

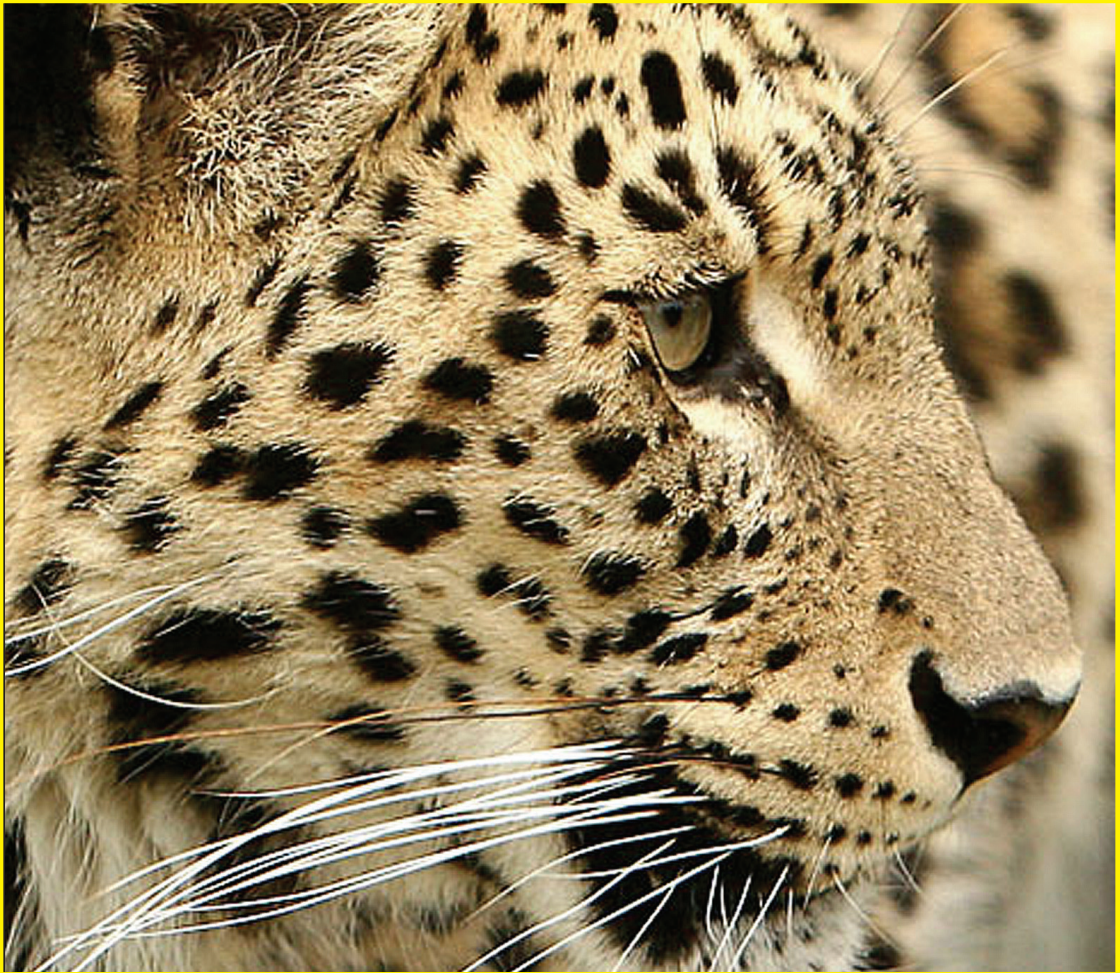
# Persian Leopard



Newsletter

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## A YEAR FOR LEOPARDS

The expansion of Mongols throughout Asia was accompanied by a breaking down of political, commercial and intellectual barriers from China to the Crimea. One of the least conspicuous but most durable results of the Mongol conquest of Persia (Iran) was the introduction of the “Turkish” twelve-animal calendar. Despite of being modified, and replaced by Jalali Lunar Calendar, these animal signs are still a part of Persian (Iranian) calendar and present through the past centuries. Leopard, as one of the twelve-animals, is the symbol of Iranian New Year (1389) started at the beginning of the spring 2010. Regarding to endangered status of the Persian leopard in the country and other parts of its highly fragmented range, it is a great opportunity to celebrate it in order to spread research efforts more on this elusive cat, and deal more significantly with conservation needs of the species in order to ensure its survival in Iran. Persian Leopard Newsletter, which you are reading its first issue, is an electronic newsletter published by the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) in order to reflect latest research, educational, and conservation activities and achievements as well as relevant news about the species in Iran. It is published each two months and will cover all the leopard activities within the Year of Leopard in Iran.



