

SNOW LEOPARDS DOWN UNDER

Peter Myroniuk

The Royal Melbourne Zoological Gardens, P.O.Box 74, Parkville, Victoria 3052, Australia

The Australasian breeding program for snow leopards is extremely small. There are only three zoos currently holding snow leopards. Our Regional Census and Plan does not indicate any further expansion of the number of zoos holding this species.

The Royal Melbourne Zoological Gardens was the first zoo to import snow leopards into Australia. In October 1983, the Melbourne Zoo imported female Kashi, # 813 from San Antonio and male Lakh, # 856 from the Bronx. This pair produced a total of six cubs between 1983 and 1989. Only two of their cubs remain in Australia, all others died except one female, which was sent to Japan.

Wellington Zoo in New Zealand imported a pair from San Diego and Columbia Zoo in July 1986. This pair subsequently bred, however, the species has now died out from this collection.

In September 1990, Taronga Zoo, Sydney imported a pair from Brookfield and Omaha zoos. Taronga is currently attempting to breed from this pair.

The third zoo currently holding snow leopards is Mogo Zoo in New South Wales. Mogo is currently negotiating the potential of importing an unrelated female into the Australasian Region. The age and sex distribution of the present population can be seen in Figure 1.

The Australasian population is descendant from 23 founders. The population mean inbreeding

coefficient is 0.006, mean kinship value is 0.1382 (range 0.1176 - 0.1658) and founder genome equivalents is 3.618.

The Australian population and carrying capacity is only a fraction of the global population. However, as a conservation education resource the snow leopard is a flagship for the Northern Hemisphere mountain/alpine habitat. We are keen to contribute to the global conservation of snow leopards in whatever way we can. Presently this is through public education and display.

