



Participative Science Expeditions to Study Snow Leopards in the Pamir-Alay Mountains

Kyrgyzstan



Goals and Procedure

This expedition is designed to carry out a scientific study on snow leopards in the Pamir-Alay mountains, at the base of the Lenin peak (23405ft.). The study area covers two valleys which surround the village of Jar-bashy, where the international organization, PANTHERA <https://www.panthera.org/>, has led community-based conservation projects with the local villagers since 2015. <http://panthera.kg/category/project?lang=en>

Until now, the project mostly focused on the fight against poaching, on raising local awareness about the need to protect snow leopards, and on sustainable usage of their natural resources. In order to do this, motion-sensitive cameras have been left with certain residents so that they themselves can continue to battle against poachers.

From this year onwards, these cameras will be used to study snow leopards to help estimate the species' population density in our study area.

In order to do this, OSI-PANTHERA will be working with PANTHERA to offer participative science expeditions which are open to volunteers of any nationality. The arrival of volunteers should allow the maximum number of motion-sensitive cameras to be put in place at the beginning of the season, all while developing a specific mindset about the conservation of wildlife by exchanging knowledge with the local population affected by the project.

Other than the setup of motion-sensitive cameras, the goal of the expedition is also to make a list of the indicators that point to the presence of snow leopards and to collect as much data as possible on its available prey. However, it should be noted that since the expedition is not on reserves, pastoralism is present in the areas surveyed, which can influence naturalistic observations.

Your mission

Every day, we will be on the move on foot on top of a ridge or in the base of the valley, in sub-groups in order to set up the motion-sensitive cameras in the opportune areas. The cameras will ideally be placed according to PANTHERA's needs, which will require us to frequently move between sites on horseback.

During the exploration, all of the indicators of snow leopards will be noted such as scratch marks, urinary markings, tracks etc... Any feces found will be collected for genetic analysis.

Example of a day by day schedule for the expedition

Day 1: Participants will be picked up from the **Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek** airport early in the morning – Breakfast with the inhabitants – 6-hour drive to the southern part of the country – night in a guest house in the **Jalalabad region**.

*Travelling through the country in the heart of the mountains allows the participants to discover the splendid view from the **Töö Ashuu (Camel Pass)** (10,433ft), the endless pastures of the **Suusamyr valley**, the resplendent lake of **Toktogul** arriving in southern Kyrgyzstan, immersing themselves in the nearby **Uzbek** atmosphere.*

Day 2: 7-hour car journey to the study region in the heart of the Pamir-Alay mountains, at an altitude of 9000ft in the southern-most part of Kyrgyzstan at the **border with Tajikistan** – Night spend in the home of a resident in the **village of Jar-bashy**.

After long hours of driving, the immense high plateaus that offer themselves to us, only limited by a snowy mountain range with some of the highest peaks in the world.

These infinite mountains will be our study area and residence for the next 10 days.

Day 3: Expedition departure, independently by horse, accompanied by an OSI-PANTHERA supervisor, a PANTHERA member and 3 participating villagers and an interpreter.

Days 4-10: Setup of motion-sensitive cameras as per the established protocol in the study area to the south of the village at the base of the **Lenin peak**. Collection of snow leopard indicators.

Camping in tents or with the shepherds in a yurt or hut.

The work of setting traps and collecting these indicators will be at the very heart of this expedition, peppered with cultural and human exchanges with shepherds, discoveries and naturalistic observations.

Day 10: Return to Jar-bashy

It is near this village, in the Kyzyl-suu river that the last otters of Kyrgyzstan are situated, supervised by the villagers partaking in the project.

Days 10-14: Setup of motion-sensitive cameras in the valets to the north of the village on the same principle.

Day 15: Return from the expedition, night spent at the house of a resident of Jar-bashy.

Day 16: Final morning in the heart of the mountains, then return to Jalalabad by car.

Day 17: Day at the Toktogul artificial lake to supply a computer data entry, an initial classification of the data, observation of initial analysis of the images of taken by the motion-censored cameras and writing of the expedition's balance sheet. All this will be done of course between 2 dives in the lake!

Day 18: Return to Bishkek by mini-bus.

