

# Snow Leopards

Snow leopards are part of the cat family. They are one of several big cats. Their scientific name is *Panthera uncia*. Snow leopards live in the taiga biome. The taiga is also known as the snow forest biome and is located in central Asia. Their habitat includes areas in China, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, and Mongolia. Snow leopards are white with black spots. Their spots are not solid but patterned. They are carnivores. Being carnivores, they only eat meat (other animals). Common prey are blue sheep, ibex, hare, and wild birds. They are elusive, so they are not seen frequently by humans.

## Adaptations

Snow leopards have adapted to their unique environment. They live in very snowy forests. Because of the amount of snow they must walk through, their paws are very wide. This adaptation helps because their paws act like snowshoes, making it easier to walk on soft snow without too much effort.

Often snow leopards dwell in areas with steep, rocky cliffs. Because of this, snow leopards are agile jumpers. This ability allows them to jump from rock to rock and to catch prey efficiently. Snow leopards can jump up to 50 feet! Also, their long tails help them balance as they carefully move across their rocky territory.

## Threats

Snow leopards are classified as vulnerable. This means that they risk becoming endangered. Scientists hypothesize that there are only between 4,500 and 10,000 in the wild. It is difficult to be precise because snow leopards are difficult to observe.

There are many threats to snow leopards. One major threat is human habitation. Many areas in the taiga have been cleared for grazing land for animals. Also, because the snow leopards are known to attack sheep and other herd animals, they are often hunted because of their damage to the herds. Poaching is another threat.

Finally, climate change is changing the range of snow leopards. Because of this, they may have to compete with other predators for their prey.

