



REPORT ON SNOW LEOPARD TOUR IN WESTERN MONGOLIA

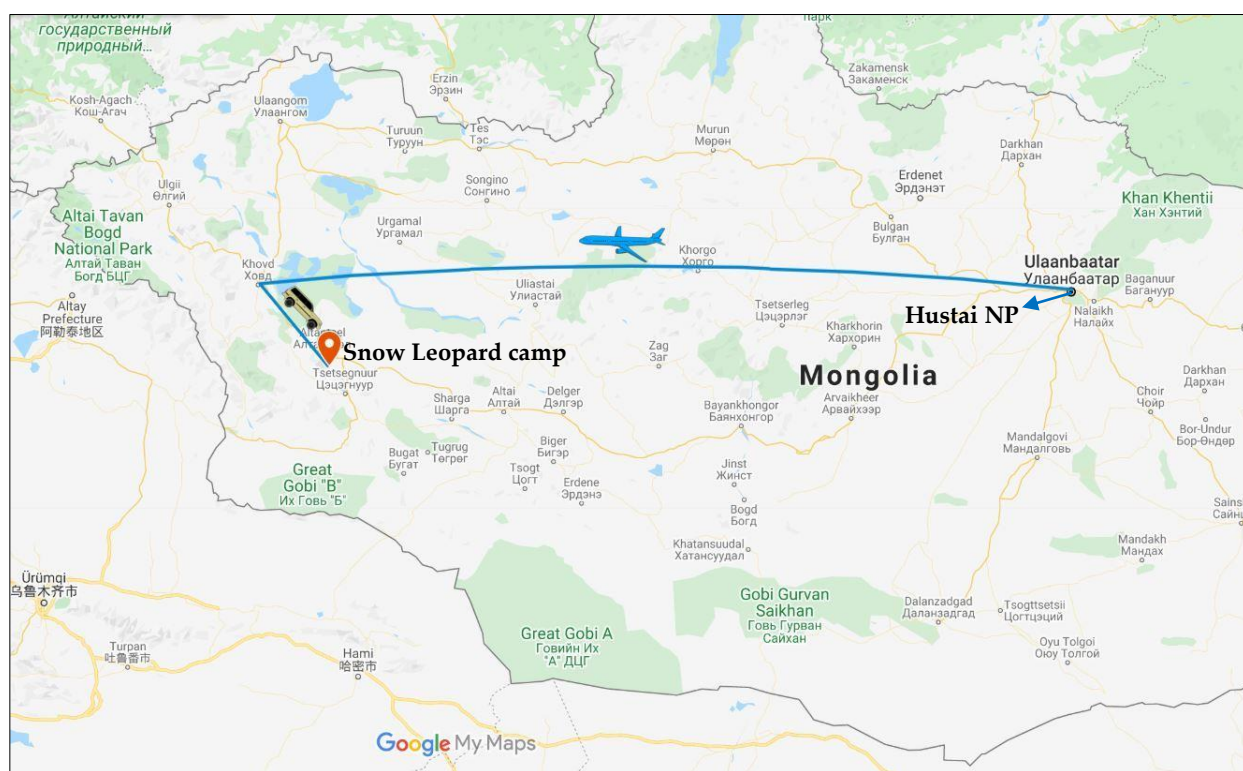


Compiled by: Purevsuren Tsolmonjav

Tour dates: 24 February - 06 March 2024

Participants: Purevsuren Tsolmonjav (leader),
Cornelius Verheijen, Saskia Verheijen and Leon van de
Kerkhof (clients)

Background information: Mongolia is home to the second largest population of endangered Snow Leopard in the world. Snow Leopard tours are becoming more and more popular in Mongolia because there are good chances to see this elusive big cat at much lower altitudes like 2,000-3,000 m. The winter months are better for the Snow Leopard tours as they come down to lower altitudes due to scarcity of their natural prey. The Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*) and Mongolian Marmot (*Marmota sibirica*) are the main prey for the Snow Leopards throughout most of its range in Mongolia. Siberian Ibex and other large wild preys are not easy to catch, and the marmots hibernate in winter. Thus, they prefer to feed on domestic animals, predominantly goats in winter. The Snow Leopards take domestic animals while grazing as well as from the herder's campsite at night. This winter diet probably increases the chances of seeing this majestic animal.



