

SARYTCHAT-ERTASH (North part) August 2018 expedition



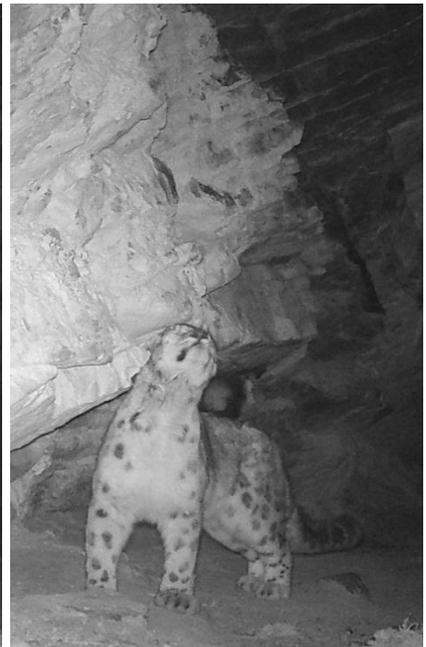
28F-2C

11-27-20



28F-2C

11-27-20



28F-2C

11-27-20



Snow leopard captured on Kizil Keregue and Tchong Koilu camera traps

Team

The expedition team was composed of :

- 3 Kyrgyz rangers (Joldoshbek / Joki, Askat, Mirlan / Mishka)
- 1 Kyrgyz guide and translator (Aliia)
- 1 French scientist guide (Anne-Lise)
- 7 European volunteers (Adrien, Aline, Balint, Benjamin, Bernadett, Matthieu, Nandor)



The europeano-kyrgyz team !

Area

The expedition took place between the 2nd and the 14th of August 2018 in Sarychat Ertash Reserve, created in 1995 and monitored by OSI-Panthera since 2007. The area explored covers the high plateau near Kumtor and the left bank of the Sarychat-Ertash river down to Koilu to the east. It was not possible to go farther south and east due to the high level of the river. Three sectors were explored through transects around the camps of Atcha, Bordu and Koilu.

Weather

The weather conditions happened to be very favorable. The first week, the mornings were generally clear, while the afternoons turned cloudy and sometimes rainy. During the second week, the conditions were clear and stable, with the exception of one rainy day.

These mild conditions resulted in the rather high level of the rivers, making it often necessary to be back in camp around midday.

Daily reports

02.08 → **Meeting with the three rangers and the horses. Ride on the high plateaus from Kumtor mine to Atcha Camp.**

Observations: one fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) near the mine, one Lammergeier (*Gypaetus barbatus*) during lunch (just before the snow), one Ruddy shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*).

03.08 → **First hike in the direction of Atcha glacier, right bank of Atcha River.**

Observations: one young (1 to 3 years) Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos daphanea*) that flew low over the camp, one fox hunting rodents (very close and during a long moment); collection of the first sample of snow leopard feces, next to a scrape; footprints and feces of wolves near the lake, very fresh feces of Bear (*Ursus arctos isabellinus*) near the crest and eight Hill pigeons (*Columba rupestris*). One dying Grey marmot (*Marmota baibacina*) in its hole at camp.



Fox hunting rodents and really fresh Bear feces.

04.08 → **Ride from Atcha to Bordu Camp.**

Observations: on the way, several Hares (*Lepus tolai*), Marmots, several females and young of Tien Shan argalis (*Ovis ammon* sp), one immature Lammergeier, one Himalayan vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*) and one Eurasian hoopoe in the camp (*Upupa epops*). In the evening, 5 females and 3 young Siberian ibexes (*Capra sibirica*) and several female Tien Shan argalis with young.

Camera trap (n°7): on the way, stop at Boroko; 8000 pictures were recorded, apparently one photo every 58 minute; after checking, pictures of Siberian ibexes, Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*, including a mother and cub), Fox and Grey wolves (*Canis lupus*) were recorded.



Team at the bottom of Ortho-Bordou and Wolf on Boroko camera trap

05.08 → *Ride from Bordu to Koilu Camp*

Camera trap (n°18): on the way, stop at Kyzyl Kerege under a cliff; several pictures of Snow leopard, one Bear and a sleeping Ibex, even Golden eagles and Lammergeiers (the camera had been knocked down by the Bear); camera left at the same spot.

