

The Leopard

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Leopard. The jaguar seems to be hunted largely for such offences as man-eating, stock-killing, and the theft or self-defensive killing of a good hunting dog.

As the largest carnivorous animal in the Southern Americas, it is not surprising that the jaguar should have many stories of ferocity attached to it, but it does not emerge from these as being anything approaching such a potentially dangerous and wilful creature as the Leopard. An oblique indication that the jaguar may be just as unpredictable as the Leopard is given by the same author as mentioned above, who quotes a charming Arawak Indian traditional council of prudence—"Everything has a Jaguar." This seems a good deal more attractive than our own Western clichés, such as "there's a snag to everything," or "Where's the catch?".

To conclude this long note on the Leopard's nearest New World relative, we should re-emphasise that the animal is only rarely as savage as the Leopard when brought to bay—a good example being the fact that numbers of treed and bayed jaguar have been taken with the rope or lasso, a form of sport which would tend to be short-lived if applied to many Leopards. In addition it would be appropriate to record that the jaguar is generally a solitary animal: associating—like the Leopard—with others of its own kind only when mating or when, as a female, accompanied by cubs. The young are often known as jaguar kittens or kits, and are assisted and supported by their mother up to two years of age. It does not seem to be known at what age they are weaned in the wild, nor when they start to kill adequate quantities of prey for themselves, but there is little reason to suppose that their life differs materially from that of the young Leopard.

Examples of the Jaguar have been known to live to twenty-two years of age, and jaguar hybrids with both lion and Leopard are recorded. Naturally such hybridisation has only occurred in captivity. In contrast to the Leopard the Jaguar is often a morose animal in captivity.

#### THE SNOW LEOPARD OR OUNCE

Authorities have pointed out that the Snow Leopard, a distinct species from the typical Leopard, shows superficial affinities with the Persian form of the normal Leopard. It is only since the Second World War that sufficient numbers of Snow Leopards have been available to solve the problematic distribution of the typical Leopard in areas where only the Snow Leopard was thought to exist. This marginal distribution, notable in areas under Russian aegis, had created much discussion.

Differences between the Snow Leopard and true Leopard or Panther are fairly pronounced. As might be expected from its name, the Snow Leopard has a pelt which is dense in texture, and thick to the point of wooliness, while the fur is long. The ground-colour is pale: variously described as dirty-white, pale whitish-grey to bronzy-olive, or extremely light grey. The belly is pure white; and large spots form interrupted irregular rosettes or rings on most of the back, flanks, and tail. In some specimens there is a black streak along the length of the back.

The name Ounce, rarely heard today, had French origins and was originally applied to the lynx. In historical times it has been applied to many of the cat-like animals, and its use is hardly to be recommended.

The species frequents the highest areas of Central Asia, including—according to

Ward—"Gilgit, Hunza, Turkestan, Trans-Baikalia, Ladak, Tibet, Amurland, and Western China:" extending in the north-west to "the Altai, and in the west, it is said, to Persia."

Living on bare mountains, and certainly attaining altitudes of up to 20,000 feet, the Snow Leopard does not seem to have been recorded at lower than 6,000 feet. The call is said to be similar to the sawing call of the typical Leopard, and it probably makes the same range of other sounds. It is rare for the two species to overlap one another, and it is not known if interbreeding would take place in the wild, although possible in captivity. In Tibet, most notably, the species almost completely replaces the typical Leopard.

The gestation is said by one authority to be 93 days, but little more seems to be known of the natural history of the animal. The young are born blind, and the prey consists of mountain sheep and goats, together with marmots and the few birds found in its desolate environment. Recent increases in the numbers of this interesting species held in captivity should lead to valuable data on its habits and life.

The longest *cured* Snow Leopard skin recorded by Ward is 8 feet 8 inches; but skins can be stretched outrageously, and the animal in the flesh is most unlikely to exceed 7 feet 6 inches in length. The height at the shoulder is given as 2 feet, and the weight would be comparable with that for typical Leopards of similar size. Apart from colour differences, the thick and long untapered tail of the Snow Leopard further distinguishes it from the true Leopard.

#### PAINTED LEOPARD, TIGER-CAT, OCELOT OR LABBA-TIGER

This is a small to medium-sized cat, short-tailed and long-legged: to some extent it is the American equivalent of the African Serval, although not so long-eared. The colouration is a splotched and blotted pattern of dark brown or black on a ground colour of grey or yellowish-buff—sometimes richer and darker. Melanistic examples are said to occur. The total length rarely exceeds four feet, and the weight 40 pounds.

The range is the same as that for the jaguar, but the species is normally confined to dense jungle conditions, in which it hunts for rodents, other small mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles. There are numerous records of attacks on domestic stock and poultry, and the species will fish.

The Painted Leopard or Ocelot (the name by which it is known in the fur-trade) has a gestation period of approximately 90 days. Like all the catlike mammals mentioned in this Chapter, the kittens or cubs are born blind but furred. The species has a harsh mewling call, and is an active tree-climber. It is too small to be actively dangerous to man—even when at bay.

As a point of interest, it will again be noted that the name "tiger" has been applied to this small creature, just as it is applied to the Leopard and jaguar.

#### CLOUDED LEOPARD

This secretive jungle and forest animal, never attaining a size larger than that of the smallest typical Leopard, is found from Nepal through to Assam, parts of Burma, Siam or Thailand, the Malayan archipelago, Sumatra, Borneo, South China and Formosa. Its weight seldom exceeds sixty pounds: while its more rounded head and