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## THE STATUS OF THE LEOPARD IN TURKEY

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### RANGE

The Anatolian leopard, Panthera pardus tulliana, of Turkey formerly had a wide distribution. The most significant part of its range centered around the Taurus Mountains, and until the 1940's, it was common from Izmir to the Hatay region. Leopards were most often seen or killed in isolated portions of Anatolia's southwest coast. In the Middle Taurus, records are relatively scarce when compared to the Southwest and Hatay regions. All records from this region are from the Amanos Mountains, a continuation of the Taurus range.

Another important area was the coastal region known as Bithynia that lies along the western Black Sea. It was here that Turkey's last known specimen was killed near Beypazari. The last major area where leopards are thought to have lived is along the Iranian border of East Anatolia. Until the 1960's, they were regularly seen or shot there.

### HABITAT

Preferred habitat of leopards in Turkey is varies widely. In eastern Anatolia, records show that they usually preferred high plateaus with sloping hills and sparsely vegetated mountains. Because, however, of the great distances covered during the course of normal hunting and wandering as well as from the pressures of displacement, it is not possible to strictly define their optimal habitat.

In Southwest Anatolia, leopards preferred isolated mountains with Red pine, Pinus brutia, or Maquis. Very rarely they were also seen in semi-wild olive plantations. In Bithnian forests along the Black Sea, Black pine, P. nigra pallasiana, is dominant, with Scotch pine, P. sylvestris, present in some areas. Regardless, there are large gaps between these forests because of agricultural and lumbering activities. No data on density distribution is available.

### POPULATION

The Anatolian leopard is thought to be extinct because there has been little reliable data for the past 16 years. The last confirmed specimen other than the one killed at Beypazari was killed in 1974. Villagers around Duzlercam and Dilek Peninsula National Park claim they hear their calls but this is not sufficient proof because their vocalization can be very easily confused with other species. In 1989, a hunter reported a friend shooting a large cat-like animal which was believed to be a leopard.

After seeing photographs of lynx, Lynx lynx, and leopards, they decided they had killed a lynx because lynx in southern Anatolia are very spotted.

If leopards still exist, they will face three major problems.

1. PREY. In remote parts of the Taurus Mountains, wild goats, Capra aegagrus, remain. The wild boar, Sus scrofa, is common in some areas but elsewhere, an adequate prey base no longer exists.
2. HUMAN CONFLICT. This should not be a problem today because today farming is very difficult and people are moving to the cities.
3. FRAGMENTATION. If potential mates do exist, the likelihood of their getting together is now doubtful because of the extreme fragmentation of their ranges. The last two areas where they are thought to remain are 350 km apart.

#### PRINCIPLE THREATS

1. HUNTING. The primary reason for the disappearance of the Anatolian leopard is over-hunting. At the beginning of this century it was a common species in Southwest Anatolia. Overall extensive hunting has decreased their numbers dramatically to the point where today they are likely extinct.
2. HUMAN SETTLEMENT. Surprisingly, Anatolian leopards often preferred coastal areas. These areas were formerly isolated but became settled as the human population increased. First agriculture and then tourism entered these areas but by the time tourism impacted these areas, the leopard had already disappeared. Today no suitable leopard habitat remains in coastal areas.
3. COMMUNICATION. Rapid changes in communication alerted people whenever a game animal, leopard or otherwise, was seen. All sightings promptly attracted hunters to the location of last report.

In addition to communication, the expansion of the highway system allowed hunters far easier access to isolated areas. This ease of access accelerated all kinds of hunting, as did the concomitant availability of firearms.

4. IMPRESSIONS. In Turkey leopards have always been viewed in a negative light by people living near them, and individuals were killed whenever located, and regardless of age or gender.

4. CONSERVATION. Other than the establishment of the Hunting Law of 1937, there is no limitation of leopard hunting. Even during the breeding season, females and young are unprotected.