Observations: feces of snow leopard (1 sample taken) and wolves, several Eurasian Crag Martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) or Sand Martins (*Riparia riparia*).

→ *Transect up the first narrow part of Tchung Koilu valley.*

Camera trap (n°2): checked and removed; several pictures of Snow leopard, Fox, Wolf, Ibex and maybe a Manul cat (*Otocolobus manul*).

Observations: Snow leopard feces (2 samples taken), several Wolves feces, one Golden eagle, a Sand martin (?), in the evening, in the plains south of the camp, 70 argalis (58 females, 12 young) and 2 Bears hunting marmots at dusk in plains at the junction of the rivers (probably a female with an old cub).



2 Bears hunting Marmots and a Siberian ibex male on camera trap

06.08 → *Group 1: crest of Ortho Koilu, across the river south of the camp.*

Observations: very fresh scrapes (one or two day old), a fresh footprint and 3 feces of Snow leopard (3 samples taken); many traces of wolves (mainly feces); one Gldentstdt's redstart (*Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*),

→ *Group 2: Kirk Choro, north of the Camp.*

Observations: lots of feces of Snow leopard (3 samples taken); 2 Golden eagles, 3 Lammergeiers (two adults and one young), one female Himalayan snowcock with 15 juveniles (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*), one Sand martin (?), one Isabelline wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*), several female of Tien Shan argalis with young;



Lammergeier and Himalayan snowcock

07.08 → **Group 1: Tchong Sary Etcki**

Observations: several feces of Snow leopard (2 samples taken); three Eurasian eagle Owl (probably one adult, 2 young) (*Bubo bubo*), one Eurasian hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) and one juvenile Golden Eagle, two Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*).

Camera trap (n°2): a lot of time was spent setting the camera and checking its proper functioning (pictures seem to be taken and copied on the memory card, but they are unreadable on the camera).

→ **Group 2: Kitchi Sary Etchiki**

Observations: 31 female Argalis with youngs at the entry of the valley; scrapes and footprints of Bear; one scrape, two fresh feces (2 samples taken) and urine of Snow leopard in the lowest part of the river, one Guldentstädt's redstart.



Eurasian eagle owl (adult and young) and Eurasian hobby

08.08 Ride to Chong Koilu valley by horse. On the way, a group of 6 mountaineers was met (they may have disturbed the fauna, which could explain why there were only few observations of animals).

→ **Group 1: crest on the right side of the main valley (near the “castle”)**

Camera trap (n°6): was found broken (closing mechanism of the box) by a Snow leopard; has been repositioned in order to improve the quality of the images and secured with a serflex.

Observations: four Himalayan snowcocks, many traces of Wolves (feces) and at the top of the crest 3 Snow leopards scrapes and one feces (1 sample taken).

→ **Group 2: long moraine (slightly flat) of slate further up the main valley**

Observations: many Snow leopard footprints and scrapes until around 4000m; above, only traces of Wolves (feces); 2 Lammergeiers.

At the end of the day, a small valley on the left bank was checked and a fresh scrape of Snow leopard was found at the crossing of the two rivers.

09.08 → **Ride between Koilu and Bordu; investigation of Kitchi Bordu valley on foot**

Observations: 36 female Siberian ibexes, one young Lammergeier (3-5 years old with a black head) and one adult.

10.08 → **Wake up at half past four for a short hike to a view point.**

Observations: many Siberian ibexes (3 females and 2 youngs in Kizil Kerege; ~ 60 females and young males on the right bank slope in front of Bordu camp) and Tien Shan argalis (6

young males and 60 females above Boroko; one female on the crest just behind us); Common swifts (*Apus apus*); 2 adult and one immature Lammergeiers.

→ **Group 1: crest of Ortho Bordu**

Camera trap (n°4): checked (record number of pictures... 25000 not analysed) and maintained.

Observations: many scrapes, feces, footprints as well as urine of Snow leopard (2 samples taken), feces of Wolves.

