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и других особо важных животных фауны России

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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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CHOICE OF THE LEOPARD RELEASE PLACE IN THE CAUCASIAN RESERVE

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The project for Persian leopard reintroduction in the West Caucasus includes several main phases (Rozhnov, Lukarevskiy, 2008), such as selecting the area that best suits initial adaptation of the animals, and then the reintroduction itself. This process is complicated from the technical point of view, also it requires solving a number of fundamental issues, such as area selection and preparation, availability and accessibility of food reserves and protection stations; presence of enemies and trophic competitors; distribution of the snow cover in winter. A relatively well isolated site in the Caucasian reserve located on the northern macroslope of the Greater Caucasus Mountain Range (Eastern part) has been selected for the reintroduction. The area is located on a side spur of the Greater Caucasus Mountain Range 30 km away from the closest inhabited locations at the heights from 800 to 2 800 above sea level. In the north and east it is limited by two isolation barriers (the rivers Urushten and Malaya Laba). This area features all the height levels of the mountains; there are some rock outcrops in the upper part of the forest belt. This area is constantly inhabited by the red deer, European buffalo, chamois, wild boar, roe, European hare, Caucasian grouse, snowcock, brown bear, lynx, and wolf. The leopard was observed here previously, too (Dinnik, 1914; Ryabov, 1956). Before the site for the first reintroduction phase was selected, the researchers examined the area many times, evaluated the composition and structure of the ecosystems, analysed the existence of isolating barriers etc. Another factor, equally important for the predator, is seasonal territorial distribution of the main potential prey, their number, and age/gender composition. The species composition and population structure of big mammals have been monitored in the selected area over many years (the ungulates are counted annually). The area is protected, and the required with bioengineering (salt licks). Reference points of seasonal concentration of ungulates and their main routes were identified. Places for installation salt licks and the frequency of their replenishment have been recommended. Censuses are conducted twice a year to estimate the trends and structure of the ungulate population; during 2012–2015, the area has hosted: 250–280 deer, 320-350 European buffaloes, 120–140 chamoises, 60–70 wild boars, and 40–50 roes. Furthermore, 6–8 European bisons, three lynxes, four wolves and 12–15 bears inhabit the area constantly. In 2012, a temporary enclosure was built for holding reintroduced animals in the first days after their release in the wild. The enclosed area is 5 to 5.5 ha. Its upper part borders to the subalpine zone. There are some rock outcrops, with lots of natural niches, caves and other natural hiding places and shelters. A network of constant trails used by hoofed animals for communications can be observed in the area. Not far from the selected place there are three man-made salt licks actively visited by ungulates throughout the year. The perimeter of the temporary enclosure is fenced off, upper and lower parts of the enclosure have 50m wide corridors, so that animals can used freely their main path. According to the plan, the corridors will be closed immediately before the the leopards releasing. Monitoring the area has shown that the mesh is in satisfactory condition, and there are tracks of ungulates inside the enclosure.