



WWF

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Tatish mountains © WWF-Caucasus

# CAUCASUS ECOREGION NEWSLETTER

News from the Caucasus

Special



Issue

## One male and two females of Caucasian leopard live in Southern Armenia

Since September 2013 to April 2014 WWF experts got camera trapped photos of different leopards.

The analyses of the photos show that at least one male and two females live in the area for over a year. It gives hope that in 2014 the females will be able to deliver cubs and WWF will try to get their photos too. Of course, it will require more attention and harder work to enforce the protection of these animals in the area. According to the camera trapped photos and field monitoring data the number of prey species (bezoar goat, mouflon) for the leopard has been increased.

These achievements are the result of a long-term work carried out by WWF since 2002, including enforcement of existing Protected Areas (Khosrov and Shikahogh Reserves), establishment of new Protected Areas (Arevik National Park, Zangezur and Khustup Sanctuaries) in the area of the main habitats of leopard through partnership with the Ministry of Nature Protection, the State Environmental Inspectorate, Protected Areas, donors, communities and partner NGOs.

In 2014 WWF will conduct regional and national workshops on the development of the Regional Conservation Strategy for leopard and the National Action Plans. Meantime, WWF will continue its cooperation with the partners on enforcement of Protected Areas system in Armenia as well as will work on consolidation of the Protected Areas ecological network in the south of the country through establishment of ecological corridors.

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## Leopard Booom in Azerbaijan

Six different leopards have been photographed or filmed in Azerbaijan in the past year – four in the Nakhchivan Republic and two in the Talish Mountains. This is remarkable, since not so long ago no-one believed that leopards were left in the Caucasus at all. For 30 to 40 years it was nigh on impossible to find any reliable scientific data about the presence of the big cats.

The programme for leopard conservation in the Caucasus started in early 2000. In those days, the WWF field team had to spend weeks or months in the Hyrkan forest or arid landscapes of Zangezur to find any trace of leopards.

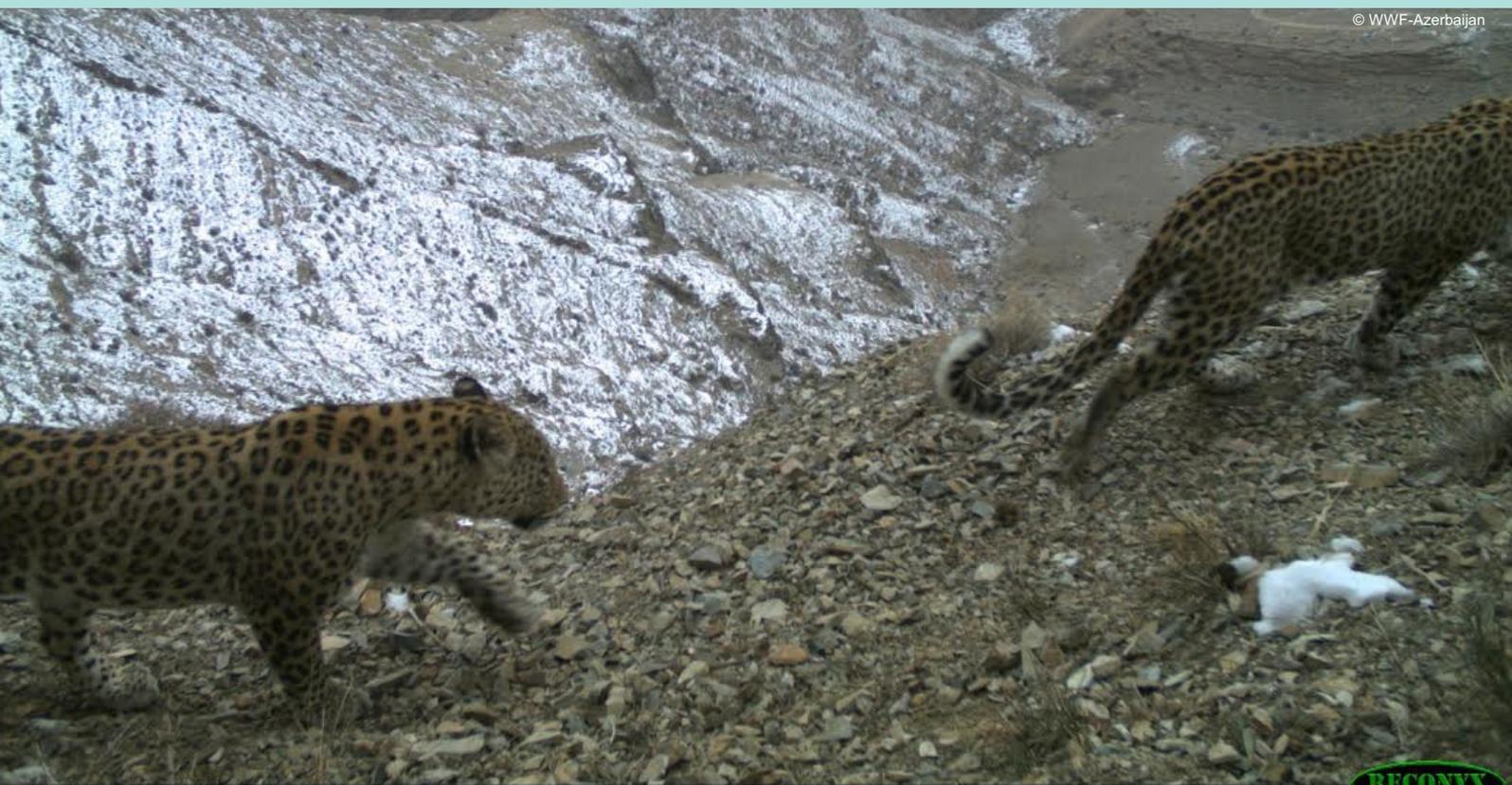
The long-term programme, which includes support for PAs in leopard habitats and active communication work among the local population, has resulted in an increase in the number of leopards. Intensive monitoring of the leopard population and other associated species was established in Talish Mountains and Zangezur (Nakhchivan), using camera traps. In the past year 50 photos and 12 movies have been taken of four different leopards in the Nakhchivan AR and eight photos of two leopards in the Talish Mountains.

