

Highly adapted to harsh and cold climate conditions, snow leopards have roamed the high, remote mountains of central and south Asia for more than two million years



Hello!

Welcome to your latest snow leopard update



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Your snow leopard adoption updates usually bring you the latest developments from the mountains of Nepal. But your support is also helping us protect these majestic cats across

their range, including in China's Qilian mountains, a rugged range at the north-eastern ridge of the Tibetan Plateau. Since 2017, WWF-China has been working here to survey snow leopards and raise awareness about conserving the region's special wildlife. Turn over to hear from Wang, a dedicated ranger pursuing his dream of seeing the ghost of the mountains with his own eyes. **Thanks for your support!**

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FIELD NOTES

Rugged, remote terrain makes it hard to glimpse snow leopards

GHOSTS IN THE SNOW

Spotting the world's most elusive big cat isn't easy. It takes great teamwork, unwavering determination – and a dash of luck!

More than half of the world's snow leopards live in China, and I'm so proud to be part of the team in the Qilian mountains safeguarding them. I grew up in the mountains and have dedicated my life to monitoring snow leopards, but it was years before I saw one with my own eyes. I have, however, seen them many times through the lenses of camera traps – solid, tantalising proof that they're here.

My team and I have set up cameras across a vast 4,000 sq km of these remote mountains, and it's no easy task. Here, four seasons can unfold in one day, especially when you're climbing to altitudes of almost 5,000m, the lofty peaks where snow

leopards roam. But my trusty flask of green tea and what we call the 'onion rule' – dressing in layers – keep me going.

The erratic weather isn't the only challenge. We were on our way to our monitoring site, where we'd set up camp a week earlier, when our vehicle became stuck in an icy riverbed. We had no option but to radio for help.

Leaving a bit of time between pitching the tents and actually sleeping in them allows any snow leopards in the area to become accustomed to our presence, giving us the best possible chance of spotting them. But by the time we arrived, the snow had melted, along with any traces of big cats that might have passed.

Fortunately, this was just the starting point in our quest to see a snow leopard. The cats are most active at dawn and dusk, and my teammate had spotted blue sheep – snow leopards' favourite prey – on the

Even from a distance, the snow leopard's powerful presence can be felt



Waiting patiently...



There they are!

...for the perfect picture

mountainside opposite our camp. Could today be the day we finally caught a glimpse of the ghost of the mountains? Determined, we divided up our workload: two of us cooking while the other pair kept a close eye on the slopes. As the sunlight waned and our dinner grew cold, so did our hopes.

This is how most days go. Snow leopards are elusive, and they're spread thinly across their expansive range. Spotting one is like finding a needle in a haystack – and this particular needle is well camouflaged. Yet we're always optimistic, and it's exhilarating to spend the night in snow leopard territory. I often wonder if they're watching us and if they're curious about us.

The next day, fresh tracks in the snow revived our flagging spirits. We were exhausted, but my teammate resolutely set up his equipment at a viewpoint, his eyes fixed on the peaks opposite. Time stretched out, then he softly said: "Wang, take a look...". I peered through his binoculars and there, perched majestically on the mountaintops, were two snow leopards. Though they were distant, you could still sense their kingly demeanour.

Dropping the binoculars, I made a dash for the camera, positioned and ready for this long-awaited moment – and finally got the photo I'd dreamed of. As the snow leopards melted back into the landscape, we shared awestruck glances, knowing we would cherish the memory of this fleeting yet unforgettable encounter with these most extraordinary creatures. Until we meet again!

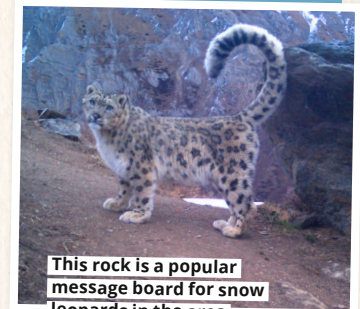
Wang

BIG CATS, SNAPPED

In Nepal's Shey Phoksundo National Park our camera traps have captured some fantastic photos of snow leopards, shedding more light on these elusive cats.



This snow leopard's eyes are glowing due to a layer of reflective tissue that helps them see in poor light



This rock is a popular message board for snow leopards in the area



Cresting a peak against a stunning mountain backdrop