



Long-term Ecological Study Update, 22 June 2011

Cubs? Probably!

In our last update, we noted that GPS uplinks indicated Tenger might have established a birth den. We know snow leopards are elusive, but cubs seem to be even more so than adults. Our team began the work of locating Tenger's possible den during the second week of June. But the mountainside where her GPS locations led us has countless hiding locations and is a very difficult area to search. Despite GPS guidance and VHF signals from Tenger's collar, the best we could do was catch a fleeting glimpse of Tenger, but no den location or visual confirmation of cubs. The cubs are too mobile to handle at this point, so our investigation of an active birth den and PIT tagging (tiny injected microchips that many of us have in our pets for identification purposes) of cubs will likely have to wait another year. Tenger is doing a great job hiding her cubs!

Orjan described what it was like trying to find the den: *"Outside a nice cave someone had played with the bushes and chewed on the stems, ought to be the cubs. Spent several hours searching the whole area but found nothing more than chewed bushes and snow leopard pugmarks. We are guessing that Tenger gave birth around 1st of May which means that the cubs are 6-7 weeks old now. Tenger has*

probably left the original den and the cubs are moving around fairly well. The cubs are probably so big that they move around in the canyon and can find hiding places themselves. Tons of rocks, caves, crevices, big thorny bushes etc. that a cub can hide under. No luck in finding them."

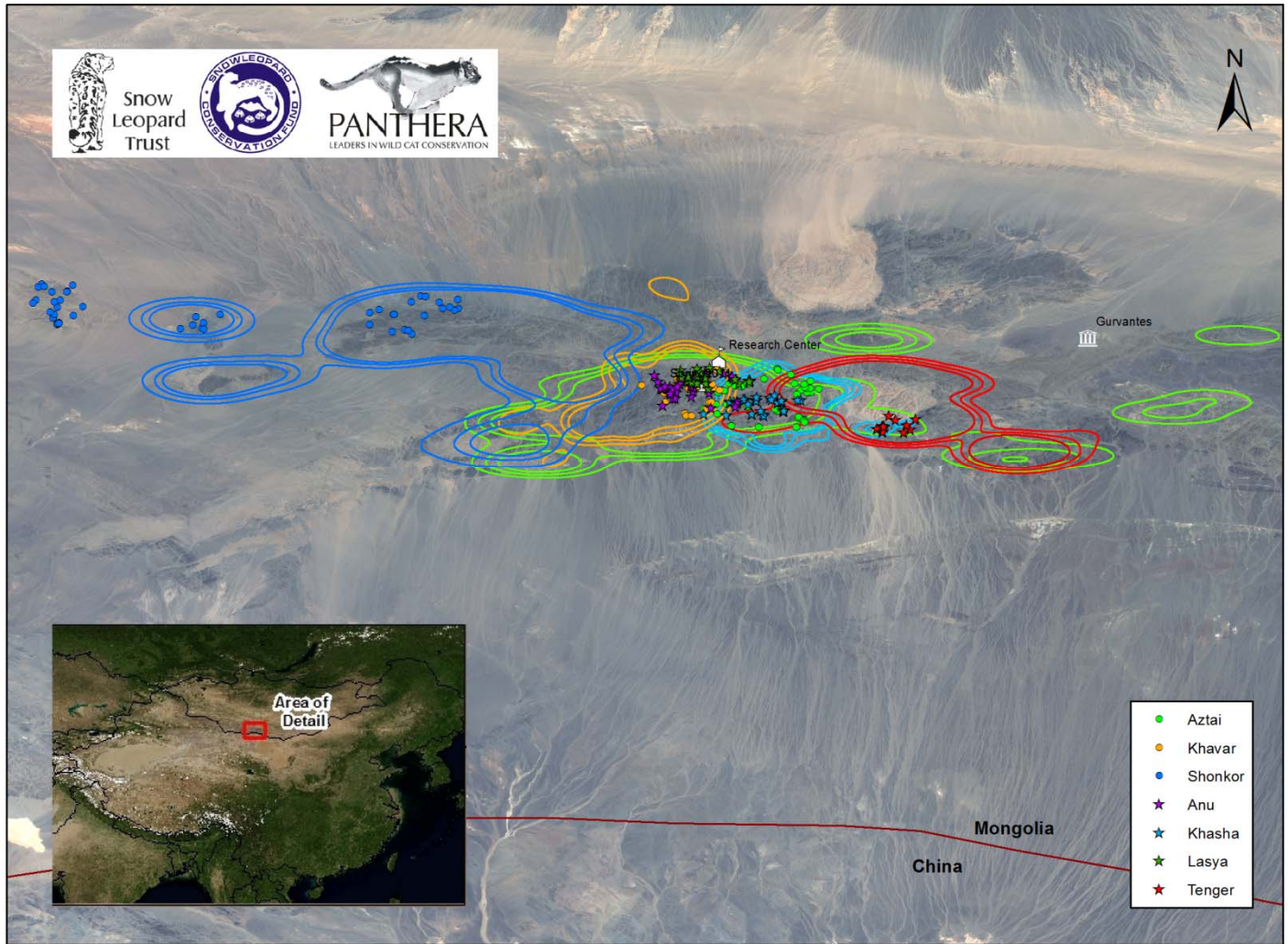


Typical habitat – great cub hiding places!

