

## Symposium Held On Snow Leopard

For some species the clock has run out; for others there is still hope. The snow leopard is one of the lucky ones. Pushed to the edge of extinction by an expanding human population, the snow leopard until recently has been a story with blank pages. Little was known about the snow leopard's habits in the wild until George B. Schaller's studies in the 1970's.

More pages are now being filled by zoos and researchers who are carefully piecing together the puzzle of an animal which has captured the imagination of poets and zoologists alike. Part of the mystery can be attributed not only to the nature of the cat itself, but also to its isolation in the remote and often bleak mountain habitat of Central Asia, in altitudes up to 18,000 feet.

Encounters with the snow leopard in the wild have been momentary, at best. It wasn't until the spring of 1981 that a snow leopard was collared and tracked by radio telemetry. This was accomplished by biologist Rodney Jackson, in a remote section of Nepal. Some researchers have traveled for months without seeing a single snow leopard.

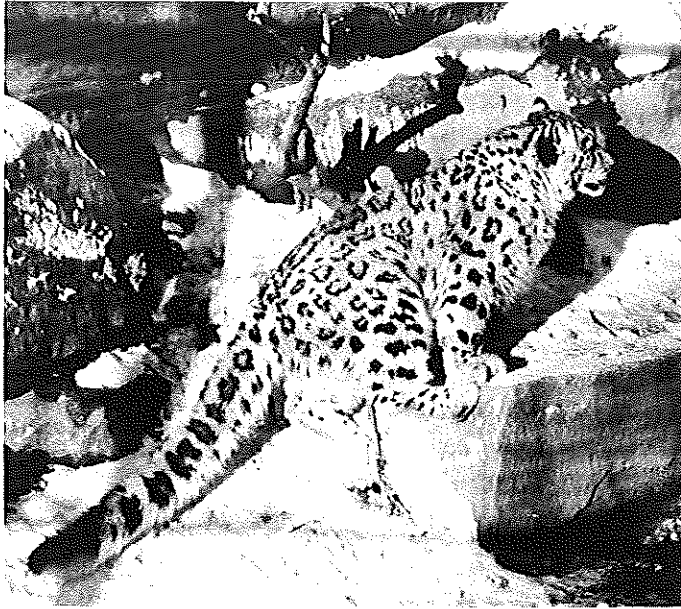
During the week of June 20, a group of nearly 80 people gathered at Woodland Park Zoo to share what they know about snow leopards. The Third International Snow Leopard Symposium, sponsored by the zoo, the Seattle Zoological Society and the International Snow Leopard Trust, drew people from as far away as Asia and Europe. Each paper presented at the conference contributed more vital pieces of information to the story of the snow leopard.

Some got right down to the DNA level of discussion; others talked about the global picture several generations from now. But they came with one goal in mind: to develop methods to assure the perpetuation of a breed-

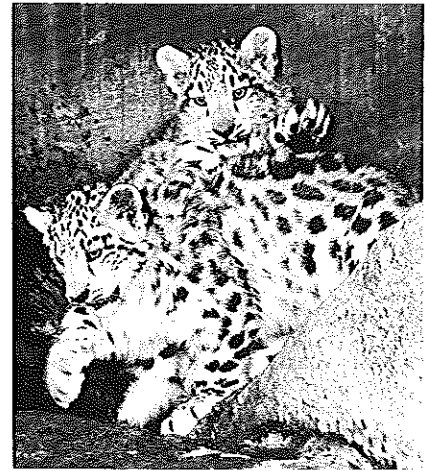
Bernard Nist

# Woodland Park Zoological Gardens

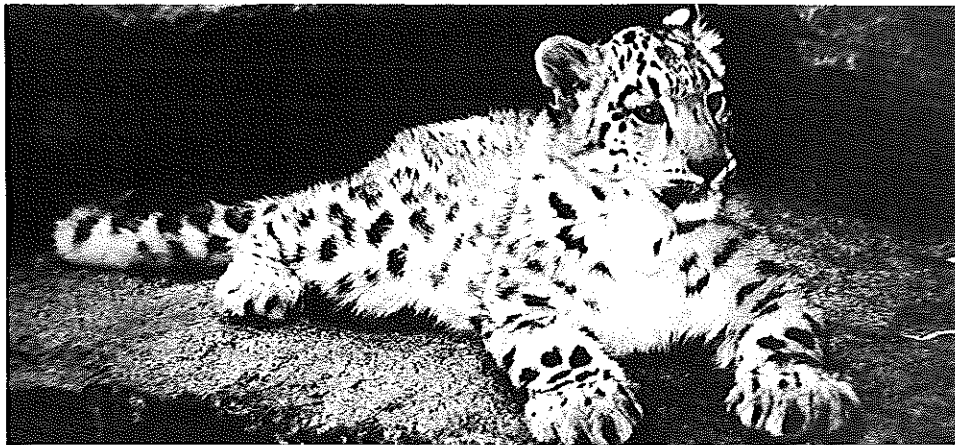
*“But none possessed me as did the snow leopard, a rare and elusive*



Helen Freeman



Bernard Nist



Bernard Nist

ing population of snow leopards in zoos and to hopefully have a large enough captive population to return some of them to the wild.

Few animals have received such concentrated attention worldwide. Only one other species, the Asian wild horse, has triggered a symposium that meets on a regular basis, according to Tom Foose, conservation coordinator for the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums.

