



Press Release
22nd October 2007

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Critically Endangered female Amur leopard captured for conservation

A rare Amur leopard (*Panthera pardus orientalis*), one of only an estimated 30 left in the wild has been captured and health-checked by experts from a consortium of conservation organisations, before being released.

A group of organisations, including the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Biology and Soils, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) captured the female in a remote location in south-west Primorye as part of their work to save the critically endangered leopard. The animal was tranquilised and an extensive and high-tech medical examination undertaken by the veterinary team.

Sarah Christie, ZSL Carnivore Programme manager, commented, "This capture is remarkable in bringing together top experts from around the world and taking state-of-the-art equipment deep into the forest, a unprecedented level of collaboration and effort that is essential if we are to save this critically endangered leopard."

John Goodrich of the Wildlife Conservation Society, leader of the expedition, commented, "catching this female was a big step forward in our efforts to understand the status of this population, and to better define necessary conservation actions needed to conserve this population."

There are estimated to be between 24 and 32 Amur leopards living in the wild, making the species the rarest big cat on the planet. The animals are found in a corner of the Russian Far East on the Chinese border, in an area where their range is restricted by human activity. As the wild population is so small, it is likely that inbreeding (breeding between close relatives) is taking place and it is important to find out if this is having damaging effects on the cats in order to plan conservation action for the future. The Zoological Society of London and the Wildlife Conservation Society are working with local organisations to initiate a wildlife health monitoring programme involving leopards and other wildlife in the region.

Initial findings from the veterinary examination of the leopard include the presence of a heart murmur, which could be indicative of inbreeding depression. Remarkably given the remote location, the team was able to capture footage of the heart, using a portable sonogram device, which has already been sent out for review by heart specialists. Further results are expected once laboratory analysis has been carried out, which will provide more information about the reproductive condition of the leopard as well as any illnesses or parasites that she may have been suffering from.

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Notes for Editors

Sarah Christie, ZSL Carnivore Programme manager, is available for comment and interview – please contact Alice Henchley on 020 7449 6361 or 07889 043843 to organise.

- Founded in 1826, the **Zoological Society of London (ZSL)** is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity: our key role is the conservation of animals and their habitats. ZSL runs London Zoo and Whipsnade Wild Animal Park, carries out scientific

research in the Institute of Zoology and is actively involved in field conservation in other countries worldwide. www.zsl.org.

- ZSL and WCS are key members of ALTA (the Amur Leopard and Tiger Alliance), a consortium of conservation organisations working in partnership to protect the Amur leopard and tiger; information on ALTA's Amur leopard programme can be found at www.amur-leopard.org
- The **Amur leopard** (*Panthera pardus orientalis*), is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. There are currently estimated to be between 24 – 32 Amur leopards left in the wild, distributed in south-west Primorski Krai, between Vladivostok and the Sino-Russian border. Male leopards can weigh up to 50kg, females as little as 35kg, and they are carnivorous, feeding mainly on deer. The leopard inhabits mixed forest environments and has long fur to help it withstand the freezing weather.

There are currently approximately 130 Amur leopards held in zoos throughout Europe and Russia; all are part of a conservation breeding programme coordinated by ZSL and Moscow Zoo.

- **The Wildlife Conservation Society** - Since 1895, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has worked to save wildlife and wild lands around the globe. Today WCS has field staff at work in over 60 nations, protecting many of the last wild places left on our planet. To bring the mission home, the Bronx Zoo based WCS is distinguished as the only global conservation organization that also operates the world's largest system of urban wildlife parks, educating more than 4 million zoo and aquarium visitors each year about the importance of wildlife conservation.
- Funding for the capture and medical assessment work was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Save the Tiger Fund (USA), the Homeland Fund, the Darwin Initiative (UK), the Lucie Burgers Foundation (Holland), The US Fish and Wildlife Service's Rhino-Tiger Fund (USA), AMUR (UK and Russia), and Wildlife Vets International.
- The Darwin Initiative is a small grants programme that aims to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of resources around the world. The Initiative is funded and administered by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (Defra). www.darwin.gov.uk

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