Snow Leopard Trip route in Feb - Mar 2024

Day 1. Ulaanbaatar

Our first Snow Leopard tour in 2024 took place between February 24th and March 6th, 2023. Our group consisted of three guests - Mr. Cornelius Verheijen, Mrs. Saskia Verheijen and Mr. Leon van de Kerkhof from Netherlands. Our guests arrived in Mongolia on February 24th, 2024. We visited a national history museum and some markets later in the day.

Day 2-10. Altai Mountains

We met at 4:20am at the hotel in order catch our local flight to Khovd at 6:50am. The plane departed on time and it took about 2 hours reach Khovd airport. We jumped into our Toyota land cruiser and stopped for breakfast at a local restaurant and bought some sweets from the supermarket before beginning our journey to the majestic Altai Mountains for the next 9 days. After one and a half hours of driving on the paved (65km) and dirt (30km) roads, we reached our Snow Leopard camp at the base of Jargalant Mountain. We had a short break on the way. We were welcomed by our team and soon we had a delicious dinner made by our professional cook Gana.



Our Snow Leopard camp at the base of Altai Mountains (Photo by Purevsuren Tsolmonjav)

After lunch, we drove to our Snow Leopard valley to look around and get an idea of the area. After hiking up along the main valley for some time, our guests went back to the camp and I stayed in the valley with our two local trackers to scan the rocky slopes. After some time, we heard a Snow Leopard call twice from the rocky slope a bit far from us.

We tried to find it, but it was probably hidden behind some big rocks or hiding in a crevice or cave. Suddenly, it got windy and cold, so we were forced to go back to the camp.

The following day (Day 2 in the Altai Mountains), three of us (me and two local trackers) split up. After about 30-40 minutes, one of our trackers, Sodo, called us by radio and said that he spotted a Snow Leopard sleeping in a shallow cave at an altitude of 2,350m. We called our driver Gana to take our guests to the site. The leopard was still resting in the cave, but it tried to move away twice. Fortunately, we used our secret trick to make this leopard get back to the cave and stay there. Our tracker Sodo went up first while we were watching the leopard from the bottom of the narrow valley. He reached the suitable position where we could have a closer view of the leopard without disturbing it. Then, he called us to come to his position as the leopard was sleeping. After about 30 minutes, we reached the same position and saw a beautiful young adult Snow Leopard laying down at the mouth of a cave.



Snow Leopard seen in February 2024 (Photo by Purevsuren Tsolmonjav)

After taking some photos, we decided to wait for the sun light to shine on the leopard. Luckily, the weather was almost perfect except occasional cold breezes.

We took some good photos before this Snow Leopard decided to move away. We all were so thrilled to see and photograph the elusive Snow Leopard at quite close distance and went back to our camp for late lunch.



Snow Leopard seen in late February 2024 (Photo by Purevsuren Tsolmonjav)

We saw four more Snow Leopards on Day 4, 6 and 7. On Day 4, we saw two Snow Leopards at around same location where we saw the first Snow Leopard. But, these two leopards have gone away behind some big rocks. One of our trackers went to the big rocky area to have a closer look, but no more sign of those two leopards. Suddenly, he encountered a Snow Leopard resting in a hidden shallow cave about 15 meters away. We were at the bottom of the narrow valley and saw this Snow Leopard when it ran away from an unexpected encounter with our tracker. We thought that this was the different individual and this means we saw 3 Snow Leopards on this day.

On Day 6 and 7, we saw one Snow Leopard at two different locations. We concluded that it was the same leopard based on the comparison of spot pattern on the photos.



Snow Leopard seen on Day 6 (Photo by Purevsuren Tsolmonjav)

Day 12. Hustai National Park

We visited the Hustai National Park for a day. We saw numerous Przewalski's Horses and Siberian Wapiti Deer in the park.



Siberian Wapiti Deer in Hustai National Park (Photo by Purevsuren Tsolmonjav)

Our Snow Leopard tour ended here with a great success and lots of good memories. We would like to thank our wonderful clients Cornelius Verheijen, Saskia Verheijen and Leon van de Kerkhof for travelling with us and contributing Snow Leopard conservation through supporting community based eco-tourism. It was one of our most successful Snow Leopard tours.



Our Snow Leopard team in Feb - Mar 2024