

# Persian Leopard



Newsletter

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Farzaneh

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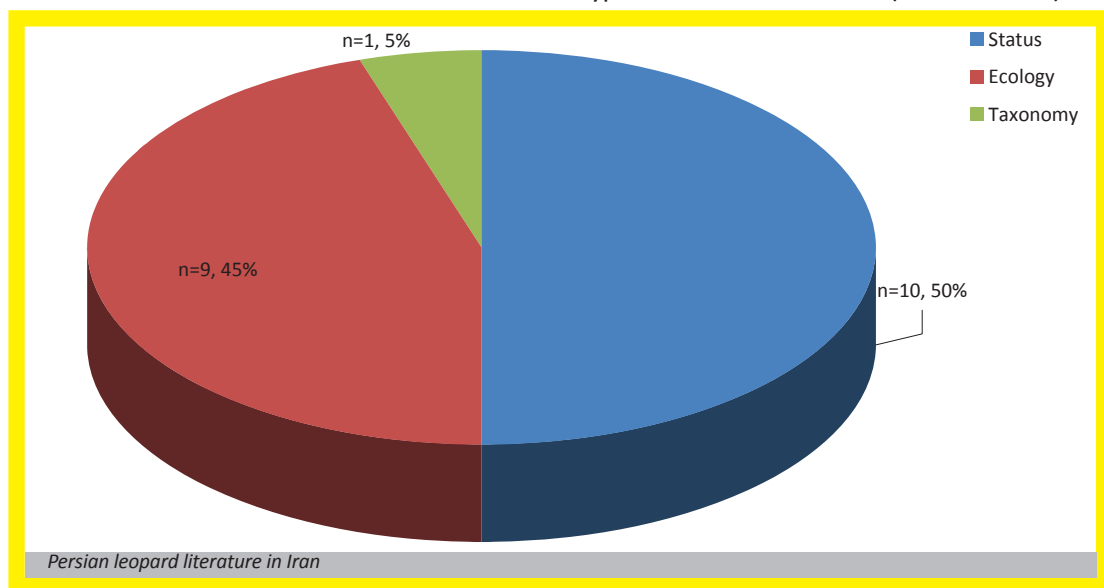
## THE PERSIAN LEOPARD; FORMERLY LEAST-STUDIED, BUT NOW AMONG THE MOST STUDIED MAMMALS IN IRAN

Probably one of the most intensively investigated mammals of Iran, Persian leopards have recently attracted constant attention of zoologists and research has progressed over the past decade on various aspects.

The animal first came into modern literature in Misonne (1959) and Lay (1967). Then it was described within a number of Iranian books, first in Mammals of Iran, co-authored by Harrington and Dareshuri (1976) with the most detailed description in Jamshid's Big Game of Iran (1976). In 1985, Etemad, the Iranian zoologist, compiled all the scientific publications and presented species profile in his invaluable book Mammals of Iran. In his book, he presented data on taxonomy of the leopards within the Iranian range. Joslin who was managing carnivore conservation in the Iranian Department of Environment (DoE) during mid-1970s also published a typescript, namely as "Leopards in Iran" in 1990 with a brief review about the species ecology. In 1996, Ziaie "A Field Guide to Mammals of Iran" illustrated

generally ecology and status of the leopards in Iran, then updated in 2008's second edition.

However, the animal has never been studied specifically in Iran until 2002 when Kiabi et al's classic paper, entitled as "Population status of the Persian leopard in Iran" was published. Afterward, the animal has been extensively/intensively researched within a number of habitats in the country with up-to 10 university thesis on the species. Absence-presence surveys have been a main field for recent studies, conducted within various areas; however, camera trapping approaches is going to be more accepted among the Iranian biologists. Meanwhile, food habits and habitat evaluation are considered as the most intensively studied ecological aspects of the leopards in Iran. Since 2002, almost ten scientific papers and reports have been internationally published by the Iranian biologists and now beside the Asiatic cheetah; the Persian leopard is going to be the most-studied cat in Iran. To learn more about the available literatures on the species, you can visit Library section of "Year of Leopard" hyperlink on the ICS website ([www.wildlife.ir](http://www.wildlife.ir)).



