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A SHORT REVIEW ON THE STATUS OF THE LEOPARD, Panthera pardus ciscaucasica (saxicolor), IN THE SOUTHWEST USSR.

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Within the USSR, Panthera pardus ciscaucasica (saxicolor) is now seriously threatened with extinction. According to recent estimates, the numbers of leopards in the northern macroslope of the Greater Caucasus hardly exceeds 10 individuals (Gineyev and Abdurakhmanov, 1988). They are scattered over the vast space of the Krasnodar and Stavropol Provinces, and of the Kabardin-Balkar, Chechen-Ingush, and Daghestan ASSR. Within this area, they are permanently found only in the Kabardino-Balkarsky Reserve (741 km<sup>2</sup>) where a number of sightings have been reported since 1982, including a group of three leopards that were encountered in 1985 by a forester in Chegem Canyon (Aiyunts and Shalybkov, 1990). Leopards are also likely to be present in the highlands of the Tooshetsky Reserve (125 km<sup>2</sup>) in the Eastern Caucasus of Georgian SSR (Chykovany et al, 1990). In the adjacent Daghestan ASSR, an adult male was killed in November, 1981 (Spasskaya and Saidaliyeva, 1982).

In Azerbaijan, the leopard is extremely rare. Solitary individuals are found in the south-eastern part of this republic (Talysh), and in the Nakhichevan ASSR from which they enter the Karabakh Upland Region (Alekperov et al, 1977). In Armenia 73 leopards were killed from 1952 to 1971, of which 54 were killed during 1967-1971, and 16 in 1971. Since 1972, killing has been forbidden and while the range of the leopard in Armenia has increased greatly, there is only one nature reserve within this range where habitats are fully protected. This reserve, the Khosrovsky (Garni) Reserve (292 km<sup>2</sup>) has perhaps 5 leopards as permanent residents (Airumyan and Gasparyan, 1977).

In Central Asia the leopard appears to be extinct in the mountains of southwest Tajikistan (Sokov, 1977). In the southwest Kopet Dagh, Turkmen SSR, leopards are found over the entire region from lower mountains (400-600 m) in the West to higher ones (1600-1800 m) in the East. According to Lukarevsky (1987), 25-30 leopards were living in the 3000 km<sup>2</sup> Sumbar River basin in 1984-86, of which 7 were adult females and 4 adult males. In the fully protected Syunt-Hasardagh Reserve (297 km<sup>2</sup>), however, their numbers rarely exceed 10 animals, including transients because natural recruitment is lost to direct persecution by local people living near the Reserve (Danov, 1987).

In the Central Kopet-Dagh, leopards are fully protected in the Kopet Dagh Reserve (500 km<sup>2</sup>). Although their numbers are not known, sightings are increasingly common due to the recovery of ungulate populations, a decrease in poaching, and the presence of

two wildlife sanctuaries, the Meana-Chaachinsky (600 km<sup>2</sup>) and Kalininsky (150 km<sup>2</sup>) Sanctuaries, adjacent to the Reserve (German and Tyrlyshkin, 1990). The presence of leopards in unprotected areas of the Central Kopet Dagh has recently been confirmed by the discovery of a young leopard at the bottom of the Golubinoye Gorge on 5 May, 1987; this individual apparently died after falling down a steep precipice (Vishnyatshky, 1988).

The future of leopard populations in the Badhyz Reserve (876 km<sup>2</sup>) is also of serious concern due to a gradual decrease in its size. There are currently less than 10 individual reported living in the Reserve (Sokolov et al, 1990).

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