Knowledge about animal diet can inform conservation strategy, but this information can be difficult to gather. A new DNA-based method, which analyzes genetic material from feces, could be a useful tool, and researchers have shown its utility to characterize the diet of snow leopards in Mongolia.

The full results are reported Feb. 29 in the open access journal PLoS ONE.

Analysis of DNA from 81 fecal samples showed that the leopards ate mostly Siberian ibex, followed by domestic goats and wild sheep. Most of the animals eaten were wild (79 %), with a relatively low proportion of domestic livestock (19.7 %).

The authors, led by Pierre Taberlet of Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in France, write that the results help further the understanding of snow leopard feeding, which can help address related conservation and management issues.

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