→ **Group 2: up Chong Bordu valley to investigate two new sites**

Observations: 1/ narrow valley on the left bank - 2 scrapes and a pug mark of Bear; Wolf markings (old feces, old pug marks); 2/ group of boulders on the slope of the Ortho Bordu crest, at the eastern end of the valley (right bank) - old track of Snow leopard; on the way - Bear diggings into marmot holes, 30 female Siberian ibexes and 46 female Tien Shan argalis.



Female of Tien Shan argali

11.08 → **Ride from Bordu to Boroko for a SUPER bivouac (met 6 Bielorussian hikers)**

Observations: at Kizil Djar - old Snow leopard scrapes and a pug mark, a huge Bear “nest” and a Bear feces; on the way - 3 Wallcreepers (*Tichodrome muraria*).

→ **Ride up the valley of Boroko**

Observations: 70 female Tien Shan argalis and a Stoat (*Mustela erminea*).

During the night, 5 true adventurers slept under the stars and woke up under the rain.



Nest of Bear with Mishka and Bivouac in Boroko valley

12.08 → **Group 1: direct ride to Atcha to set up camp**

Observations: on the way -125 female Tien Shan argalis, including 34 young; 7 female Siberian ibexes; 2 Golden eagles; several Hares and Marmots, 3 Eurasian hoopoe, 2 limicoles and 1 duck (unidentified); at the camp - one stoat.

→ **Group 2: left bank of Boroko river (cliffs)**

Camera trap (n°7) new set up farther up

Camera trap (n°17) checked (around 5000 pictures, Fox, Blue whistling thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*) and Marmots, triggered by a shrub) and maintained in front of Oroï suu area.

Observations: 10 to 15 feces of Bear were found at the same place, old Bear scrapes and an old Snow leopard scrape.



Female Tien Shan argalis and a Blue whistling thrush on camera trap

13.08 → **Group 1: left bank of Sarychat river (cliffs) and Sarai d'Atcha**

Observations: under the cliffs - one old feces of Snow leopard (maybe of wolf?, 1 sample taken); after the end of the transect, one old feces of Snow leopard under a boulder in the higher parts of the cliffs; 66 female and 4 males Tien Shan argalis on the right bank of Sarychat river; on the way to Sarai d'Atcha - 7 male Tien Shan argalis (at 30-40m); at Sarai d'Atcha (second transect in a canyon on the left side of the main river) - old scrape and feces of Snow leopard (1 sample taken); track followed to a very fresh trace of Snow leopard urine; old scrape and trace of urine of Snow leopard. On the way - one Common kestrel (*Falco*

tinnunculus).

Camera trap (n°15): unfortunately stopped working after 2 weeks, triggered by the cliff shadow, apparently no animals on the recordings except a Large-eared pika (*Ochotona macrotis*).



Young males of Tien Shan argalis

→ **Group 2: lakes of Atcha's plateau**

Observations: no traces of Snow leopard, several feces and pug marks of Wolves; one adult Lammergeier, 2 ducks (unidentified), 4 geese / ducks (unidentified) and several pipits de Tawni (*Anthus campestris* - ?), 1 Common kestrel, one Common raven (*Corvus ruficollis*), one Hare, 85 Tien Shan argalis (7 males and 78 females and/or juveniles, right bank of Sarychat river) and 28 Siberian ibexes (3 males, 6 juveniles and 19 females, on the crest on the left bank of Atcha river).

14.08 → **Ride back to Kumtor with a stop by the lakes for lunch.**

Observations: at the camp – again the hermine; on the way - one fox (that could be seen every day around the camp); at the lake – 2 Common sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*), one duck (diver, *Aythya* sp ?), 3 Ruddy Shelducks, one adult Lammergeier, and 3 female Tien Shan argalis on the shores; on the way - foxes, 2 Ruddy shelducks, about ten female Tien Shan argalis and 3 another time, Marmots.



Lunch at the lake and way back to Kumtor

15.08 Wake up under a clear sky, under the scrutiny of a fox. Breakfast with watermelon and vodka before driving back to Issyk Kul.



Fox and dinner at 4000 m above sea level



On the way back to Bishkek