Panthera/Snow Leopard Trust

Activity of Our Other Collared Cats

Male Khavar's movement pattern has been consistent over the past two weeks and he is utilizing only the eastern portion of his home range, perhaps in response to male Aztai's similar eastward shift into an area previously used by the late Tsagaan (as detailed in our last update). Aztai and Khavar were only one third of a kilometer apart at one uplink. Khavar and females Lasya and Anu continue to overlap extensively near our Spring Camp, sometimes within only one kilometer of one another. And on 10 and 11 June, Khavar and Anu were together just a few kilometers from Camp! Female Khasha remains in her core home range, often within



Cat locations for 3 through 17 June with home ranges calculated from each cat's entire data set.

We do not yet have enough data to calculate home ranges for our two newly collared female cats, Anu and Lasya.

a few kilometers of Aztai and once only 1.5 kilometers from Khavar. It is intriguing how Khavar and Aztai's home ranges overlap with so many females, Aztai with all four of our collared females and Khavar with three of the four. From camera trap images, we know that there are uncollared cats in the area and with this study we hope to learn how many cats may share the same home ranges.

Last week, Shonkor crossed over 30 km of open, sandy steppe to reach a small group of mountains where argali sheep may be found. To date, he has spent 7 days within this 5 kilometer area. The last time Shonkor was way out west for several days, Orjan found that he had killed a large male argali.

Orjan provided this update on the investigation of the cluster of GPS locations shared by Aztai and Khasha earlier this spring: *"In mid-April, Aztai and Khasha spent three days at the same place. The collar locations were spread out in a line and it seemed as if they had slowly, slowly moved down a steep mountainside. We got curious about what might have happened there, from looking at the computer it didn't seem like a hunting site but to know for sure we had to go there. The place is a steep canyon side and the locations follow a line of steep (almost vertical) rock formations, almost like pinnacles. They are about 20 m wide and 10-15 m high. On each side of the pinnacles are a field of loose gravel and rocks, very steep and very loose. Most of the locations*

are on the pinnacles but some are at the base of them. It was not possible to visit all locations, the terrain was just too steep and rugged. However, there were no signs of a hunt and the terrain doesn't look like anything that I have found kills in previously. Since the two cats were moving down along the pinnacles they would have had to drag their meal with them up and down, which doesn't make much sense. So the only likely explanation for them to spend so much time together is that they mated. We got a couple locations taken at the same time when the cats' collars were within 1 m of each other.

I know that mid April is late for a mating but maybe Khashaa mated with Aztai. He seems to be the new dominant male of the area. Aztai sure didn't wait many days after Tsagaan died before he took over his area. While Tsagaan was our 'bad boy', always growling at me and keeping three collared females in his home range that he ventured between and spent at most a day with now and then. Aztai, on the other hand, found a nice cliff with a view all the way to China and spent three days getting to know Khashaa."

One Less Collared Cat

As we reported in our last update, Zara's collar fell off as scheduled so you will no longer see her locations on our maps. Orjan hopes to catch and re-collar her this fall. We located her collar less than a kilometer from a summer camp location for a local herding family and they joined us to see what we were doing.

Panthera/Snow Leopard Trust



Local herders investigating Zara's collar, June 2011.

Camp News

June was another busy month in camp. LTES Coordinator Rana Bayrakci (Panthera) finished up her stay in camp and departed overland on a 22 hour drive to Ulaanbaatar: due to an airline fuel shortage, the free flights we enjoyed to a mining airfield near camp have been temporarily suspended. We anticipate and fervently hope that these donated flights will resume later this year. The camp van returned after a short rest for driver Miji in Ulaanbaatar, packed with LTES in-country Coordinator Purevjav (Pujii), cub expert Per Ahlqvist from Grimso Wildlife Research Station in Sweden, volunteer Ueli Rehsteiner from Switzerland, and a carpenter hired to build-shelves in our storage container at Base Camp. Per's mission was to assist Orjan with locating and handling Tenger's cubs, while Ueli's job is to assist with Orjan's prey site habitat studies. Mongolian biologist Sumbee learned how to continue prey site surveys while Orjan is in Sweden over the summer and will conduct our annual camera trap survey. Orjan will return to Sweden for a much deserved vacation and to work on his PhD, but will return to for another session of trapping and collaring next October.

This study is a joint project of Panthera, Snow Leopard Trust and the Snow Leopard Conservation Fund and is in collaboration with Mongolia Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism, Mongolia Academy of Sciences, and National University of Mongolia. For more information, please visit www.panthera.org or www.snowleopard.org.