Mammals of the World 2009



Portrait of a leopard in “Manafi al-Hayawan (Uses of Animals)”, in Persian-Persia, Maragheh, dated 1294, 1297-Abu Sa’d’ Ubayd-Allah ibn Ibrahim, known as Ibn Bakhtishu. ©The Morgan Library and Museum

## FACTS ABOUT LEOPARDS IN IRAN

Formerly, the leopards existed in most parts of Iran, except along shores of Oman Sea and Persian Gulf in south as well as Caspian Sea areas in north. They also avoid hot deserts of Lut and Kavir. Presently, their range has been confined to less-disturbed areas where there is a minimum based of prey. Fortunately, their present distribution is still known to cover all 30 provinces in the country. Based on latest status assessment of the Persian leopards in Iran, they are confirmed to roam within at least 130 areas throughout the country. Their habitats have been less fragmented in northern half of Iran, particularly along Hyrcanian forests and Khorasan in northeast. In south, particularly Baluchestan, they occur in patchy habitats which is a serious concern for their long-term survival.

# THE PERSIAN LEOPARD IN IRANIAN BALUCHESTAN

**B**aluchestan is the main territory of southeastern Iran, neighboring the Pakistan Baluchestan. It has a desert biome with unique fauna. However, due to remoteness and lack of security, scientific surveys have been rarely conducted in this region.


There are at least 5 areas in whole the Iranian Baluchestan confirmed to hold the Persian leopard, namely as Sarbaz, Nikshahr, Taftan, Bazman and the most important, Birk Protected Area. It is roughly guesstimated that no more than 27 leopards exist in whole the Iranian Baluchestan.

Birk is considered to hold the largest population of the animal with a minimum population of leopards. It has been located in Saravan and Khash counties, at least 6 hours driving southward from the capital city of Zahedan. Birk Protected Area is one of few reserves in southeastern Iran which is mainly consisted of a long mountainous chain of around 100 kilometers extending from north to the Pakistan border. This 70,000 hectares area is also supposed to hold small number of the Asiatic black bear; however, it is a few years

that it has not been reported from the area.

During 2008, the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) conducted the first leopard survey in southeastern Iran to identify the leopard range and probably getting an insight into the leopard population. Local game wardens were empowered to conduct Persian leopard surveys, particularly using camera traps. They were also provided with a number of camera traps in order to set with aim of Baluch nomads. Preliminary surveys indicated that serious conflict between leopard and local Baluch nomads exist, but due to some local beliefs, the nomads do not shoot the leopards. It was estimated that a total of 10 to 20 livestock, mainly domestic goat are killed monthly by the leopards and since there is no alternative source of income for local nomads, it is a great loss with respect to small size of their herds. So far, 2 different individuals were captured by camera traps in 2 different locations of this elongated reserve, the adult male within the core zone, but the other adult one outside in north. Also, female leopards have been encountered a few times to be accompanied by 2 yearlings.



 An adult male sniffing an olfactory sign scrape in Birk Protected Area / Sistan & Baluchestan DoE

# LEOPARD TRAINING COURSES FOR EXPERTS

Recently, two training courses have been held to empower Iranian experts about the Persian leopard. They were organized by the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) within two central offices of Department of Environment (DOE) in Zanjan and Lorestan provinces, western Iran. Lorestan province possesses a relatively high frequency of leopard poaching in the country; however, the DOE experts were less empowered how to study, monitor and conserve this big cat. Also, northern



M. Eslami

## LEOPARD FOOTAGE

**B**afq Wildlife Refuge is located in central country where hosted the first radio-telemetry study on Asiatic cheetah and Persian leopard by Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project (CACP) and WCS/Panthera. Also, the rare cheetahs have been filmed there for more than 5 times, but no leopard was shot until recently.



Ali Khajeie, a game warden in Bafq WR, managed to shoot a 20 minutes film of an adult Persian leopard which is one of the longest footages ever taken from the species in Iran. The leopard was walking along foothills to a rocky hollow, but was not aware that it is an actor. It seemed unhappy; it just lost a herd of wild goat before any hunting effort. Ali heard the leopard's roar.

Zanjan province where adjoins Iranian Caucasus witnessed leopard poaching, mainly by herders. Formerly, the animals was not considered enough important as a top predator within their habitat nor proper sampling was implemented when a dead leopard was found.

During the traing courses, a total of 15 experts learnt latest findings of leopard investigation in Iran as well as abroad. They were also educated how to sample and implement biometry for the killed animals for later analysis. Also, they experienced field tecnniques necessary to investigate and conserve the Persian leopard in the wild. Training courses had a good outcome. Just during March 2010, Lorestan DOE was successful to find 2 leopards (due to incident and poaching); however, the success was when they called the ICS to inform us that they have removed the body, but after conducting a complete necropsy and sampling operation for the first found animal, a young male with empty stomach.

## MORTALITIES



In order to record and store mortality data properly, the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) has established and updated a database for the Persian leopard since 2002. During 2009, 32 leopards were confirmed to be poached/killed due to human causes. We were successful to determine their sexes in 16 cases which were similar 8 males: 8 females. 4 animals were killed in road incidents, but poaching, mainly due to conflict with local people accounted for rest of mortalities.



## LEOPARD LOSS COUNTER (MARCH & APRIL 2010)



Four Persian leopard were killed, including an adult male leopard poisoned in Gilan province and a young male killed in railroad incident in Lorestan



## SARIGOL NATIONAL PARK

**A**s one of the most important leopard's habitat in Iran, Sarigol National Park is located in North Khorasan Province with an area of 7037 ha. This area is a part of Sarigol protected area which has been protected since 1973 was separated and promoted to national park in 2002. The altitude range of 1400 to 2940 m, and mean annual temperature and precipitation of 14o C and 273 mm, respectively have given the region a temperate semi-arid climate.

