

Arabian Leopard Fact Sheet (*Panthera pardus nimr*)



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The Arabian leopard is the largest and most powerful of Arabian cats with males weighing up to 34 kg and females averaging about 20 kg. It is the smallest and palest of the 15 leopard subspecies and has an unusually long tail, which it uses for balance in the steep terrain that it inhabits. The Arabian Leopard is also the most genetically distinct leopard, with 38 loci differences compared to a maximum of 14 for other subspecies.

Arabian leopards are solitary animals that spends most of their time alone. Males patrol large territories which may overlap the territories of several females. Mating occurs frequently during each female's five-day 'heat.' Approximately 100 days later, the female gives birth to a litter of from one to four cubs in a naturally protected den such as a cave. The cubs are born blind and remain so for up to ten days. Although the cubs don't usually leave the den for the first month of their lives, the mother may move them periodically to evade discovery. Naturally curious like most cats, the cubs explore a wider area as they grow older.

In Arabia, leopards live in rugged mountains and wadis where there is permanent surface water and enough wild game to eat. On a peninsula where wildlife and water have, in recent millennia, always been scarce, the leopard population has probably never been very large. Recent human population growth puts even greater pressure on the environment, with leopards and their prey being squeezed out of their habitats throughout the region. For this reason, the Arabian leopard is now considered the rarest large cat on the planet with no more than about 200 thought to exist in the wild and fewer than 60 known in captivity.

The recent rapid decline of the Arabian Leopard is due to a variety of reasons, most of which are caused by people. Rapid human population growth causes encroachment into wilderness areas, putting pressure on leopards and other wildlife. Depletion by hunting of natural prey such as Nubian ibex (*Capra ibex*), Arabian tahr (*Hemitragus jayakari*), Mountain gazelle (*Gazella gazella cora*), and rock hyrax (*Procapra capensis*) leaves little for leopards to eat so some are forced to prey on livestock. This leads to conflict with villagers who kill leopards in order to protect their herds. Wealthy animal collectors who pay huge sums for Arabian Leopards encourage the trapping of leopards for the illegal market.

CONSERVATION STATUS

IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Red Data List (http://cms.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/red_list/index.cfm) ("Critically endangered" [with extinction]); CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) (<http://www.cites.org/>) Appendix I ("Threatened with extinction and is or may be affected by trade").

POPULATION ESTIMATES

"While the possibility, however remote, of the existence of other relict populations cannot be ruled out, the need for urgent conservation action across the region is obvious given the reality that the Arabian leopard may soon be reduced to two, or even just one population in the wild." (Spalton and Al Hikmani 2006).

Wild: Population estimates vary wildly depending on the optimism of the estimator. Current estimates range from fewer than 100 to 250. It would be wonderful to discover that Arabian leopards are more widespread and common than is believed, but this is probably unrealistic.

- **UAE:** probably extinct; maximum carrying capacity of all the Emirates calculated at 10 – 15 individuals
- **Oman:** ~ 30 individuals camera trapped in last 8 years on Jebel Samhan (17 individuals) and Jebels Qara and Qamar (9 – 11 individuals) in Dhofar; extinct in Hajar Range (last specimen found killed in 1976); presumed extinct

in Musandam peninsula (no confirmed reports since last two specimens killed in October 1997).

- **Saudi Arabia:** possibly extinct; potential population based on habitat assessment calculated at from 60 to 425 individuals; last confirmed record 1999
- **Yemen:** possibly extinct but good reason to believe that Arabian Leopards still exist in Wada'a, Amran, and possibly Hawf, Al Mahrah. Other localities can't yet be ruled out, but should not be counted on.
- **Israel/Palestine:** about 10 individuals in the Judean Desert and Negev highlands
- **Jordan:** Extinct, last record 1987
- **Egypt (Sinai):** Extinct
- **Captive:** As of 2008 the captive population of Arabian Leopards is known to be around 55.
- **UAE:** 23 at BCEAW, Sharjah, and 5 - 6 at Al Bustan, Sharjah
- **Oman:** 4
- **Saudi Arabia:** 4
- **Yemen:** Sana'a - 4, Taiz - 16
- **Private collections in all countries:** Unknown but may be significant

RANGE

Historic: Mountainous areas throughout the Arabian Peninsula, Sinai, and the Levant

Current: Proven to exist only in the Dhofar region of Oman, the Judean Desert and Negev highlands of Israel/Palestine, with recent records from Wada'a subdistrict Amran, Yemen needing confirmation. Otherwise, there are no recent confirmed records of Arabian Leopard from elsewhere within their historic range.

BIOLOGY

- Weight:** Males range from 24 - 34 kg (53 - 76 lbs.)
Females range from 18 - 23.5 kg (40 - 51 lbs.)
- Overall length:** Males range from 1820 - 2030 mm (6 ft - 6 ft 8 in)
Females range from 1600 - 1920 mm (5 ft 3 in - 6 ft 4 in)
- Habitat:** High mountains and deep wadis with sufficient prey, permanent water, and adequate cover.

Habits: Solitary although ranges may overlap in which case different leopards will use the same routes or tracks while moving from place to place. Arabian leopards are potentially active at any time of the day or night. Around 50% of camera-trap records in Oman occurred during the day with peaks of activity in early morning and late afternoon; midday activity is more common between November and February. As the season warms up the animals become increasingly nocturnal.

Prey: Nubian ibex, Arabian tahr mountain gazelle, porcupine, cape hyrax, cape hare, red fox, blandford's fox, philby's partridge, Arabian partridge, sand partridge. As leopards are highly adaptable it is possible that they eat other animals including mongoose, genets, honey badgers, snakes, lizards, hedgehogs, rats, mice, and others although this is only speculative.

David Stanton July 2008

References

Sections of this text have been copied from the website of the Breeding Centre for Arabian Wildlife, Sharjah, UAE
<http://www.breedingcentresharjah.com/>

Spalton, A. and Al Hikmani, H. (2006) "The Leopard in the Arabian Peninsula - Distribution and Subspecies Status" Cat News Special Issue No. 1