

Jangart's valley expedition
(10th to 28th July 2018)

For this expedition to the valley of Jangart, in the frame of the OSI-PANTHERA scientific program, we were a group of 12. The leader and scientific coordinator was Anne-Lise CABANAT. She was assisted by Aliya NARYNBKOVA. With us were also 3 rangers, Urmat SOLOKOV, Oemourbek KOURMANALIEV, and Elmir OEMOURBEK UULU. Nowadays, the group was completed by 7 volunteers from France (Heidi, Anna, Agathe, Gaëlle, Thibaud, Macha) and Switzerland (Larissa). The area of Jangart is still a hunt-concession, but it should end at the end of the year. Moreover, this valley is an ecological corridor connecting Sarychat-Ertash reserve and Enylchek Park.

Apparently, the fauna is moving from one zone to the other and converting that hunting area in a buffer zone would allow us to, maybe, uphold an extension of the reserve. It would be a great news for fauna's preservation: that's why we've chosen that area to collect data. Reaching that purpose would be a great accomplishment for our OSI-Panthera program.

On July the 13th (day 1), we left from the village of Ush Kochkon (3100 m), horse-riding, to reach the camp n°1 (Kaiche). On the road we found a track of wolves (*Canis lupus*) on the right bank of the Ush Kochkon river. We also identified pugmarks of a female bear (*Ursus arctos isabellinus*) with her baby and the scrapes of a bear on a marmot's hole. In the sky, we observed golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos daphanea*) and a Himalayan vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*). We arrived at Kaiche in the afternoon. In this area, Urmat's brother had seen a Snow leopard female with 3 old cubs few years ago.



On the road and bear with cub footprint

On July the 14th (for Bastille day), we went top of a hill next to Kaiche camp (3272 m) at dawn to watch the wildlife. There we saw a herd of 6 young males argalis (*Ovis ammon* sp), aged between 3 and 4 years. Then we departed to camp 2 (Togolok) and we saw on the road a wolf's feces and some bear's feces before the Togolok's pass. We arrived at camp 2-Togolok (3774 m) in the afternoon and spent the night there.



Togolok glacier and pass

The day after, on July the 15th, we went for a transect on the cliffs of Togolok. There we found many old feces of wolves and bears, and some feces of Siberian ibexes (*Capra sibirica*) and argalis. We watched 3 female ibexes and a bearded gypaete (*Gypaetus barbatus*). In the afternoon, we left to camp 3-Jangart (3041 m). We arrived there in the evening.



First transect in Togolok area and bear feces

The 4th day, on July the 16th, we went on horseback for a transect. In the morning we saw a golden eagle and 7 males argalis between 5 and 7 years old, in the Chang Sary Teur's glen. In the afternoon we found an old horn of a possible Argali of Marco Polo and we took the horses to reach a crest a few kilometres away from the camp. There we found a scrape and a snow leopard's feces (*Panthera uncia*). Nevertheless, we were caught in a storm and we couldn't pursue our explorations. After that we climbed another crest where we made a great harvest of snow leopard's feces, very old one but also more recent one, and we observed 20 male argalis. We also noticed the presence of Himalayan snowcocks (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*).



Snow leopard feces and transect under the rain

On July the 17th (day 5), the meteorological conditions were too hard for scientific observations. The rangers nevertheless saw a young wolf of 1 year old near the camp. On the evening, we celebrate the French football world victory.

On July the 18th (day 6), we left the camp n°3 to Camp n°4, we settle in Sarai Köl where we arrived in the middle of the afternoon, we went for a transect in a glen adjoining the camp, where we found recent urine of snow leopard, scapes and leopard's hair. On the road we had seen also a very fresh wolf's track and bear's feces. Around Sarai Köl we also observed argalis and ibexes. In this area Elmir said the he met bears a lot of times and also a young snow leopard learning hair to hunt with his mother not so far.



Landscape, a rock with snow leopard urine and a wolf footprint near Siberian ibex skull

On the 19th of July (day 7), we woke up at dawn for lying in wait for animals. We observed 2 young wolves, many ibexes and a few snowcocks. Then we went for a transect, around 8 o'clock, we found bear's old feces then we observed a bearded gypaete. In the afternoon, we splat into 3 groups, to explore two different crests. One group spotted bear's feces (few months old) and wolf's. Moreover, several quite old feces of snow leopard were found in addition to scrapes that confirmed the passage of the feline. They also watched gypaete, Himalayan vulture, golden eagles and two saker falcons (*Falco cherrug*). There were also snowcocks.



