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по изучению животных Красной книги Российской Федерации  
и других особо важных животных фауны России

A.N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution RAS  
Russian Theriological Society RAS  
Permanent Expedition of RAS for study of Russian Red Data Book animals  
and other key animals of Russian fauna

**МАТЕРИАЛЫ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЙ РАБОЧЕЙ ВСТРЕЧИ  
ПО РЕАБИЛИТАЦИИ И РЕИНТРОДУКЦИИ  
КРУПНЫХ ХИЩНЫХ МЛЕКОПИТАЮЩИХ**

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## RESTORATION THE PERSIAN LEOPARD IN THE CAUCASUS

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The leopard was quite wide-spread in the Caucasus until recent times, inhabiting practically all mountain areas, but in the late 19th – early 20th century it was eliminated in many areas. As a result, only individual animals could be found here by the 1950-s. Research conducted in 2005-2006 by the Institute of Ecology and Evolution of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the WWF-Russia demonstrated that the leopard occurs only in the most remote areas of East Caucasus. Its population is fragmented, the age-gender structure is distorted, it has practically lost vitality and is supported only due to rare visits of animals from North Iran via Transcaucasia. Self-recovery of the Caucasian population of the leopard is impossible in this state. In view of this, Russian scientists have prepared a Program for Recovery of Persian Leopard in the Caucasus envisaging breeding it in captivity with subsequent release. In 2007, the Program was approved by the RF Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology, and in 2012 it acquired international recognition when a trilateral memorandum on cooperation in the Program implementation was signed by the RF MNR, IUCN and EAZA. The long-term purpose of the Program is to recover a sustainable leopard population within its historic range in the Russian Caucasus. The main tasks are to form a group of animals reproducing in captivity that will become the founders of a natural population; create the conditions required for successful breeding, adaptation and reintroduction of young leopards resulting from the breeding; organize a system of constant monitoring of the forming population; educate the local population on the significance of the measures and activities carried out under the Program. The Program is implemented by the RF Ministry of Natural Resources under participation of the Sochi National Park, Caucasian Reserve, Institute of Ecology and Evolution of the Russian Academy of Sciences, WWF-Russia and the Moscow Zoo. In 2009, the Center for Leopard Restoration in the Caucasus in the Sochi national park was built, and the first leopards were delivered (two males captured in Turkmenistan). In 2010, two females were brought from Iran that had to be taken from the wild, and in 2012 a breeding couple of leopards was brought from the Lisbon zoo. In 2013, the first offspring was appeared: two leopard couples gave birth to four kittens (one of the kittens was fed artificially because its mother rejected it). Four more kittens were born in 2014. In 2015, a two-year old male was brought to the Centre from the Cat Park, France, to be prepared for releasing to the wild. Measures on estimating the leopard's food reserves (stronger security, bioengineering (salt licks), forage in winter for ungulates) have been organised in the Caucasian reserve (the place where the natural leopard population is to be formed) since 2006. A 5.2 ha enclosure has been built in the area of future release of leopards to provide young leopards with accessible food and help them adapt to life in the wild. At the present, there are 13 leopards in the Centre: 1 male, which is not involved in reproduction; 2 reproducing couples; 4 two-year old leopards (three males and a female) currently undergoing preparation for release, and 4 one-year old younglings. The release of the first group of unrelated leopards (two males and a female) is scheduled for May, 2016 (if it is decided that they are ready to live in the wild). Lotek radio-collars (satellite & UHF tracking) and phototraps will be used to monitor the released animals.