

## **Amur Leopard** *Panthera pardus orientalis*

### **Classification**

The leopard species is closely related to jaguars (species: *onca*). All 8 subspecies of leopard are endangered.

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Felidae

Genus: *Panthera*

Species: *pardus*

Subspecies: *orientalis*

### **Distribution**

Once found from South Korea to north of the China-Russian border, Amur leopards are now nearly extinct in the wild. They are only found along a small area south of Primorski Krai in Eastern Russia, west of Vladivostok. Amur leopards live further north than any other subspecies of leopard.

### **Habitat**

The Amur leopard lives in the harsh winter climate of the Russian Amur-Ussuri boreal forests. They can adapt to a variety of types of habitat including lowland forests, grasslands and mountains as long as there is sufficient food and adequate cover.

### **Physical Description**

- Head-body length ranges from three to six feet (90-180 cm), with a two to three foot (60-90 cm) tail.
- Male leopards weigh 82-198 pounds (37-89 kg); females are smaller weighing 62-132 pounds (28-59 kg).
- Leopard height is between 18-30 inches (45-75cm) at the shoulder.
- The base fur color ranges from a tan to a red/brown color with white on the belly.
- The leopard's spot pattern is unlike the other leopards with large widely spaced black spots in the form of "rosettes" on the head, back, tail and legs.

### **Diet**

What Does It Eat?

*In the wild:* Roe deer, wild boar, hare, sika deer and occasionally domestic livestock

*At the zoo:* A special feline diet daily along with knucklebones.

What Eats It?

Leopard cubs may occasionally be eaten by other predators. The Amur leopard is a top level predator with few, if no, natural predators.

### **Social Organization**

Amur leopards live and hunt alone except for mating pairs or females with cubs.

### **Life Cycle**

Amur leopards reach sexual maturity at two to three years of age. They generally breed during the months of January and February. Although leopards can have up to six cubs, a typical litter is usually two to three cubs born after a gestation period of 90-105 days. Newborn leopard cubs are blind and helpless weighing around one pound (0.5 kg); cubs do not open their eyes until they are about 10 days old. At six to eight weeks of age they follow their mother out of the den. By three months cubs are weaned but will stay with their mother learning how to hunt until they are 18-24 months old. The Amur leopard may live up to 12 years in the wild and up to 20 years in captivity.

### **Adaptations**

#### **Brrr! It's Cold**

Amur leopards have several adaptations for surviving in the cold snowy climate in the taiga region. They have beautiful fur that is longer and paler than other leopards that in winter can be up to seven centimeters long! In addition they have long legs to help them move through deep snow in search of prey.

#### **Arboreal Buffet**

Leopards are agile climbers and can leap 10 feet in the air or up a tree. They can drag a kill up to three times their own weight into a tree to avoid competition from other predators. They sometimes leave leftovers in the trees and return to feed later.

### **Night Vision**

The tapetum lucidum, a mirrorlike layer in the back of the eye, reflects light back through the eye to help produce a brighter image in low light. This is an adaptation for their nocturnal lifestyle enabling them to see six times better than humans in low light. Cats have the most highly developed binocular vision of all carnivores resulting in extremely accurate 3-D vision, which helps them gauge the distance to prey animals.

### **Conservation Connection**

*IUCN Status: Critically Endangered.*

Amur leopards are considered critically endangered with fewer than 40 animals remaining in the wild. Poaching for fur, loss of habitat and trophy hunting are the primary reasons for their decline. Recent efforts by Russian conservationists have improved the leopards' chances of survival. Penalties for poaching along with captive breeding programs throughout Asia and Europe are helping to protect this rare animal with the hope that safe areas will be established for repopulation. Zoos in North America participate in a Species Survival Program to breed these rare animals in captivity in an effort to prevent extinction of the species.

### **Fun Facts**

- Amur leopards live further north than any other subspecies of leopard.
- The main vocalization of the Amur leopard is a distinctive raspy call rather than a growl.
- Amur leopards can run at speeds of 36 mph over short distances.
- These leopards can leap 10 feet (3 m) vertically.
- Unlike other cats, leopards are strong swimmers and are one of the few cats that like water.
- The name of this cat is taken from the Amur region located along the Chinese-Russian border.