Sarai Köl waterfall and a fresh feces of bear

The other group on the parallel but higher crest only found one feces of snow leopard, even though one had been seen there several years ago by the rangers. More or less old feces of wolves were also on that crest. Next to a big rock were so many feces of bears that it seemed to be a spot appreciated for this animal who might have lived and slept here. The cliffs were also inhabited by a lot of ibexes, and the group saw around 50 of them, males, females and youthlings.



Tien Shan argali females and lanscape

On the 20th of July (day 8), as the sun rose around 5 am, the group observed 4 male ibexes and some argalis. Later in the morning, the group left Sarai Köl going through a glen where the snow leopard has been witnessed two times by Oemourbek. The team reached “SOS camp” in the early afternoon with the horses and crossed a river, walking, to do a transect on a small crest. Several signs attesting the presence of animals were raised: many feces of wolves, six feces and 10 scrapes of snow leopard: all from de previous winter. Some animals were directly observed: gypaete, griffons, golden eagle, and around 10 snowcocks. We also saw a “giant” caterpillar and feces of argalis and ibexes.

On the 21st of July (day 9), we left SOS camp in the morning and on the road, the volunteers sight ibexes and old wolves' feces. Once established in Jangart, the group reached some heights on foot behind the camp and observed around 10 ibexes. In this area we noticed that the biodiversity war really furnished, with a lot of butterflies and other bugs in the meadows.



Snow leopard's feces, Uch Kochkon river, way back to Jangart camp

On the 22nd of July (day 10), the group splat and 2 opposite crests on each side were explored. Those who crossed the river saw several scrapes and feces of snow leopard. Some feces were even very recent (around 15 day) pugmarks and feces of snow leopard. Some feces were very recents, less than 15 days, and possibly a baby's and an adult's. Whereas there were also wolf's feces but older, around 1 year old, however one scrape of a wolf seemed quite fresh. Direct observations through the binoculars led to 3 male Tien Shan argalis, aged between 6 and 7 years old. The other crest appeared to be a sanctuary for the snow leopard, as proved by the many scrapes and feces left by the animal. Some were old, but a scrape looked quite fresh as well as some diarrhea and traces of urine which still smelled very strongly. Other animals live there too such as the wolf who left a track and the bear (around 1-month old feces), Himalayan vulture, gypaete and 7 Siberian ibexes. We also noticed an important concentration of snowcocks (around 50). We found a old trap already closed on the leg of an animal in the past (because of old bones catch).



Saussurea sp, young Siberian ibex males and a old trap

The 11th day (23rd of July) the group decamped in the morning to move from Jangart to Kaiche. On the road we saw 3 gypaetes, including one juvenile. Once the lunch eaten we reached Togolok's pass (4168 m), the horses went down with the ranger and we went to a crest overlooking Kaiche. Few old scrapes and feces of snow leopard had been observed there. Nevertheless, one track seemed recent. We also so gypaete and Himalayan vultures. As this crest was hardly accessible, there were very few traces of other forms of wildlife, especially the feces of herbivores that could have been expected. On an old trail we found many old snow leopard scrapes, 2 old feces and a fresh scrape.

Every good thing come to an end, and the 24th of July was the last day. On the way back to Ush Kochkon, our nostalgic gaze only glanced ad an Himalayan vulture.



Papilio machaon and the team europeo-kyrgyz

Coming to the end of this expedition, it seems important to add that the rangers mentioned that many times with hunters they told us having seen snow leopards in that area, especially during spring and winter. Moreover, they explained us that they had noticed a decrease in the argali's and ibex's herds, probably due to a bad plan of management of local wildlife by the hunter's companies. Concerning marmots and hares, there were few of them in the eastern part of Togolok's pass compared to the other part of the pass.

Last but not least we also observed an important biodiversity in the meadows, notably concerning arthropods and flora. Many species of butterflies had been seen. Our only regret is that we lacked time in the areas surrounding Kaiche and Togolok.

So, we have the pleasure to say that the expedition ended successfully, as we found many fresh clues of the snow leopard's presence, collecting 25 samples of feces and noticing many more traces. Moreover, the presence and reproduction of bears has widely been noticed too, and this area seems appreciated by that animal. Two wolves and many ungulates with young were also observed, with a density depending on the area.

Ultimately, it appears justified to extend Sarychat Ertash's reserve to that area, in order to protect those threatened species. In a more human perspective and as said by a ranger, we're glad that even if human's presence jeopardizes the snow leopard's existence, this majestic feline became a bridge between Kyrgyzstan and French-speaking Europe.