At the end of 2013 onwards leopards were photographed in pairs so we are looking forward to seeing their cubs in summer or autumn when they follow their mother for a photo session.

All this success has been possible due to the coordinated work of the WWF team and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan. This year is the last year of National Action Plan for Leopard Conservation in Azerbaijan, approved in 2009. A New Action Plan will be developed for the next five years. The size of PAs in leopard habitats during the programme period has more than quadrupled. According to the camera trap monitoring, the number of prey species for the leopard is also increasing. This is behind the leopard boom in Azerbaijan in recent years.

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© Sochi National Park. Umar Semenov

## The cubs to start a new population of the leopard in Russia

The Persian leopards, who once ranged across the entire Caucasus, are now among the world's endangered species according to the IUCN Red List. But these charismatic animals were given another chance in the Russian Caucasus. They are currently being reintroduced to their natural habitat as part of the Persian Leopard Reintroduction Program, linked to the Sochi 2014 Winter Games.

Four kittens were born in the Persian Leopard Breeding and Rehabilitation Center at the Sochi National Park in the Caucasus Nature Reserve last summer. Today, the cubs are learning to hunt small prey, thus forming their predatory skills for the future release into the wild. The birth of these animals in captivity is a big event and a remarkable achievement of the Russian scientists. "These kittens will become the founders of a new leopard population in the Russian Caucasus mountains", says WWF-Russia species coordinator Natalia Dronova. "We hope that after the leopard cubs have been successfully prepared for independent life in the wild, they will be released into the Kavkazsky biosphere reserve in the spring of 2015".

The Persian Leopard Reintroduction Program in the Russian Caucasus is run by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation with participation of the Sochi National Park, Caucasus Nature Reserve, A.N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution, WWF and Moscow Zoo. The experience gained during the implementation of the Leopard Reintroduction Program will be introduced to the Far East region of Russia for similar projects for recovery of Amur leopard population.

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## Saving mountain gazelles in Hatay

WWF-Turkey initiated Turkey's Life Programme to raise awareness about Turkey's biodiversity values and support the conservation efforts of local NGOs through a grant programme. Mountain Gazelle (*Gazella gazella*), an endangered species in Turkey and found only in Kırıkhan (Hatay), is acknowledged highly for the local people thus is an important value needs protection. This belief allowed the remaining 150 individuals to survive until now. The conservation and minimizing the risks of its habitat are equally important since Mountain Gazelle's distribution is limited to approximately 50 squaremeter in Turkey. With the support of WWF-Turkey, Conservation of Turkey's Nature Association - the local NGO in Hatay – realized the first official population count and identified 230 individuals. Information boards were placed around its habitat. The observatory built in Kırıkhan not only informs people but also helps promoting ecotourism activities. A breeding center is planned to be established by the Forestry and Water Affairs Ministry. The project influenced both locals and visitors of Kırıkhan. Today, locals are more aware and actively take action for Mountain Gazelle conservation. WWF-Turkey continues to monitor the progress in the area.



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## Earth Hour 2014 in the Caucasus



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In 2014 more than 162 countries with 7000 cities were united for the Earth Hour initiative. In Yerevan the external lighting of buildings and the symbols of the city as well as the main street lights switched off for one hour. This year Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia again joined the Earth Hour global movement.

WWF-Armenia together with the Ministry of Nature Protection, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Yerevan Municipality, Best Western Congress Hotel and Prometey Bank participated in the Earth Hour event. The intent of the initiative was to bring together the public, private sector, communities and other stakeholders around the idea of switching off the lights for one hour in support for decisive action on climate change. Significant landmarks in Tbilisi such as the TV broadcasting tower, municipal buildings, the Peace Bridge, the Shota Rustaveli State Drama Theater and numerous other cultural, historical and commercial structures stood in darkness during Earth Hour in solidarity with the rest of the world as symbols of hope for a cause that grows more urgent by the hour.



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Azerbaijan joined the Earth Hour Global campaign for the fourth time. During the event the most popular buildings in Baku – Maiden Tower, Shirvanshahs' Palace, Hotel Hilton, Park Boulevard, Hotel Absheron Marriott, Bridge Plaza and 28 Mall were switched off for one hour.



© WWF-Armenia

Earth Hour in Russia continues to drive big results for conservation in its annual commitment to protect the planet. In 2014, in addition to symbolic gesture of switching the lights off in the country's main buildings and landmarks, WWF Russia has launched a new campaign aiming to support field projects for endangered species, including the rare European bison in the Northern Caucasus.

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### Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

[www.panda.org/caucasus](http://www.panda.org/caucasus)

Regional projects in Turkish and Russian parts of the Caucasus are coordinated and implemented accordingly by WWF-Turkey and WWF-Russia in close cooperation with WWF-Caucasus Programme Office under one vision of Ecoregion Conservation Plan.

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