

Earlier in Kyrgyzstan, snow leopard skins were traded for the equivalent of one horse or five domestic sheep but today skins are worth 30 to 150 times more. Depending on location, snow leopard skins could be obtained during the winter of 1993-94 for a price equal to \$500-2,000 U.S. or 1-4 million rubles, 7-27 thousand somas (local currency). Lynx skins were selling for \$200-500 U.S.; arkhari (*Ovis ammon karelini*) horns \$100-200 U.S. Good examples of horns for hunting displays could be ten times higher. Mountain goat horns were selling two to three times cheaper than arkhari.

The scale of poaching is enormous. During the winter of 1994 in the village of Pokrovka (now called Kyzyl-Su) I saw for sale the skins from snow leopards trapped along the northern slope of the Terskei Alatau in the following river basins: Chon-Kyzyl-Su, Kichi-Kyzyl-Su, Dzhukuchak, Dzhuuka, Chichkan, and Barskaun. Not less than twelve ibex skins and 34 lynx skins were for sale through a dealer. However, not all the lynx skins were fresh; apparently some had been caught in previous years. The general area inhabited by snow leopard in these basins totals 1500 sq km; by lynx, 450 sq km. Thus, the total number of snow leopard and lynx trapped here during the winter of 1993-94 may represent up to half the wild population.

Another ten snow leopard skins which were trapped in the winter of 1993-94 appeared through a dealer in Karakol (formerly called Pokrovka). These animals were caught by a shepherd in the Sary-Dzhaz basin of the Dzhety-Oguzskiy region. More precise determination of the place where they were caught is not possible to determine since they were being sold through a middleman.

My opinion is that the current scale of poaching may be three to four times greater than in previous times. Before the break-up of the USSR, snow leopards were caught especially by hunter-shepherds who lived in remote regions of the Tien Shan, but now people with little experience who are novice hunters are engaging in the activity. The reason is primarily the poverty of local people. In the winter of 1993-94 the value of a snow leopard skin was more than 60 times higher than the minimum yearly wage in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, it is hard to believe that there will be a decrease in poaching in the near future.

## Poaching in the Former USSR

by Eugene Koshkarev

Of the many problems facing the republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan after the break-up of the USSR, poaching of endangered animals is of particular concern. Through the black market, networks of acquaintances, middlemen, or even advertisements in newspapers, everything is up for sale: horns, skins, mounted trophies, animal parts for traditional medicine. Interest in snow leopard and Turkestan lynx (*Lynx lynx isabellinus* Blyth) along with skins and horns from mountain sheep and goats sharply increased in 1992-93, and prices grew unusually high.

Even one of the main prey objects of the snow leopard - the gray marmot (*Marmota baibacina Kastsch*) - is increasingly being sold. Their skins cost the equivalent of three dollars now. Earlier, the maximum number of marmots caught by hunters in a season was 600-800. Today the number is less since the density of marmots has fallen in much of the region.

The main markets are located in Russia and among foreign tourists. However, despite the numerous black markets, there may be a decrease in the number of tourists in Central Asia and Kazakhstan due to instability in the region and the poverty of local people who do not have the means to sell and transfer contraband. Notwithstanding this, dealers for skins and horns are meanwhile continuing to enlarge their net of middlemen, and demand for traps and gun cartridges is not declining.