# THE **LARGEST** LEOPARD SKULL IN THE WORLD!



**A**s the largest subspecies, the Persian leopards have large skulls comparing to other subspecies. In a recent survey in Iran, craniometrical variables of more than 70 specimens across the country were measured and they compared by more than 150 animals outside Iran within the entire range of the leopard in Asia and Africa (presented in Meijard 2004 and Khorozyan et al. 2006). Measurements of an exceptionally big male were presented in Kiabi et al 2002 which was recently again measured precisely. It has the greatest length and

zygomatic breadth of 281.35 and 178.95 mm, respectively which means that this male has had the largest ever-recorded skull of the leopards in the world. The animal has been found in Golestan National Park (GNP), northeastern Iran in 1980s and is now kept by Dr. Bahram Kiabi (Faculty of Biosciences, Shahid Beheshti University) in Tehran. The animal has been in good tooth, particularly its canines. The measurements indicate that the animal has been as large as an adult female tiger which once occurred within GNP.

## PERSIAN LEOPARD'S TECHNICAL MANUALS

The “Year of Leopard” committee has had various efforts to increase scientific knowledge on leopard issues among experts and students in Iran. Spreading scientific results of leopard studies to provincial DoE offices is one of the plans which is pursued. Novel methods to study leopard status and conservation needs are the main subject of the articles. As the first volume, “Reproduction ecology of Persian leopard in Sarigol National Park-North east Iran” has translated in Persian and released. The study was done by a team of ICS researchers and published in 2009 in journal of Zoology in the Middle East. The survey was carried out from April 2005-March 2008 and camera



traps were used in mating seasons to roughly assess the leopard reproduction ecology. Results show that mating season of the Persian leopard extends from mid-January to a peak in mid-February. Meantime, no sign of raising more than 2 cubs were found.

## LEOPARDS OF IRAN IN WILDLIFE MIDDLE EAST

As a high-quality information resource, the quarterly “Wildlife Middle East News” is dedicated to present the most recent activities concerning vanishing wildlife of the Middle East and surrounding region. In its September issue, an article is released explaining ICS’ goal of celebrating this year as the “Year of Leopard”, with a focus on the Persian Leopard Newsletter. This issue, along with others, is available to download on: [www.wmenews.com](http://www.wmenews.com)

### LEOPARD FOOTAGE

People who have spent years in search of the Persian leopard perfectly know that sighting the elusive cat



is a manner of chance, not skill. Ehsan Ranjbaran’s story could be a proof for this! Indeed, during sport climbing in vicinity of Taleghan - a small town near the capital of Tehran – he encountered a large animal far away and hardly was able to recognize the leopard resting on top of a rocky terrain. Ehsan’s spotting is one of the few confirmed records of the leopard presence in Tehran, though historically; the animal flourished in many parts of the province.

## LEOPARDS IN IRAN’S WIDELY-CIRCULATED PRINT NEWSPAPER!

A statement is released by Farshid Jafarzadeh, ICS’ Year of Leopard coordinator, in Hamshahri Newspaper, one of the top circulated daily newspapers of Iran. The article, entitled as

“A New Era for Leopards in Iran”, discussed the threats to the today largest cats of country and addressed urgent activities to guarantee the survival of animal within its last stronghold.

## EDUCATION FOR CONSERVATION IN YAZD

**O**n 26 October 2010, a mid-day workshop was held, entitled as “Ecology and Conservation of Persian Leopard in Iran” in Yazd, Central Iran. Organized for the experts of Iranian Department of the Environment (DoE), the workshop was held at central conference hall of the Yazd DoE. Meanwhile, students and professors of Yazd University were also invited to attend in the workshop.

The workshop covered various issues about the leopards with a brief overview on the leopards across the province. Also, food habits, territoriality, habitat selection, etc. were described and finally, human dimensions of the leopard conservation were discussed.

Yazd province possesses various habitats for the Persian leopard in central Iran with a number of well-known habitats, particularly Kalmand and Bafq where the latter hosted the first radio-telemetry study on the species across the range of Persian leopard in west Asia, led by CACP, UNDP, DoE, WCS and Panthera in 2007. Local educational programs were implemented in Bafq by the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) in 2002-2007 to save its unique cats, especially Asiatic cheetah and Persian leopard. Since early 2010, the ICS is working in Kalmand where is supposed to be a good habitat for the leopards in the province to empower local people for effective conservation of the cats. A complete report will be released



on coming issue of the Persian Leopard Newsletter on this project.

### VIVA FOR A LEOPARD THESIS!

**E**lmira Shaerbafi, a research associate at ICS, defended her master thesis entitled as “Diet of Persian leopard in different habitats of Golestan National Park” in the past month. The study was conducted for 18 months in the area, as one of the main leopard habitats in Iran. During the study, 115 scat samples were collected and microscopically analyzed. Results indicated variety of preys in diet of Persian leopard, as well as trying to answer whether differences in its food habits in different seasons and habitats is scientifically meaningful. Details on this study will be published in the next issue.

