

For **Blizzard Bag 4**:

6th Grade:

Literature/Reading: Read the article about snow leopards (attached). Write a one-paragraph summary, including the central idea of the article and at least TWO pieces of evidence from the article to support that central idea.

Writing: If you were a conservationist (someone dedicated to making sure plants and animals like the snow leopard survive), what would YOU do to help this cat survive? What suggestions would you have for ANYONE to help the snow leopard or other endangered species, survive? Feel free to problem-solve, innovate, or invent an answer!!

# Endangered Species: The snow leopard

By Gale, Cengage Learning, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.03.18

Word Count **613**

Level **MAX**



Image 1. A snow leopard pictured in a protected area in Kyrgyzstan, a country in central Asia. The area is run by the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union, a German organization that works to restore snow leopard populations and fight against poaching. Photo from: Vyacheslav Oseledko/AFP/Getty Images.

The snow leopard, or ounce, has a beautiful coat of long, pale gray fur with white underneath. Its coat is patterned with solid black spots on its head and legs and dark gray rosettes on the rest of its body. Although it is called a leopard, it is most closely related to the tiger.

An average snow leopard has a head and body length of 48 to 56 inches and weighs 132 to 165 pounds. Its heavy, thickly furred tail measures 32 to 40 inches. The snow leopard has thick chest muscles for climbing and large, heavily padded forepaws for walking through snow. These animals are excellent leapers. They can jump as far as 50 feet in a single bound.

Snow leopards usually hunt at dusk or at night. Although their preferred prey is the bharal, a goatlike mammal, they also hunt yaks, marmots, musk deer and domestic livestock. An individual snow leopard's home range extends from 5 to 15 square miles.

Like other big cats, snow leopards are solitary animals. Males and females come together only to mate in late winter. After a gestation period of 98 to 103 days, a female snow leopard gives birth to

one to four cubs. The cubs nurse for at least two months. They remain dependent on their mother for up to a year.

### Habitat And Population

Snow leopards inhabit mountain ranges in central Asia. Their potential range could cover as much as 1,158,000 square miles, most of which are in China. It is not clear, however, how much of this area snow leopards actually use. Wherever they are found, these rare and endangered animals exist in only sparse populations. Scientists estimated in 2003 that there were between 4,080 and 6,590 mature snow leopards in the wild. They also estimated, however, that only about half of that population was successfully reproducing. So the species' numbers are thought to be declining.

Snow leopards are normally found at altitudes above 9,840 feet. They live in dry alpine regions, which sit above the tree line of high mountains, and slightly lower altitude subalpine regions. During summer months, when their prey moves to higher pastures, snow leopards may climb to an altitude of 13,000 feet.

### History And Conservation

Along with other spotted cats, the snow leopard has long been hunted for its prized coat. Current international treaties protect the animal. However, poachers still hunt down snow leopards and sell the hide or bones illegally. Because some of the animal's habitat is not easy to reach, officials have a difficult time enforcing the snow leopard's protective rights.

Snow leopards are also threatened by human development. As human populations have grown in the region, the snow leopard habitat has been converted into agricultural land for livestock. As a result, the animal's traditional prey has become scarce. Forced to feed on domestic animals, the snow leopard has become a target for angry farm and ranch owners. Livestock can make up as much as 58 percent of the snow leopard's diet in some areas. This creates serious tensions between herders and the cats.

In addition, much of the snow leopard's range is in border areas where there is political turmoil. This makes treaty agreements on conservation difficult. Military activity can also put the leopards in danger.

In 2008 scientists mapped out the snow leopard's range. They were able to highlight areas where conservation is most needed. Still, conservation remains a challenge. Unless large areas of its natural habitat are preserved, the snow leopard will continue to be in jeopardy.

