

CAT

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news





CATnews is the newsletter of the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group, a component of the Species Survival Commission SSC of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is published three times a year, in spring, summer, and late fall. It features original articles and short communications relevant to the conservation of the free living wild cats, including news on the IUCN Red List and Green Status of Species assessments, important ex situ conservation breeding programmes, and form Species Working Groups affiliated with the Cat SG.

الهيئة الملكية لمحافظة العلا
Royal Commission for AlUla



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For joining the Friends of the Cat Group you can also contact Christine Breitenmoser at ch.breitenmoser@kora.ch

Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome
Send contributions and observations to ch.breitenmoser@kora.ch.

Guidelines for authors are available at www.catsg.org/catnews

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Persian Leopard WG

Established: 2023

Members: > 40

Mission: To ensure the continued existence of Persian leopards and their prey in coexistence with local communities in their natural habitats

Persian leopard conservation is boosted by a newly established working group



Fig. 1. A Persian leopard in north-eastern Iran (Photo Future4Leopards Foundation).

The Persian leopard *Panthera pardus tulliana* (Fig. 1) is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™. It is permanently present in Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Russia, Türkiye and Turkmenistan, occasionally present in Georgia and Kazakhstan, possibly present in Uzbekistan, and extinct in Tajikistan, Syria and Lebanon. According to the 2023 IUCN Red List assessment, the population size of the Persian leopard is estimated as at least 750–1044 individuals (450–626 mature individuals), with the largest populations living in Iran (528–732) and Turkmenistan (60–80). Its main habitats are forests, woodlands and scrublands with an essential presence of rocky outcrops and precipitous slopes. Most of the prey species are wild ungulates such as urial *Ovis vignei*, bezoar goat *Capra aegagrus* and wild boar *Sus scrofa*, but smaller species and domestic animals also can be hunted.

The main range-wide threats are: (1) illegal hunting to mitigate damage to livestock and threats to human safety, or for trophies; (2) prey depletion due to illegal hunting and habitat degradation; and (3) habitat loss and fragmentation that create deadly barriers and make populations too small to survive on their own.

Conservation of the Persian leopard, its prey and habitats requires the mobilisation of global and national efforts. As a vital step, the

Range-Wide Strategy for the Conservation of the Persian Leopard was discussed and endorsed at the First Range State Meeting for the Persian Leopard, 20–22 September 2022 in Tbilisi, Georgia, under the auspice of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals CMS, specifically under the CMS Central Asian Mammals Initiative CAMI. The knowledge base on the Persian leopard was published in 2022 in the Cat News Special Issue No. 15 as an input to the development of the Range-Wide Strategy. The authors and subsequent group members were already involved in the IUCN Red List assessment of the Persian leopard, which was published in December 2023.

The Persian Leopard Working Group PeLeWG was established in March 2023 as a professional group of experts from all the range countries and beyond to help implement the Range-Wide Strategy. It is an affiliated partner of the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group and has over 40 members. The group is managed by the Steering Committee of 15 members, including two Co-chairs, all from the range countries. The PeLeWG has a feasible annual working plan. Its current activities are focused on awareness-raising on social media (X/ Twitter: @PersLeopWG, Instagram: @pelewg, Facebook: @PeLeWG), professional training (WildTeam), implementation of range-wide monitoring, and fundraising for it.

Range-wide monitoring is one of our pivotal activities, which is based on occupancy analysis of reliable post-2010 leopard records based on a 25 x 25 km grid throughout the range in relation to prey, habitats, human activities and existing threats. We are striving to raise funds for this work, which will be our major step forward in collective monitoring of Persian leopards.

In 2024, we plan to expand our training efforts in collaboration with Snow Leopard Network, Manul Working Group and Society for Conservation Biology Asia, use new channels for awareness-raising and fundraising, spread knowledge by translations from/to national languages, and apply local programmes for capacity building and motivation build-up. The website <https://pelewg.net> is created and its content has been continuously filled. In 2026, the PeLeWG will produce a triennial report of all its activities and make it available online.

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