

**BOOYAH**  
SAVE UP TO 90% ON LOCAL EATS

**GROUPON**  
See Today's Deal

## Environment News Service

International Daily Newswire Since 1990 We Cover the Earth for You

Home About Services Subscribe News Index Search Contact World-Wire

**Levi's**

**WATER<LESS**  
AN ENTIRELY  
NEW WAY OF  
MAKING JEANS.

LEARN MORE

### Snow Leopards Found in Nepal's Langtang National Park

By Deepak Gajurel

**KATHMANDU, NEPAL**, March 24, 2006 (ENS) - The mercury is below 10 degrees Celsius on this shiny morning in February 2006. A team of five researchers is exploring for traces of snow leopards. They walk randomly, yet systematically, on the snow-blanketed terrain. Suddenly, one of the biologists sees a series of pugmarks on the snow.

"The pugmarks are of snow leopard," declares Dr. Randall Kyes, after inspection. Associate professor at the University of Washington in Seattle, Dr. Kyes is the team leader of this two week long snow leopard research mission in Nepal's Langtang National Park.

"We have also found urine marks, scrapes and scats of snow leopards in the area," Professor Kyes says. "We have confirmed that snow leopards roam in Langtang National Park."

On the basis of evidence collected, the scientists have confirmed that the population of snow leopards, *Uncia uncia*, in Langtang National Park is at least five to 10 individuals. This is the first time that a snow leopard population in Langtang has been scientifically confirmed.

Scientists have been observing probable habitat, tracks and pugmarks, collecting scats, observing urine spray, identifying scrapes, tracing study blocks and sign transects, camera trapping and surveying prey species.



**Dr. Randall Kyes studies a snow leopard urine mark in Langtang National Park.** (Photo courtesy Dr. Mukesh Chalise)

Based on sightings, reports and anecdotal oral history, the

presence of snow leopards has been suggested in eight mountain protected areas of Nepal. They are Annapurna Conservation Area, Shey Phoksundo National Park, Kangchenjunga Conservation Area, Manaslu Conservation Area, Makalu Barun National Park, Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, Sagarmatha National Park and Langtang National Park.

Snow leopards are distributed along Nepal's northern frontier, especially in the districts of Mustang, Mugu, Dolpa and Humla.

**You Can Save The Planet**  
Real Science.  
Real Choices.  
Real Consequences.

**Play Fate of the World**  
Buy Now

#### ENS Video News



Salmon poaching on Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula could wipe out the entire fish stock.



#### Today's Press Releases

[Whistleblower Film Incriminates Sarawak Chief Minister](#)

[Eco-Dogs.com Launches Site for Eco-Friendly Pet Owners](#)

[Responsible Bathroom Water Conservation Tour Shows Americans How to Reduce the Use](#)

[A Long Journey to TED](#)

[Canada, UK Governments Urged to Freeze Taib Assets](#)

[FBI's Seattle Office to See Embarrassing Anti-corruption Protest](#)

[Canadian Government Under Fire Over Taib Ties](#)

[Anti-Taib Campaign to Be Taken to the Streets of London and Ottawa](#)

A habitat suitability index model of snow leopard habitat in Nepal's northern frontier suggests an estimated population of 350-500 animals in Nepal, which constitutes one-tenth of the world's snow leopard population, according to World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Nepal program.

However, to date no scientific study has been carried out in other probable snow leopard habitats.

It is estimated that there are about 4,510 to 7,350 snow leopards remaining anywhere in the world. The total potential snow leopard habitat is about 1.83 million square kilometers in 12 snow leopard range countries.

In addition, some 600 to 700 animals survive in zoos around the world.

Despite Nepal's continued efforts to save the snow leopard, its long-term viability is threatened by the conflict from livestock depredation and retaliatory killings, poaching, and loss of habitat because of high density of livestock in grazing areas.

**Snow leopards are found only in the mountains of central Asia and the Himalayas.** (Photo credit unknown)

The snow leopard-human conflict is one of the main threats to the species' survival because snow leopards are known to kill sheep, goats, horses, and yak calves. Degradation of snow leopard habitat continues due to year-round grazing pressure following the closure of the Tibetan border some 30 years ago.



As snow leopards are opportunistic predators, they often kill livestock because of high encounter rates and ineffective guarding by herders.

