



Long-term Ecological Study Update, 7 November 2011

Another record broken! Actually, make that TWO records broken:

This story is best told in Orjan's words: *We have collared three cats in the past two and a half weeks. First out was Aztai who got a collar with a new fix schedule, it will take GPS locations twice as often and hopefully we will be able to study his movements in more detail. He seems to be in good shape, well muscled and weighing in at 42kg with an empty stomach. Aztai is so experienced that he jumped away when he heard the dart gun fire (it makes a "poff" from the CO2 gas pressure), where there had been a nice spotted thigh 0.2 seconds earlier there was nothing but air when the dart reached.*



Khashaa in foreground with her two cubs at a waterhole, camera trap photo 19 July 2011.

Second cat was Khashaa, her collar had run out of battery and dropped off about a month ago. She had 2 big cubs with her that watched the whole procedure from a cliff above us. **Khashaa weighed almost 42 kg, making her the heaviest female ever caught for research purposes.** My brother has developed our trap surveillance system and installed a couple of microprocessors that analyzes the beeps from the trap transmitters. The system works great now, we haven't had a single false alarm which means that as soon as the siren starts we are ready to go. Kullu, an Indian PhD student who usually works in the Himalayas, is here to do some work. He is the fastest climber I have seen, whenever the siren goes off he runs up and down the mountain to check which snare that has been tripped, doesn't take him more than a few minutes. We darted Khashaa about 25 minutes after she was trapped, that must be the fastest response time for any trapping research project.

Day after we collared Khashaa, me and Carol (volunteer veterinarian from Australia) went to pick up Tenger's collar that had dropped off a few days earlier. The collar was lying far into a, for me, unknown mountain range. We had to drive on goat trails for a while to get there. Took us so long time that it got dark before we found our way back, spent four hours on the bike in total darkness before we found our camp. It is very hard to navigate when one can't see the mountains.

Day after that we set out to check some kill sites. We lost our balance in loose gravel, it happened so fast that I didn't have time to react and so we went down hard with the bike. Carol who was in the back got a few bruises and I injured my shoulder, still can't move the upper arm much. Kullu had to go get an ATV and Miji to get us back home.



Panthera/Snow Leopard Trust (K. Suryawanshi)

Khashaa's male cub, M9, immediately after collaring.

Yesterday we caught a new male. He weighed a little more than 30 kg, we think that he is one and a half years old and that it is one of Khashaa's cubs, we saw tracks from a mother and cub at the trap site. From the GPS collars we should soon be able to tell if it is Khashaa's cub or not. It would be great if it is, then we can follow him as he disperses away from her. Will be the **first male disperser ever studied**. I supervised and instructed Carol and Kullu but apart from that didn't do much. Kind of nice to sit back for a change. Especially since **that was our 15th snow leopard and with that we have collared as many individuals as all other studies combined.**

Not much happening for me in a while, I'll sit in camp and hope that the shoulder gets well soon.