It is not possible to save all endangered species. Space in zoos and resources are just too tight to breed

large populations of animals over a long period of time. Therefore, the picking and choosing is a painful process. As a result of the symposium, and the efforts of several zoos and researchers, the snow leopard will join nearly 30 other species in a Species Survival Program, a worldwide project devoted to saving certain endangered species from extinction.

Two serious medical problems in the snow leopard were brought up for discussion: coloboma of the eye was discussed by Dr. Carl Wahlberg of the Helsinki Zoo, Finland and a viral

disease was described by Dr. Michael Worley of the San Diego Zoo. If the eye defect is hereditary, further breeding of individuals from the affected bloodline could spell disaster for many offspring all over the world. An international studbook is maintained by Dr. Leif Blomquist at Helsinki Zoo to record the bloodlines and any such defects of snow leopards in captivity.

A detailed picture of snow leopard behavior, impossible to observe in the wild, was presented by Helen Freeman, Curator of Education at Woodland Park Zoo, from a study she con-

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## Moving Mountains

In a city virtually encircled by

mountains, it might seem peculiar to add another one, but that's precisely what happened at the zoo. Two hundred and eighty tons of granite were moved from the Cascade Range and assembled into a weathered mountain-side—the future home of the zoo's snow leopards.

The transformation of the former giraffe yard into a Himalayan landscape was the culmination of a cooperative venture between the City of Seattle, Woodland Park Zoo, The Seattle Zoological Society and SAFECO Insurance Companies.

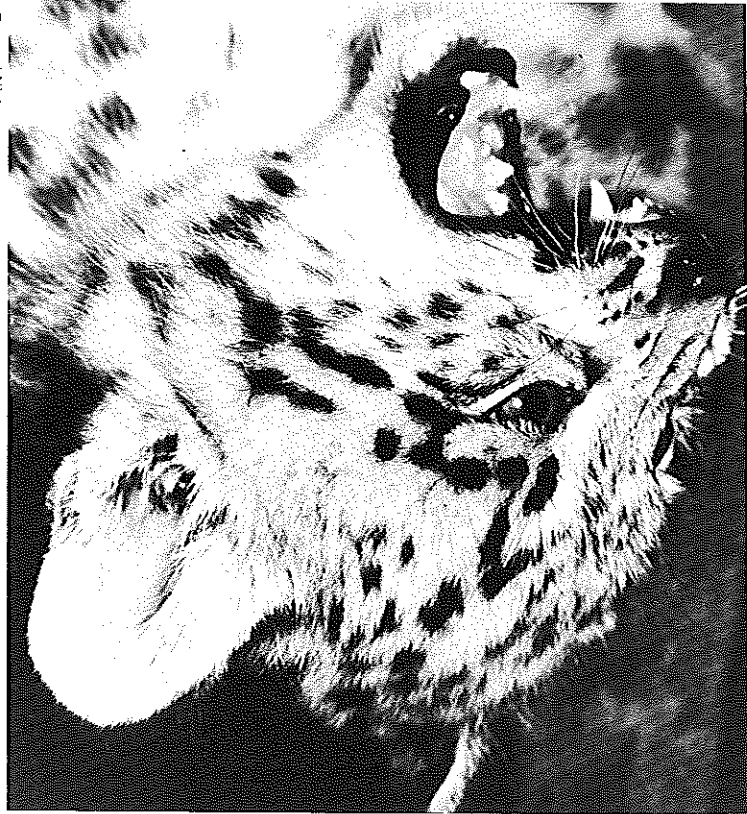
Architects Craig and Lawson along with Thomas L. Berger and Associates, landscape architects, were selected for the project. Their design philosophy was compatible with the zoo's Long Range Plan to develop naturalistic habitats.

The monolithic mountainside clearly qualifies as naturalistic by Himalayan standards, but other elements needed to be considered. More than 70 nurseries from California to British Columbia were contacted to obtain plant materials botanically similar to the vegetation of the Himalayas. It isn't known exactly how the snow leopards will respond to their new exhibit. In the spacious new quarters, their behavior will be monitored—behavior, it is hoped, that will more closely approximate natural activity. Do snow leopards really leap 45 feet? The new exhibit is designed to encourage the animals to jump from point to point while an overhead net contains the action.

Visitors can view the action at a covered overlook where a winding panorama of mammals and mountain ranges offers a breathtaking panoramic view of the snow leopard. Saving this endangered species is a task on the magnitude of moving mountains, and the zoo is clearly making strides in that direction.

Laura Eisen

*creature which lured me on, only seldom permitting a glimpse.* —George B. Schaller



Bernard Nisi

*“Here in this unpeopled night world, the mountains were hers, the eternal desolation of rock and snow investing her with an archaic eternal permanence.”* —George B. Schaller

ducted and coordinated with five other zoos.

Hari Dang of India shared his rare glimpse of two snow leopards leaping across a glacier of a high Himalayan mountain. With less enthusiasm, he described the snow leopard habitat now ravaged by years of border warfare. Techniques of embryo transfer and artificial insemination were discussed by Roger Birkel of the St. Louis Zoo, replacing the need for shipping animals from country to country.

The scope of information of the snow leopard's range in the wild was widened as Kathleen Braden, geography professor at Seattle Pacific University, spoke on the snow leopard in U.S.S.R. preserves. Given the extensive research presented at the symposium, the message for the snow leopard is clear. There is much work to be done, but there is a promising future. International cooperation is again anticipated for the fourth snow leopard symposium: 1984, Krefeld Zoo, West Germany. □