Poaching is primarily associated with the trade in snow leopard pelts, bones, and body parts that are used in oriental medicines. As an illicit trans-border market exists between northern frontiers of Nepal and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, poaching has become lucrative.

Wildlife experts say that snow leopard bone is replacing tiger bone in South East Asian and Chinese market where it is prized for its supposedly high medicinal values.

Poachers are also targeting this flagship species of the Himalayas for its bones and fur. In 2003, police intercepted body parts and fur of snow leopards from

[EXCLUSIVE: The Black List of Taib's Secret Foreign Assets](#)

[Bruno Manser Fund to Launch International Campaign Against Sarawak Timber Corruption](#)

[Malaysian Government Fears Anti-Taib Protests](#)

[Cousteau Finds Ideal Sunscreen: Protecting Both Humans and Ocean](#)

['Boycott the Baggie' Encourages Consumers to Take the Pledge and Go Green](#)

['Partnering with Nature' Wins Best Social Change Book 2010](#)

Post Your Press Release  
on World-Wire

License ENS News  
for websites and newsletters

[Send a news story to ENS editors](#)

[Upload environmental news videos](#)

Share ENS stories with the world





**Tell Your Story to the Environmental World**

*Press release distribution for the green marketplace*

<http://www.world-wire.com>

a hotel in Thamel area of Kathmandu. They were reportedly being trafficked out of Nepal.

Global warming may also have a negative impact on the survival of snow leopards because they live just above the treeline and below the permanent snow line.

"Because of climate change and decreasing snow line, snow leopards are moving higher where vegetation is scarcer and its prey species, which depend on vegetation, are absent," says biologist Dr. Mukesh Chalise, an associate professor at Tribhuvan University in Nepal.



**Camera trap set to catch snow leopard images**  
(Photo courtesy Dr. Mukesh Chalise)

The government

of Nepal has legally protected the snow leopard by including it in the list of protected animals in the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (NPWC) Act 2029 (1973).

Additionally, the Fourth Amendment of the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (NPWC) Act imposes penalties up to NRs.100,000 (US\$1,400) or five to 15 years in prison, or both, for poaching snow leopards or trading in their pelts and bones.

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species has listed the snow leopard as Endangered.

Since 1973, the species has been protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which makes trafficking of snow leopards or their parts illegal in all signatory countries.

To conserve the snow leopard the government of Nepal has been implementing an Action Plan that was prepared in 2003 in collaboration with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Nepal Program and King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC).

The Action Plan realizes the limitations on effective conservation, including scant information on snow leopard distribution in Nepal, limited knowledge in understanding its complex ecology in a harsh mountain environment, incremental loss for poorer households through livestock depredation and the illicit trans-border trade in endangered wildlife products.

**Langtang Valley in Nepal's Langtang National Park is inhabited by the rare lesser panda**



**and musk deer as well as snow leopards.** (Photo courtesy [Fishtail Treks](#))

The Action Plan recommends 44 program activities requiring US\$2.92 million over a period of 10 years for scientific conservation of this endangered species.

"There is a need to have a comprehensive study first," says Narendra Khadka, a biologist at Tribhuvan University. "We must first have an inventory of the number, habitat and situation of snow leopards. Only then can we talk about its conservation and how to minimize conflict between the animals and local people."

Realizing the need of extensive scientific study, scientists from the United States and Nepal have been collaborating in the cause of snow leopard conservation.

Since 2002, researchers from the University of Washington and Tribhuvan University have done the snow leopard study in Langtang National Park; they have provided training in conservation biology to Nepali environmental journalists and students in the Masters of Science program; and have conducted a public awareness program at the grassroots level in the Langtang area.

These efforts are part of an ongoing collaboration between former Fulbright Scholars Dr. Chalise and Dr. Kyes. "This collaboration is an excellent example of how Fulbright grants can lead to a long-term relationship that benefits the former Fulbright scholars, their students, and respective countries," says Dr. Chalise.

"Our collaboration has started bearing fruit. We have gathered scientific evidences on snow leopard in Langtang National Park. Two Nepali students have completed their M. Sc. thesis on snow leopard," says Dr. Kyes, who heads the Division of International Programs at the University of Washington's National Primate Research Center.

"We have been involving environmental journalists in our annual training programs and field study. This has resulted into better understanding of snow leopard conservation in Nepal among media persons here," says Dr. Kyes. "This is evident in recent media reports."