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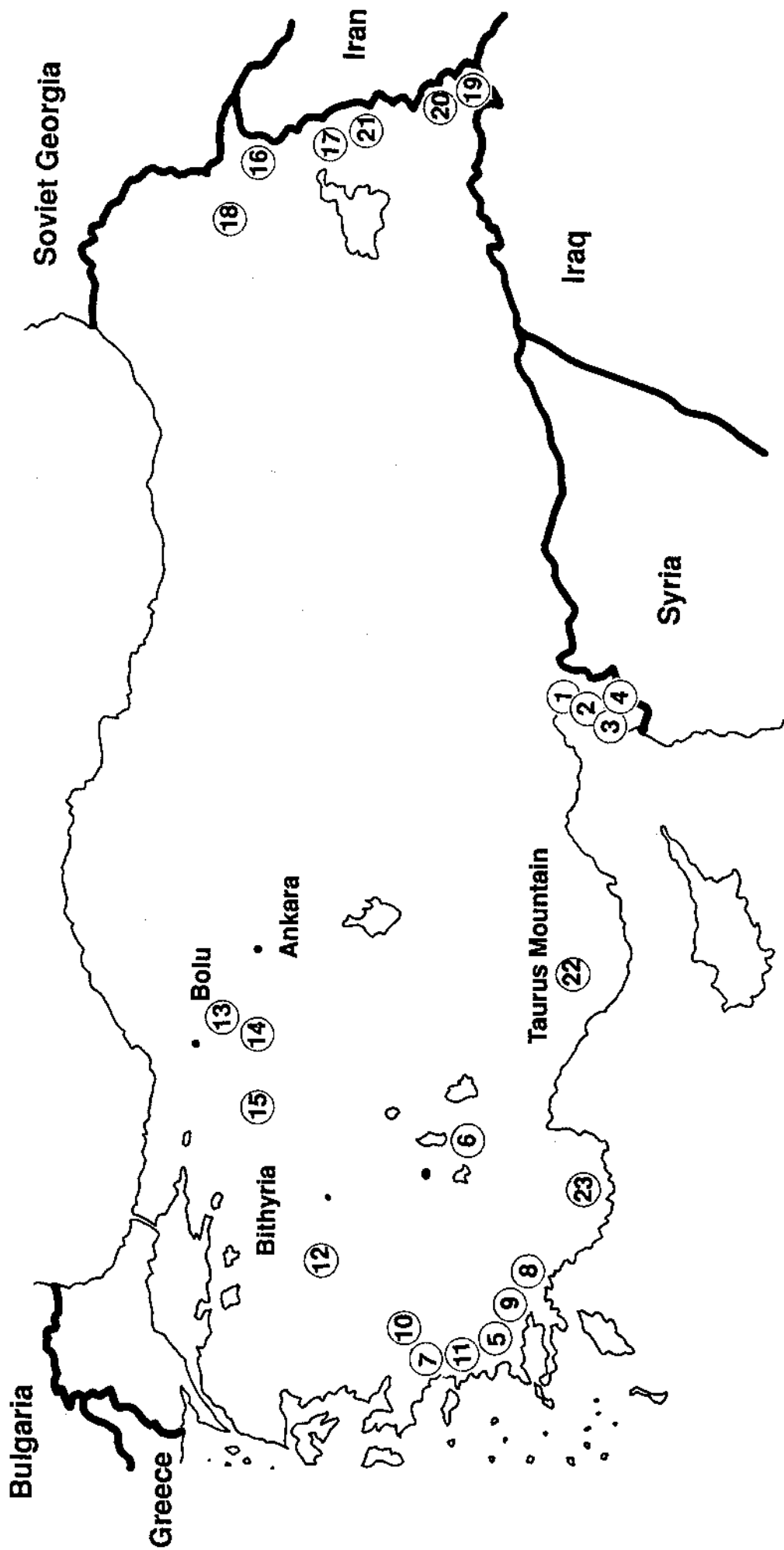


Fig. 1. Recent records of Anatolian leopards in Turkey. Numbered circles represent confirmed sightings or killings dating from 1955 to 1974. Additional records from the 1950's and 60's are numerous but excluded because of reliability.