### LEOPARD LOSS COUNTER (SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2010)



**N**o confirmed leopard mortality during the past two months was reported. However, rumors were

highlighted possible poaching of another male (?) leopard in Lorestan province which has not been indicated to us yet.

# TOURAN BIOSPHERE RESERVE

**T**ouran (Khar-Touran) Complex is the second largest wildlife reserve in Iran situated in southeastern Shahrud, Semnan province. Covering 1.4 million ha, the area comprises of National Park (8%), Wildlife Refuge (17%) and Reserve (75%). Touran National Park (TNP) supports a high diversity of Iranian mammals and has been listed by UNESCO as one of the World Heritage Sites. Meanwhile, the park acts as a

protected area for two critically endangered species, Asiatic cheetah, and one of the only two remained free-living populations of the Persian wild ass (Onager) in Iran which once estimated to be more than 2500 but now reduced to less than 300. According to Conservation of the Asiatic Cheetah Project's (CACP) 2010 annual report, the highest number of cheetah observation


among the ten [currently] known habitats of the cat in Iran has occurred in TNP. Several groups of 3 to even 4 have been photo-captured by wardens and enthusiastic visitors strengthening the hope for continuous survival of this vanishing cat in

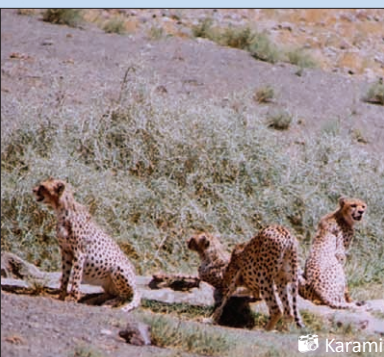
Iran.

Although Touran is well-known for its cheetahs, but the Persian leopard thrives within the park, mainly in mountainous landscapes of the semi-arid region. Several by-catch pictures of the animal were obtained during extensive camera-trapping surveys to assess the cheetah population in TNP by CACP. The leopards in Touran mainly roam within two main mountainous chains of the area, preying on wild sheep and wild goat. In 2002, an adult male leopard was filmed on an onager kill. So far, the animal has been captured by camcorders and cameras no more than 5 times in the area.

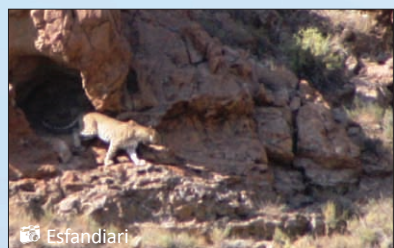
TNP Also serves as a renowned habitat for caracals in Iran. Moreover, there are several reports of sand cat observation as well as unconfirmed reports of lynx observation inside the park. Occurrence of both goitered gazelle and chinkara is another issue showing invaluable of the reserve.



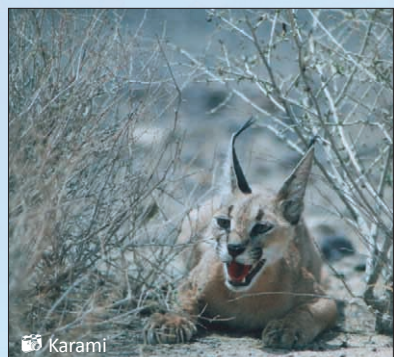
 Esfandiari - Persian leopard on an onager kill



