The Leopard in Jordan

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Leopards have been reported from several localities in Jordan. The last confirmed report dates from 1987. There have been occasional unconfirmed reports since. Recent field surveys have failed to find signs of leopard presence.

Leopards became rare after the turn of the twentieth century and by the second half of the century it was almost extinct from Jordan. Major causes of extinction are habitat loss, hunting and reduced prey availability. Habitat loss is mainly due to the rapid increase in the human population and development projects associated with this growth. Hunting has been a feature for millennia for sport and out of fear for man and his domestic animals. Most large-size prey items for the leopard have become rare, especially in the second half of the 20th century.

Habitat
Three protected areas totaling 1,300 km² (Wadi Rum, Dana, and Wadi Mujib) are sited along the historical range of the leopard, and a fourth is proposed.

Prey
Nubian ibex Capra nubiana occur in Wadi Mujib Wildlife Reserve and
Wadi Rum Protected Area. Mountain gazelle *Gazella gazella* is now considered extinct in Jordan. Historical range of the species is along the western mountain range bordering the Rift Valley. A small number of dorcas gazelles *Gazella dorcas* occur in Wadi Araba and Wadi Rum Desert in the south of the country. Other possible prey items inhabiting the same historical range of the leopard include rock hyrax *Procavia capensis*, and Cape hare *Lepus capensis*.

**Legal Status**
Leopards are protected by law. Ibex and all gazelle species are also strictly protected.

**Conflicts and Public Awareness**
Leopards were hunted for different reasons. According to interviews with local people who live in areas where leopards used to exist, the main reason for hunting was related to the social traditions at that time. A person who could hunt or kill a leopard would be acknowledged by the tribe as a distinguished and brave man.

In 1999, a local guide from Wadi Rum showed us a leopard trap, known locally as *margabah* (Fig. 2) that was used by his grandfather to catch leopards. The trap was made of stones and had two openings. The bait hung from the middle of the trap and when the leopard tried to take the bait, the stone doors of the trap closed and trapped the leopard inside.

**People and Institutions**
The Royal Society for Conservation of Nature (RSCN) is responsible for establishment and management of protected areas, research, cooperation with international agencies, enforcement of wildlife protection laws and administration of hunting.

**Recommendations**
During the past couple of years there have been rumours of leopards crossing the borders from the Saudi side and Palestine, but a recent short field visit could not confirm these. However, in one area close to Dana Nature Reserve in Tafilah, habitats are still relatively untouched and seem to be very suitable for leopards due to the rugged landscape and presence of wadis and rocky cliffs which might provide very good shelter and forage for leopards. This is also the area where the last sighting of leopards came from. It is recommended to survey this area thoroughly and place some camera traps if possible.

**References:**