

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.

هناك العديد من التقارير التي تشير إلى مشاهدة النمر العربي في الأردن، وتم إعداد آخر تقرير في شأن ذلك عام 1987، وقد فشل آخر مسح ميداني تم القيام به مؤخرا في إيجاد أية مؤشرات تؤكد وجود النمر العربي في الأردن.

Distribution

Leopards were reported as more common than the cheetah by Tristram (1866, 1888) in many areas of Jordan and Palestine. Ernst Schmitz recorded five leopards shot near Jerusalem in the first decade of the 20th century (Hardy 1947). Aharoni (1930) reported a leopard killed between Ramallah and Emmaus. Another animal was killed on the Palestinian-Lebanese frontier and a cub was secured near Safad, west of Lake Galilee (Hardy 1947, Qumsiyeh 1996, Qumsiyeh *et al.* 1993). Hardy (1947) stated that leopards still inhabited the wadi south of Petra and Wadi Zarqa Ma'an as well as an individual shot at Ain Ghidyan, north of Aqaba. Harrison (1968) reported a specimen shot west of Ma'an. Lehmann (1965) reported several observations west of the Dead Sea. A leopard was killed by a Bedouin in Wadi Darajah, in the desert east of the Dead Sea in October 1965 (Blake 1966). Clarke (1977) listed the following localities as previous reports of the leopard from Jordan; Petra, Wadi Zarqa Ma'an, Ain el Taba, Ain Buweirdeh, and Ma'an. The latest report of the leopard came from an observation in the Tafilah area where it attacked and killed sheep during February 1987 (Amr & Disi 1988, Qumsiyeh *et al.* 1993). Figure 1 shows these localities. Sporadic local reports have been received since then, possibly referring to vagrants, but remain unconfirmed. A field visit by the authors in 2005 with local rangers failed to find any signs of leopard presence.

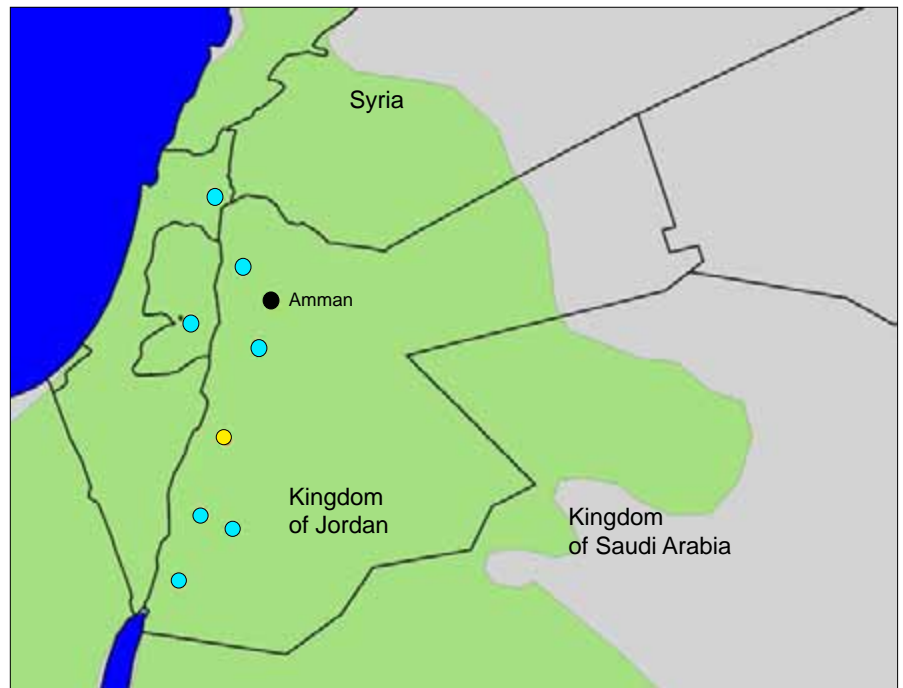


Fig. 1. Former distribution of leopard in Jordan. Presumed former range (green), 1987 record (yellow dot) and historical records (blue dots).

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



Fig. 2. A leopard trap (called *margabah* by the local population) Eastern Desert – Jordan (Photo M. Qarqaz).

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.

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