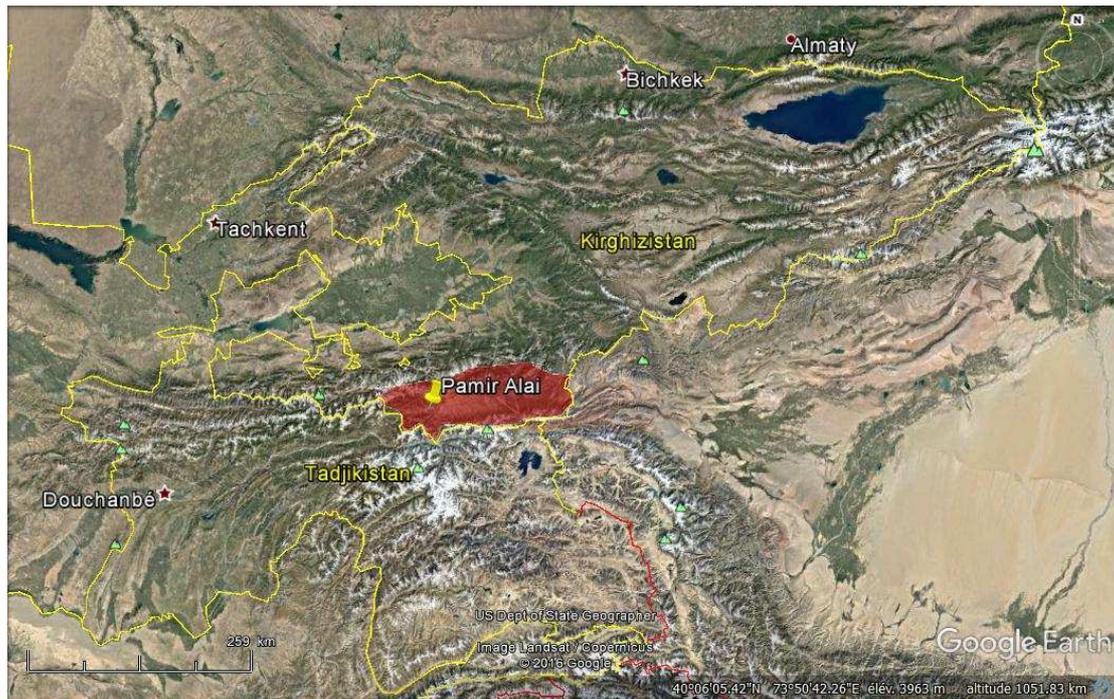
Day 19: Return to Europe on a mid-morning flight.



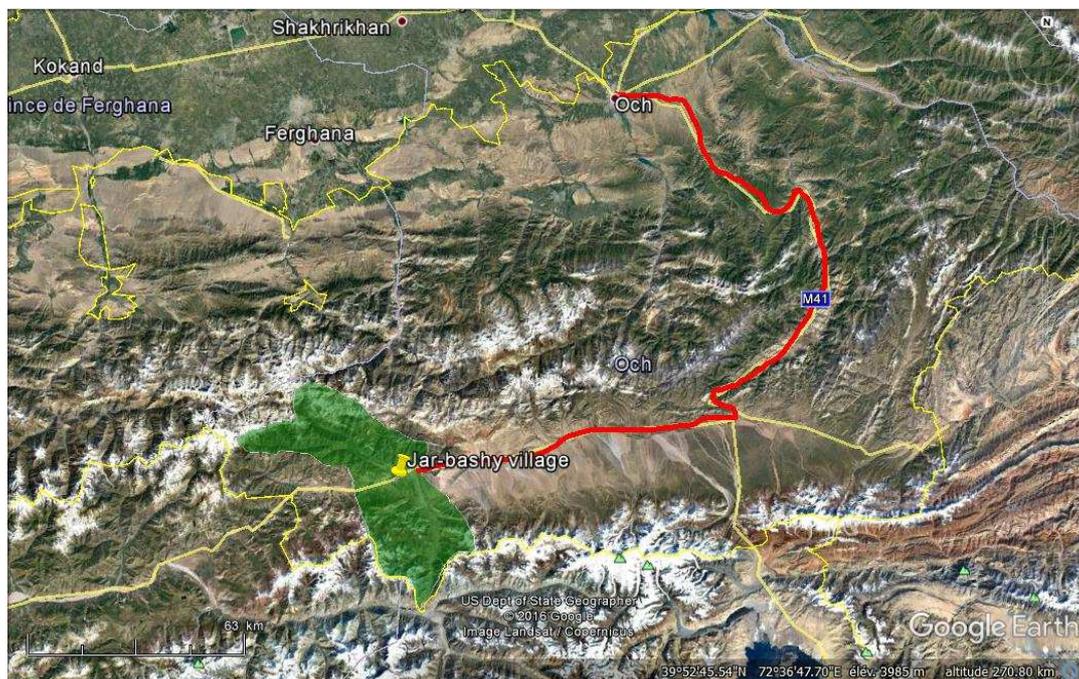
*This scientific expedition has **two objectives**: each year we organize an expedition with Kyrgyz teenagers so that they have the opportunity to discover their mountains, and the ecosystems that compose them.*

