

Nepal snow leopard threatened by climate change

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A female snow leopard shows off her teeth at a zoo in New York. Nepal's elusive snow leopards, thought to number just 500 in the wild, are under threat from warmer and wetter weather in the Himalayas that is reducing their habitat, a new study says.

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Changing [weather patterns](#) are pushing forests further into the leopards' territory and they could lose 40 percent of their hunting grounds by the end of the century, scientists from environmental group WWF have concluded.

"Loss of alpine habitat not only means less room for snow leopards, but

also has the potential to bring them closer to human activities like livestock grazing," said WWF snow leopard expert and study co-author Rinjan Shrestha.

"As grazing intensifies and the leopards' natural prey decline, they could begin preying more heavily on livestock, resulting in increased retaliatory killings."

Experts believe just 500 adults survive in Nepal's Himalayas, and few can claim ever to have seen the secretive, solitary animal sometimes referred to as a "mountain ghost".

The animal lives in high alpine areas, above the treeline but generally below 5,000 metres (16,500 feet), where they are able to stealthily track their prey, usually wild goat-like ruminants, deer, boars and some smaller mammals.

"If the treeline shifts upward, as our research predicts it will, we're looking at the [snow leopard](#) faced with diminishing options for where it can live," said Jessica Forrest, a WWF scientist and another author of the study, published in the latest issue of [Biological Conservation](#).

The scientists used computer climate models and on-the-ground tracking of snow leopards' movements in the Nepalese Himalayas and its other known habitats.

They envisaged a worst-case scenario of the big cat's 20,000 square kilometre (7,700 sq mile) territory being reduced to 11,700 sq km by the end of the century.

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