# Introduction to the Seventh International Snow Leopard Symposium

**Full Text:**

With the sponsorship and active participation of China in this symposium, the largest national segment of the snow leopard's distribution is solidly included within internationally cooperative initiatives for conservation action related to this species and its mountain environment. China's rapidly developing experience in both captive management and wild conservation of snow leopard is clearly in evidence within this proceedings, and its inclusion within the international community of conservation activity in central Asia is heartily welcomed by the International Snow Leopard Trust. As evidenced by the high-level political representation at this symposium, the snow leopard's international appeal and its acceptance as a symbol of conservation in central Asia's mountain ecosystems continues to provide a significant public focus to the research and conservation initiatives that affect natural resources management in this region. Overall, the diversity of representatives and contributions to this symposium continues to reflect a widening international interest and participation in the conservation of captive and wild snow leopard populations. Whereas concentration on successful breeding in captivity is clearly stressed as important to zoo-based conservation education and to the lessening of requirements for capture from the wild, participants continue to emphasize more and more strongly the types of research and management necessary for conservation in the wild.

The theme of the symposium, "parks, people and snow leopards", was chosen to point up the need for inclusion of human needs and inputs in the process of biodiversity conservation and protection of endangered species. Inevitable conflict between pastoralists and predators of their livestock will continue to make conservation of snow leopard a very difficult and delicate issue throughout the species' range. Thus, both the gathering of information on snow leopard population and life history as well as on social issues associated with interactions between protection measures for snow leopard and local pastoralist community requirements need to be addressed with equal zeal.

Increasing recognition of the snow leopard as an indicator species of the health of ecosystems in central Asian mountain regions emphasizes the need for good information on both its biology and its interaction with human activities. In this connection the increasingly scientific framework with which ecological issues of snow leopard conservation are being viewed is an important recent development. As we move from surveys and basic status information, still of primary importance in most areas, we must make every effort to take advantage of the latest advances in conservation biology and adaptive approaches to management. We look forward to syntheses of the increasing population and distribution data that will enable us to better assess population trends and the effects of conservation actions already taken. Nevertheless, we must also recognize that progress toward "sustainable development" within snow leopard range will probably involve a modernization of pastoralism, with consequent increases in the relative value of livestock. Potential conflict with a sometimes predator of livestock such as the snow leopard needs to be minimized wherever possible and appropriate actions taken to maintain intact ecosystems that will support this endangered species and others living within its realm.

One of the most important and invigorating aspects of these symposia is the active participation of researchers and managers from the variety of countries that encompass snow leopard range. Many of these individuals have direct responsibility for conservation actions in the wild and in zoos and the opportunity for exchange of ideas and practical experiences at these meetings is highly valued; we thank the International Snow Leopard Trust for continuing to make these possible and hope that this can continue.

A recent reevaluation of the taxonomy of the Felidae published in the latest edition of *Mammal Species of the World* (Wilson, D.E. and D.M. Reader, 1993, Smithsonian Institution, Washington) now places the snow leopard in its own single species genus, *Uncia*. As this is the standard taxonomic reference work for The World Conservation Union (IUCN), World Conservation Monitoring Centre, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), the International Snow Leopard Trust is following suit in making all reference to snow leopard under this new designation. The editors of the present symposium proceedings have therefore standardized all new taxonomic references to snow leopard in this volume as *Uncia uncia*.

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