Or a project to renovate the base camps (insulation, installation of solar equipment) which was created to improve the day-to-day life of the Kyrgyz guards at the coldest times of the year.

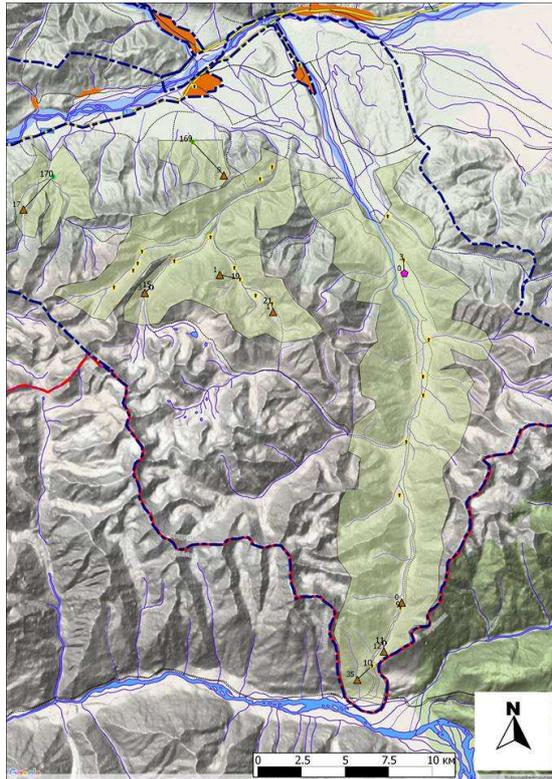
The Location of the Pamir-Alay Mountains in Kyrgyzstan



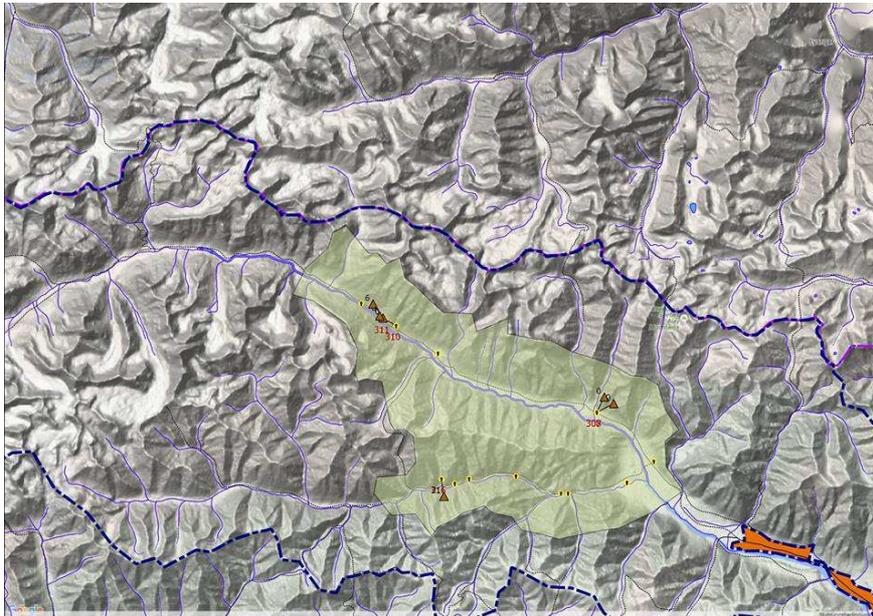
The study areas and access from Osh



The study area of Min Teke



The study area of Jar-bashy





Prerequisites

WARNING: Registration for this stay requires a full awareness of its level of physical and athletic difficulty. Far from discouraging you, these challenges may entice you, but you must be aware of them and accept them to participate in the expedition!

