

# CAT

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# news





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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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in the Gran Chaco, Bolivia  
Photo: Daniel Alarcón, Bolivia

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## First hard evidence of leopard in Nakhchivan

**We have carried out a baseline survey in Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Azerbaijan, in order to reveal the status of the Persian leopard *Panthera pardus saxicolor*, assess human attitudes towards the species and increase local capacity in wildlife monitoring techniques. On 9 September 2012, one of our camera-traps took a photo of a leopard at Zangezur National Park, approximately 1.5 km from the Iranian border.**

The leopard in the Caucasus Ecoregion is considered Critically Endangered (Zazanashvili et al. 2007, Breitenmoser et al. 2007, Khorozyan et al. 2008, Lukarevsky et al. 2007). While it was estimated that less than 15 individuals are left at the Greater Caucasus (Dagestan and Ossetia), and up to 50 in Lesser Caucasus including NW Iran, these estimations may even be too optimistic. Opportunistic surveys since 2001 have confirmed the occasional presence of the species in several isolated locations scattered over the Caucasus, but never after 2007. Today, reproducing populations are known only in northwestern Iran (Breitenmoser et al. 2010).

Bordering with northwestern Iran along Aras River, Nakhchivan has not been surveyed previously. In 1990, a person was attacked on a mountain trail by a leopard in Zangezur NP. We were able to confirm this incident based on an interview with an eyewitness, who was with the person at that moment, and also from the signs of injuries on the person's body. Although fresh scats and tracks of leopards were found in Nakhchivan's Zangezur Ridge and in Negramdag Mountains by Lukarevsky

et al. (2007), the status of the species could not be clarified by reliable survey techniques (i.e. camera-trapping), as such capacity was lacking. We have carried out a baseline survey in Nakhchivan in order to reveal the status of the leopard, assess human attitudes towards the species and increase local capacity on wildlife monitoring techniques.

Camera-trapping surveys were done between 9 October 2011 and 3 October 2012, at Zangezur National Park, Ordubad Sanctuary and Negramdag Mountains for a total of 2,884 camera-trap days at 46 stations. On 9 September 2012, one of our camera-traps took a photo of a leopard at Zangezur NP, approximately 1.5 km from the Iranian border (38°52.489'N/046°06.414'E, 1,310 m; Fig. 1.). The position of the leopard in the photo showed that the individual had no scrotum and therefore was a female.

Bezoar goat *Capra aegagrus* accounted for 49% of the species pictured in the survey and is the most likely prey for leopard in Nakhchivan. Wild boar *Sus scrofa* however was one of the least photographed species and detected only at one trap-station located in a forested area at Batabat in the northern part of Zangezur NP where we have also photographed Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx*.

While the Eurasian lynx has been observed many times by all the shepherds interviewed (n = 8), the leopard is considered a mysterious species by people. Three of the shepherds claimed to have seen leopard in the last 10 years, two of which in Zangezur NP and one in Negramdag Mountains, four however did not believe that leopards live in their region. It is known that local people, especially the shepherds, regularly observe large cats when the species have a resident population in their area, as with lynx in Nakhchivan.

The leopard photographed was a female, which are not known as long-range disper-

sers as the males. Therefore we assume that a reproducing population is nearby. However, given that we photographed the leopard only once in our survey and it is not a well known species even in the countryside by local people, we believe that this leopard population may not be in Nakhchivan, but in Iran. Nevertheless, our survey clarified that the leopards at least use Nakhchivan and therefore the area is important for the future survival of the species in the Caucasus. Additionally, two biologists have been trained in camera-trapping techniques and are able to carry out further surveys in the country.

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**Fig 1.** Female leopard in Nakhchivan.