

Amur Leopard Project Update Autumn 2008 season



*Abnormal pigmentation in the iris of the eye.
Photo: A. Cernih*

Trapping and health assessment

Two wild leopards were trapped and given full health checks this season—a very successful trapping rate when perhaps only 25 animals remain in an area of 20,000 square kilometres!

It was the first time a reproductively mature female had been trapped and the third time adult male Pp02 had been caught. Both were in very good health. In addition to a general health check, monitoring of heart murmurs and normal dental deterioration were investigated in particular. Cardiac information gathered will be discussed with veterinary cardiologists in the near future.

Although not the intention of the team to capture any individual more than once, the repeat capture of Pp02 has provided valuable information about how an individual's health changes over time.



*Dr J. Lewis exams the airway of a wild Amur leopard under field anaesthetic
Photo: Harry@harringtonphotography.com*

Anaesthesia and cardiac murmurs

The crucial question of whether anaesthesia *per se* produces heart murmurs in Amur leopards is being addressed by training captive leopards to accept having their hearts listened to and the sounds recorded by Dr Lewis. This is no easy task, but significant progress has been made at Colchester Zoo in the UK where keeping staff (notably Ms V. Ledbrook) have trained one leopard to an acceptable standard so far. Recordings have been made from this animal and hopefully many other zoos will follow their lead. Ms Earle's training technique is available to the wider zoo community through the www.amur-leopard.org website.

- By supporting John Lewis's work on Amur leopards, **WVI has rapidly become the main agency providing veterinary support for conservation efforts to save the Amur leopard.**

- By becoming a member of ALTA which enables cooperation and communication with as wide a range of conservation agencies as is possible in the Russian Far East, WVI is engaging in the highest standards of modern conservation practice.

- By supporting ongoing efforts to train Russian veterinarians in wildlife health issues, WVI is playing an active role in creating future conservation-minded professionals locally.

Thank you to all our supporters for helping us to achieve so much this season.



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Captive breeding and reintroduction update

The first version of the veterinary database for captive Amur leopards has now been completed. As it was constructed in partial fulfilment of an MSc thesis, it does not quite fulfil the requirements for managing all the veterinary data available. Thanks to WVI supporters, funds are available for the next phase of database development.

All veterinary assessments of captive leopards will continue to feed in to the database and provide vital information for leopard selection for reintroduction.



Dr Mikhail Goncharuk working with Dr Linda Kerley examining a wild leopard cat in Lasovsky

Capacity building

As local wildlife veterinary support is considered necessary for the long term future of wild Amur leopard populations, WVI is very pleased to announce that Dr Mikhail Goncharuk will now be joining Dr Lewis on all future leopard captures. Dr Goncharuk has already accompanied Dr Lewis on several health assessment training workshops on captive leopards and is currently investigation disease surveillance in prey species.

Samantha Earle was been so enthused about the plight of the leopards through developing the captive leopard veterinary database, that she has gained a three month placement with WCS-Russia from February 2009 to work with their leopard field staff in camera trapping, snow tracking and radiotracking wild leopards. She is hoping that this will lead to a PhD in wild leopard biology.

WVI is pleased to encourage the next generation of leopard biologists!

The Amur leopard is the world's most endangered cat, with as few as 25 individuals now surviving in the Russian Far East. This population is in grave danger of extinction due to numerous factors including ongoing development in the region, logging activity, hunters and poachers in the forests, forest fires, inbreeding depression due to low genetic diversity within the remaining leopard population, and the potential for disease transmission from domestic animals.

However, a large coalition of foreign non-governmental agencies (NGO's) and regional agencies of the Russian Federation are currently working together to secure a future for this leopard through vigorous conservation activities to protect the existing small population and an imaginative reintroduction scheme to establish a second population in former leopard habitat.

Wildlife Vets International (WVI) is a British charity through which the specialist veterinary services of Dr. John Lewis is provided to this project. WVI is committed to supporting this project long-term, and further funding is urgently required. Your support of this project is greatly appreciated. Thank you.



Camera trip picture of a wild male Amur leopard
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