

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **First snow leopard cubs caught on camera in reserve *Hunting area-turned sanctuary is working***

SEATTLE— This spring has brought signs of triumphant renewal well beyond the usual spring showers, budding leaves and blooming flowers. In Kyrgyzstan, the first-ever signs of a new generation—two snow leopard cubs and their mom—were spotted on a research camera inside a new sanctuary dedicated to snow leopard protection.

In 2016, Woodland Park Zoo's conservation partner, the Seattle-based Snow Leopard Trust, joined forces with the Kyrgyz government to convert the former hunting reserve of Shamshy, in Kyrgyzstan, into a sanctuary for snow leopards and ibex. These [pictures](#) confirm the first documented snow leopard cubs being raised inside the Shamshy Wildlife Sanctuary, or anywhere in the Kyrgyz Ala-Too mountain range. It is also the first sign of a breeding snow leopard population in this region of Kyrgyzstan.

The snow leopard is an elusive and mysterious big cat native to the high mountain ranges of Central Asia and Russia, as well as Afghanistan, China, India, Mongolia, Nepal and Pakistan. Major threats facing the cats are poaching, retaliation killings by local pastoral communities, and loss of habitat and prey.

For decades, ibex (a wild goat species with huge, backswept horns) were hunted legally in Shamshy, and their populations dwindled. The presence of snow leopards, although occasionally reported in the area, was never confirmed. Since the area was converted into a wildlife sanctuary, however, things are looking up, as the innovative approach has yielded very encouraging results. "One year after the Sanctuary was established, we captured the [first ever snow leopard photos taken in the Kyrgyz Ala-Too mountain range](#) where Shamshy lies. A first ibex count showed a healthy population of around 300 animals living here," said Snow Leopard Trust Kyrgyzstan Program Director Kuban Jumabai uulu.

"The cubs and their mother were captured on camera around 11 miles up the valley from the reserve entrance," explained Kuban. "We've also found snow leopard tracks at much lower altitudes, near the ranger's cabin, and camera trap photos later showed that it was a different cat roaming this area. So, we have at least two adults and two cubs using Shamshy right now."

Snow leopards are often referred to as "ghosts of the mountains" because they are so elusive and rarely seen by humans. "These recently captured images of a mother and her cubs is another example of how the Snow Leopard Trust's dedication to protecting the future of these majestic cats is helping to ensure that they thrive across their natural range," said Woodland Park Zoo Vice President of Conservation Initiatives Peter Zahler. "This project's combination of protected area development and research illustrates how zoos, conservation organizations, wildlife agencies, and governments can partner to protect and recover wildlife. We are proud to share this great news—it is further proof that when we all work together, we can make a real difference."

"Kyrgyzstan has been making a focused effort to protect snow leopards for several years, and these photos are another indication that our approach is working out," said the Director of the Department for Rational Use of Natural Resources with the Kyrgyz government Almazbek Mусаev. "As a result of this work, we now have a breeding snow leopard population just a few hours from our capital city, Bishkek."

The Snow Leopard Trust was created in 1981 by the late Woodland Park Zoo staff member Helen Freeman. Woodland Park Zoo celebrated a milestone of its own last summer when a male snow leopard cub was born to mom Helen and dad Dhirin, both 12 years old. Aibek,



which is Kyrgyzstani for “long living,” is the first offspring between mom Helen and dad Dhirin (*did-in*), both 12. Aibek can be seen at the zoo with mom Helen, who was named after Helen Freeman.

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### **Snow Leopard Trust**

The Snow Leopard Trust, based in Seattle, Wash., is a world leader in conservation of the vulnerable snow leopard, conducting pioneering research and partnering with communities as well as authorities in snow leopard habitat to protect the cat. [www.snowleopard.org](http://www.snowleopard.org).

### **Woodland Park Zoo**

Woodland Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and certified by the rigorous American Humane Conservation program. The Humane Certified™ seal of approval is another important validation of the zoo's long-standing tradition of meeting the highest standards in animal welfare. Woodland Park Zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats through more than 35 field projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. By saving wildlife and inspiring everyone to make conservation a priority in their lives, Woodland Park Zoo is making a difference in our planet's future ecological health and sustainability. Visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org) and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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