

THE STATUS OF THE LEOPARD, *Panthera pardus*, IN VIETNAM.

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1. DISTRIBUTION

In Vietnam, the leopard, *Panthera pardus*, ranges from North to South throughout the country, preferring hilly and mountainous forest habitats 300-1500 meters in elevation. Elsewhere in Asia, leopards ranges from southern China, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia. Taxonomically most authorities refer to this sub-species as *P. p. delacouri* Pocock, 1930, although a few prefer to use the name *sinensis* Brass, 1904, as suggested by Mazak and Dubroruka (1963).

2. POPULATION.

Thirty years ago, based on the information provided by local hunters and fur reports published in the magazine of the Trade Company of the Forests Products of Hanoi, the number of leopards collected in North Vietnam was 400-500 per year (Le, 1973). In Hoa Binh Province, a hilly area in the northwest region (S. 4691 km²), Dang et al (1975) estimated the leopard population to be 80-90 individuals (0.02 individuals per km²); the annual harvest for that area was 10-15 individuals (1.2-1.8 per district) or 8-9% of the overall population. If the rate of harvest for the rest of the country equalled that of Hoa Binh Province (Dang et al, 1975), the population of leopards in North Vietnam might be 3000-3200, based on harvest data of Le (1973). In the past, their home range might be one animal per 100 km².

Conversely, the 1925-32 Kelly Roosevelt and Delacour Asiatic Expeditions collected only 5 specimens in Phong sali (Laos), Baxat, Hue and Quang Tri (Vietnam) (Osgood, 1932). Later mammal surveys from 1957-71 in North Vietnam collected only two pelts in Lai Chau and Bac Kan Provinces (Dao, 1985), and no leopards were collected in South Vietnam by the 1965-69 Van Peenen Mammal Surveys (Van Peenan et al, 1969). There is no recent data or surveys on leopard populations but ~~there~~ number as probably declined.

3. HABITAT.

Leopards inhabit a wide variety of habitats that range from wooded country to open areas with rocks and dry shrubs. When possible, they prefer dense mature forest where fallen logs and stumps are present to provide cover for young. Forests in areas of limestone also have water-carved holes in the rock that are hidden by dense foliage and frequently used for refuge. In the past, the home range of leopards might be one animal per 100 km².

4. PRINCIPLE THREATS.

The principle threat to leopards in Vietnam is the loss of habitat and prey (mammals, birds, etc.). During the past thirty years, Vietnam's forests have been destroyed by war (bombing, herbicides, digging, etc.), agriculture, and activities related to population growth (construction, roads, etc.). This loss equals over one third of the forest cover present in 1943.

Another threat to leopards is illegal hunting. Like tigers, the bones of leopards are valued for their medicinal properties.

5. CONSERVATION MEASURES TAKEN.

In 1963, there was a provisional Order in government that regulated the hunting of game in Vietnam; in this Order, all Felidae were "reserved". In 1972, there was an Order by Council protecting forests. Regardless of the above, two decades of illegal hunting and logging has caused a continual decline of large felids. As a result, leopards should be considered "Vulnerable" in the Red Book. It is hopeful that a Recent Order by government on the Management of 87 Reserves and National Parks, and future laws protecting forests, will prevent the extinction of this cat.

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