Sarigol is one of the main habitats for Urial wild sheep. Meanwhile, there is a small population of wild goat in western national park. The Persian leopard is the main predator within the area as well as grey wolf and striped hyena. Wild cat and Manul's cat are two identified cat species in Sarigol. Sarigol National Park has been hosting the longest still ongoing research project on Persian leopard since 2005 in Iran. Population estimation has been done with application of camera trapping technology and feeding ecology investigation has revealed that the leopards mainly prey on Urials with a significant bias toward adult rams. They are not successful to raise more than 2 cubs is similar to most of other Iranian leopard habitats.

Local communities have been also educated about the Persian leopard, mostly through



school workshops within 9 villages around Sarigol. Results of Project Persian Leopard have been transferred to decision-makers in order to be applied for developing conservation measures. Fortunately, hunting permissions legally issued to hunters have been significantly decreased. Presently, a documentary movie is being produced by Fathollah Amiri, head of wildlife movie section which has been established since 2008 within the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS).

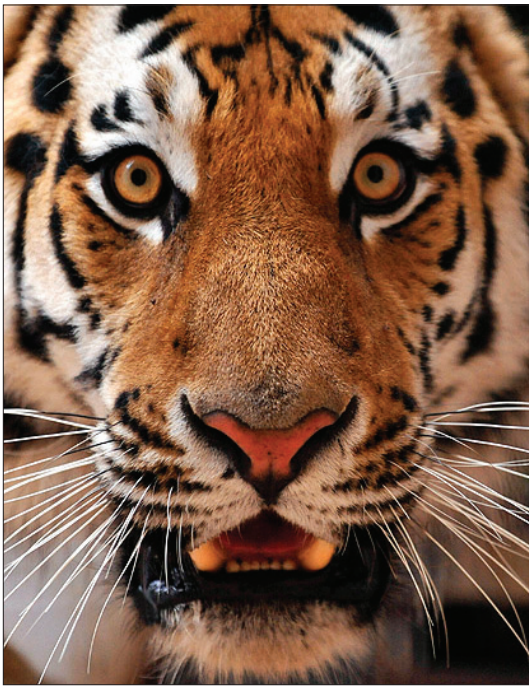
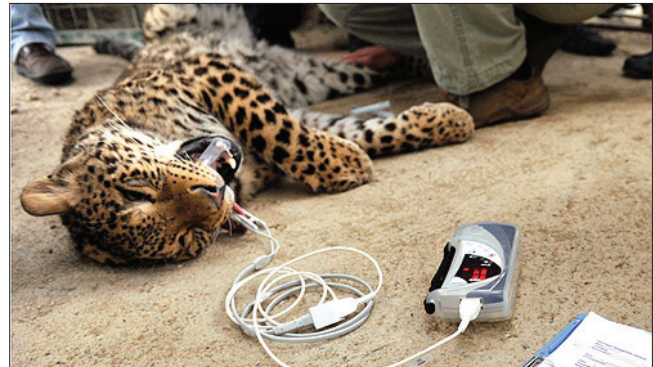


# IRAN HELPS TO RESTORE PERSIAN LEOPARD IN **RUSSIA**

**I**n order to restore Persian leopard population in Caucasus, Russia is establishing a breeding program in Suchi, European Russia. The founder population is composed of two adult males from Turkmenistan (near Iranian border) as well as two females from northern Iran which were exchanged with two Siberian tigers on 23 April 2010 in the capital of Tehran. According to the IUCN Red List, the most optimistic population number of Persian leopards within Caucasian countries (i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia) is no more than 50 animals left. Within the Iranian Caucasus, recent surveys indicate that at least 40 animals exist. There are some sporadic reports of leopards in Russia, but it is believed that the animals became extirpated a few decades ago in Suchi area.

On the other hand, the last Caspian tigers in Iran disappeared some half a century ago, but recent genetic studies have revealed that the Siberian tiger is the closest relative to the extinct Caspian tiger. Thus, Iran asked Russia

to receive a breeding pair to repopulate the Caspian tiger range in northern Iran through a long-term initiative which has been subject to serious controversial and debate between experts at national and international level.



Photos: ISNA

## **SPECIAL THANKS TO ...**

The Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) would like to thank the following people and organizations for their generous support to save the Persian leopards in Iran:

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We still need your help to save the vanishing Persian leopards in Iran



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**Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS)** is a non-governmental, non-profitable organization devoted to save the biodiversity which is so rich, but disappearing in Iran. Carnivores have essential priority within the ICS activities and various research and conservation projects have been implemented on the species, such as Asiatic cheetah, brown bear, striped hyeana, grey wolf, Eurasian lynx, caracal, mustelids and Persian leopard whose more than two third of its wild population occurs in Iran. It has been established in 2001 (registration number 13640) and hopes to celebrate its first decade of biodiversity conservation soon.



To learn more about Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS)  
visit: [www.wildlife.ir](http://www.wildlife.ir)