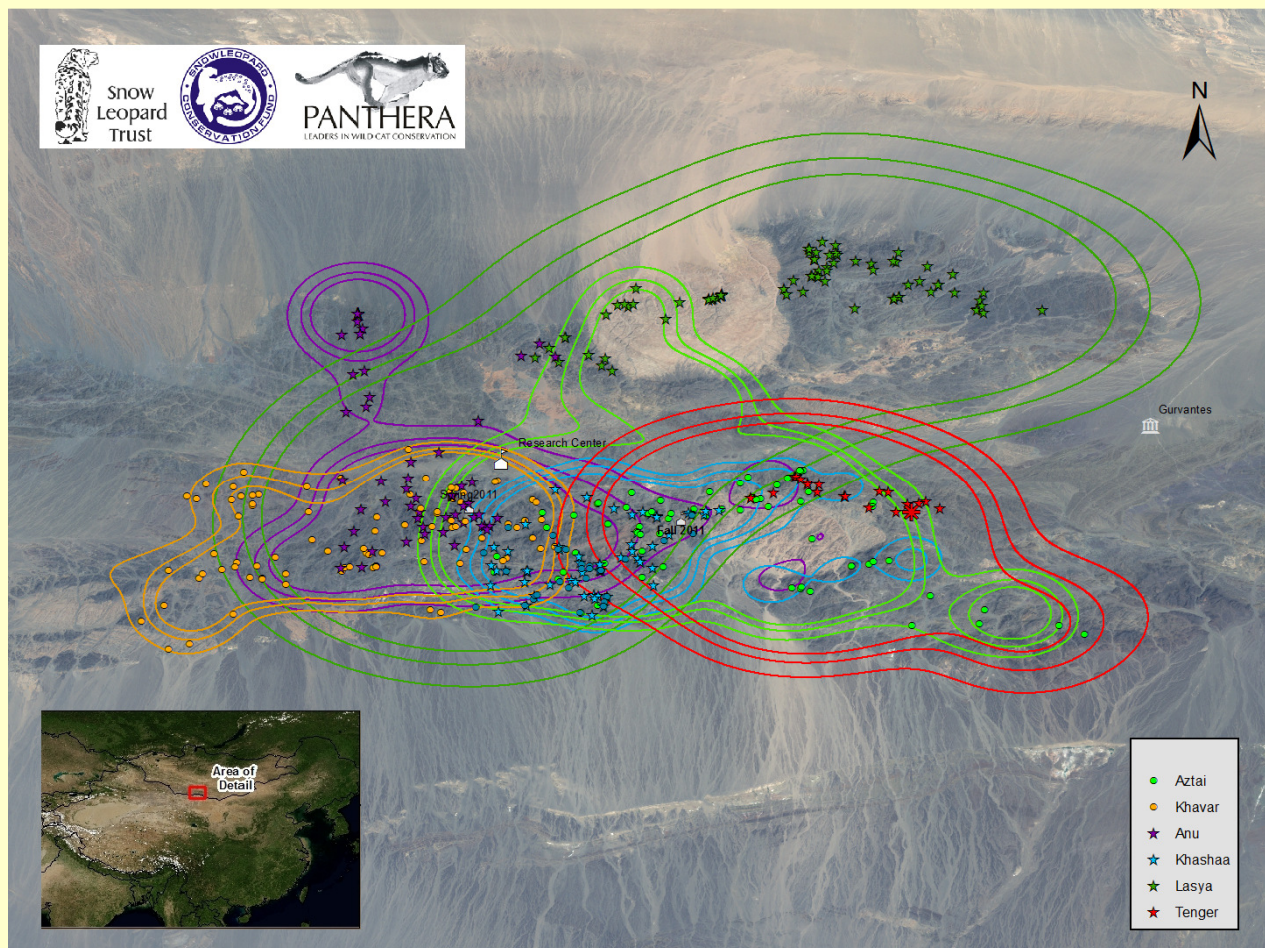
Orjan Johansson, 27 October 2011

Trapping camp closed

Unfortunately, Orjan's shoulder did not improve with rest, so he traveled to Ulaanbaatar for medical attention. The doctor recommended that Orjan return home for additional testing to determine the extent of his injury. Orjan and the rest of our team are very disappointed to close camp two months early; we were especially hoping to re-collar Tenger this season. We wish Orjan a very speedy recovery!

Ungulate survey work continues

Our ungulate survey expert Kulbhushansingh (Kullu) Suryawanshi from the Nature Conservation Foundation, India, is planning his ungulate survey methodology and surveys should be underway soon. He took some time out to work with Orjan following the motorbike injury, but is back to focusing on ibex and argali until mid-December. He will be assisted by biologist Nadia from our partner organization, the Snow Leopard Conservation Fund, Mongolia.



Cat locations for 7 October through 4 November 2011 with updated home ranges calculated from each cat's data set. There are not enough locations from M9 to calculate his home range at this time. The red starburst indicates where Tenger's dropped collar was found.

Activities of our collared cats

Similar to last month, Aztai (♂) ranged through Tenger (♀) and Khashaa's (♀) areas and ended up in the far southeastern portion of his home range. Shortly before he was re-collared, he spent 5 days eating the remains of a 14 year old male ibex that we believe Tenger had killed (she was on the kill for several days before Aztai arrived). Three days following Khashaa's re-collaring, it appeared that she was already on a kill, working to keep up her record weight. She utilized the full extent of her home range over the past four weeks. Her male cub, "M9" (our ninth male snow leopard indicated by blue circles on the map) is one of the two cubs we photographed with Khashaa several times earlier this year. M9 is traveling with his mother and will soon be named by donors.

Khavar (♂) continues to circle his home range every week or so. He was about one kilometer away from Anu (♀) at two uplinks on 7 October and < ½ kilometer from her at one uplink on 30 October. Anu has been splitting her time between the core of Khavar's area and the mountains to the north where she presumably made a large kill since she remained in the same location from 15-26 October. Lasya (♀) spent over a week in "The Badlands" again but then remained primarily in the mountains to the northeast. Her collar didn't function well in the rocky outcrops of The Badlands.

Tenger's collar dropped on 16 October (red snowflake on map), so we only have a few locations for her this month in the northern portion of her home range.



Panthera/Snow Leopard Trust

Khashaa's cubs, M9 in the lead, in this 20 August 2011 camera trap photo.

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



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