Hiking

Almost every day, except days including relocation from campsite to campsite on horseback, we will be setting up motion-sensitive cameras in sub-groups.

The first group, who will have chosen to set up cameras on the ridge on that certain day, will have to expect between **300 and 900m of altitude change**, between 4 and 6 hours of hiking or even more on **steep slopes** on any given day.

For the second group, the prospects of these changes in altitude will be less severe.

In any case, we will have to walk **off-trail**, on **steep slopes** and over **very uneven terrain** very frequently.

Horse-riding

We will use horses to relocate from one camp to another, to get to the areas where the motion-sensitive cameras are to be setup and to transport our equipment. **It is not necessary to be a skilled horse-rider, but you must not be scared of either the horses themselves or of riding them.** We will keep it at a walking pace most of the time and we will never go faster than a gentle trot. The horses are small and very docile, they know the trails off by heart and they have been very well trained by the villagers who will accompany us. Almost every day we will be travelling between 1 and 5 hours on horseback. Kyrgyz saddles are very comfortable but it would be best to bring waterproof pants or horse-riding pants to reduce chafing.

Camping

Sometimes we will be stay with the local residents (in a village house or yurt) at the beginning and at the end of the trip, but most nights will be spent under the cover of a tent canvas. You, therefore, have to like living in the middle of nature, in a fairly isolated area, far from regular homely comforts, but also closer to the necessities!

Adventure

This participative science expedition is a first in this region and so everything is yet to be discovered! The first expedition of this type took place in June 2017.

Adventure will become part of our everyday lives and so you must be able to easily adapt to unforeseen circumstances. The OSI-PANTHERA supervisors, who have several years of experience with the organization of this kind of expedition in Kyrgyzstan, will be there to ensure that everything goes well and to take care of the logistics of the expedition.

Passion for nature

It is not necessary to have many scientific or naturalist skills but you must, of course, have a keen interest in wild animals and nature.

Some practical information about our expeditions:

Immersion: Our expeditions are carried out in total immersion. We are often in wild surroundings for several hours or days with only horses for any kind of human presence. In this context rescue is only by helicopter with a delay of at least one day. You must be aware and ready to accept the psychological and safety factors that this type of isolation can have and not be afraid of it.

Rusticity: Our expeditions are done with fairly limited comfort, we sleep in tents (provided by the NGO) every day and sometimes we camp out under the stars. Highly variable weather conditions in the high mountains will be more noticeable, especially with fatigue which requires elaborate equipment. The WC consists of cold water from a stream.

Autonomy: We will be totally autonomous on at least 11 of the days with regard to food, transported on horseback like all the rest of the equipment. There is not a great amount of gastronomy, given the field constraints (starchy foods and mutton) but always sufficient amounts to feed the majority of our participants. We make our bread once the initial food stock has run out. Being in state reserves, we will not practice gathering, fishing or any other activity of this type.

Sports and equestrian level: **Our expeditions are not sports treks or equestrian stays.** The horse is our means of transportation from one camp to another while walking allows us to conduct our study on the areas where the snow leopard evolves. These surveys will be carried out in very rough terrain, off-trail and with ranging altitudes from 500 to 1500m per day. It is necessary to arrive in a healthy condition for the expedition and to have already practiced mountain off-trail hiking, without necessarily being an athlete of high level! While the horse and horse riding are an integral part of our daily life during the expedition, it is clearly not an equestrian trekking expedition, as, for example, for safety reasons gallops are prohibited during the expedition.

Duration: 18 days in the field (20 days including flights)
Or 5 weeks

Accommodation: Full board: hotel, yurts, tents

Transport: Airplane, minibus, jeep, horseback, on foot

Team: 1 scientific tutor + 1 PANTHERA member (US) + 2 villagers

For queries or to register:

www.osi-panthera.org

Tel: + 33 9 72 30 55 95

direction@osi-panthera.org