduled by a team identified during the conference. By the end of 2000 we hope to be able to report advances. But there are signs that material strides in conservation of snow leopards in Mongolia will not be easy or swift: the day after signing the resolution, hats made from snow leopard hides could still be found for sale in the State owned department store in Ulaanbaatar.

The Snow Leopard Conservation Plan text, or other details on the species in Mongolia can be obtained from Dr. Tom McCarthy at tmc@pigs.dircon.co.uk, or viewed and downloaded at the following website: <http://www.irbis-enterprises.com>.

(Article 2)

New Snow Leopard Website

Irbis Enterprises, the innovative program that combines income generation for Mongolia's semi-nomadic herders with conservation of snow leopards and their prey, was reported on in the Spring 1999 issue of Cat News (Knitting for Snow Leopards, p 24). The project has remained successful and has expanded to new areas of snow leopard habitat in Mongolia. A website was recently launched to provide current information on the program, and also offers you a chance to win products made by the herders involved! Project innovator Priscilla Allen invites you to visit the site and provide feedback on the program or the website at <http://www.irbis-enterprises.com>.