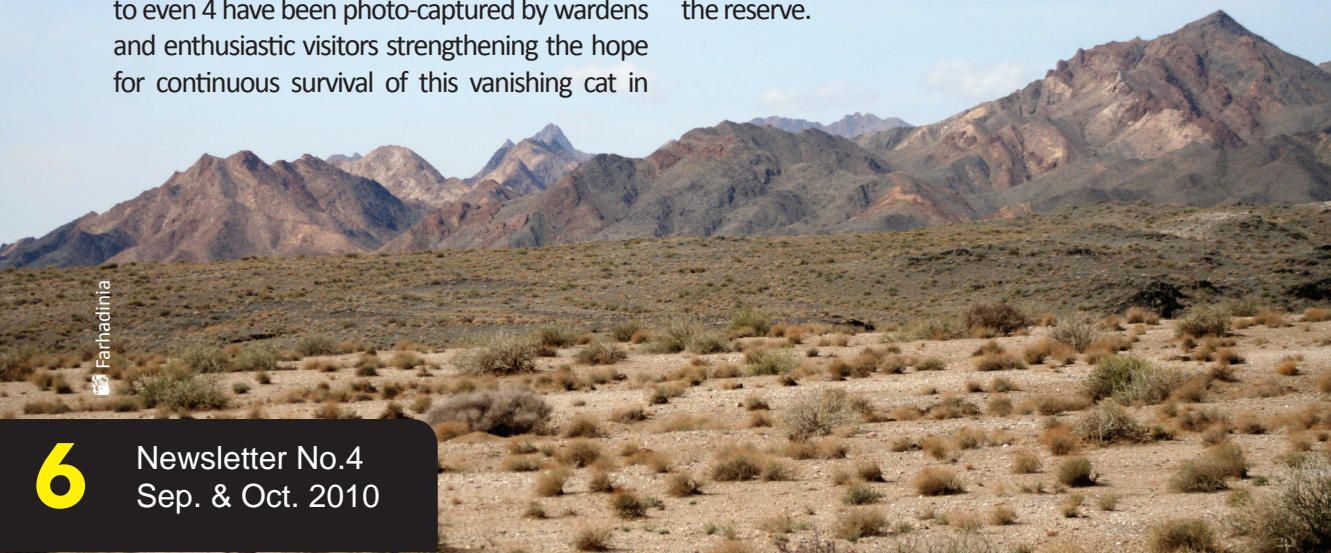
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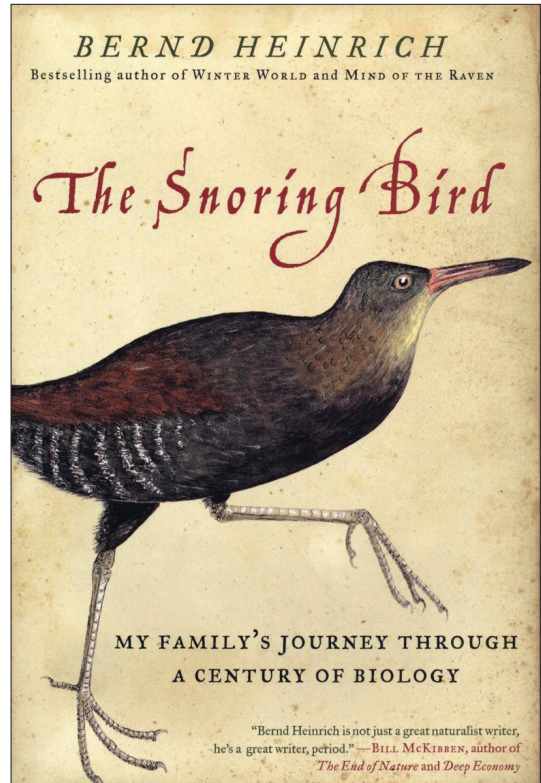


## THE FIRST PERSIAN LEOPARD IN EUROPE!

Impact of unleashed development and human activities on ecosystems and living organisms is an issue of interest to study for many conservation biologists and researchers. In countries like Iran, with very limited background of biological studies until recent decades, current knowledge issues like historical animal diversity and distribution is really scarce. Regarding to absence of any solid references, sometimes even traveler's essays are unique evidences of understanding the status of a species or today invaluable reserve during a specific period of time. In such situation, every word is count and could draw attention to aspects that previously was not shown to us.

Considering all of these, you can imagine story of a biologist in Iran's 1930s how invaluable could be! And as a leopard fan, Gerd Heinrich's *Auf Panthersuche Durch Persien* (A Panther Search through Persia) would be definitely a should-to-read when it comes in English for the first time by Bernd Heinrich! Indeed, Bernd has designated a chapter in his 2007 book (*The Snoring Bird: My Family's Journey through a Century of Biology*) to the main story when his father and stepmother were collecting birds for Berlin's Humboldt Museum, with a special wish from Berlin Zoo to bring back a panther (leopard) from Persia.

Although ancestors of today captive Persian leopards has been imported by Cincinnati Zoo (Shoemaker 1985),



it seems that probably, Peter (Gerd's panther) has been the first of its own bringing to an international zoo. The whole story is completely engrossing, especially when it came to counter-buying the leopard from a Persian military officer who was asking their guns, tent, binoculars and camera! According to Bernd's final sentences in this chapter, Peter spent many years in Berlin Zoo until World War II that probably was killed with all other inhabitants by bombs.

Iranian Cheetah Society would like to express its sincere thanks to Dr. Bernd Heinrich for kindly donating a volume of his book to the ICS's library.

### **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:

- Amersfoort Zoo, the Netherlands
- Conservation des Espèces et des Populations Animales (CEPA), France
- People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), UK
- Allwetter Munster Zoo, Germany
- Bordar Mabna Ltd.m Iran

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)