



Monitoring Amur Leopards and Tigers in Southwest Primorye, Russia



A female Amur leopard photographed on March 3, 2019 in Land of the Leopard National Park. Photo © Land of the Leopard National Park/WCS

INTERIM REPORT TO THE WILDCATS CONSERVATION ALLIANCE AUGUST 2019

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Executive Summary

The Wildlife Conservation Society in Russia (ANO WCS) has made strong progress to date on the objectives defined in our proposal. Specifically, we completed the 2019 data collection for population monitoring of Amur leopards and tigers in the Nezhino and Northern sectors of Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP). Our cameras were out for 118 days from January to May, resulting in 2,202 photographs of leopards (in 354 trap events) and 559 photographs of tigers (in 103 trap events).

Unfortunately, 14 cameras were stolen this season, which is an unusually high number. Nonetheless, we have entered camera trap data from across LLNP into a database, and plan to conduct our population estimate as expected and on schedule for autumn 2019.

Progress against Goals and Objectives

Objective 1: Continue monitoring in Nezhino and the Northern Sectors of LLNP

We started placing 116 cameras at 58 locations on January 15, 2019, and completed the process 2 weeks later. Our team then collected traps between May 15 to 27. On average, cameras were in operation for 118 days, or 10,651 trap days in total. We only collected 102 of the 116 camera traps we deployed since, as noted above, the remainder were stolen. We believe that poachers now know what to look for and are beginning to develop a ‘search image’ for camera traps; this contrasts the earlier years of this work when the traps were almost never found or stolen. While we now devote significant energy to concealing traps, they are still sometimes found. We tallied 6,988 images total during the noted period, of which 2,202 photographs were of leopards (in 354 trap events) and 559 photographs were of tigers (in 103 trap events). Badger and hare were the most commonly-captured species of the other mammals that appeared in our photographs (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of camera trap ‘captures’ of all mammalian species, winter and spring 2019, in LLNP.

Common Name	Images
Amur tiger	103
Amur leopard	354
Badger	933
Hare	751
Sika deer	351
Siberian weasel	321
Wild boar	64
Musk deer	60
Fox	49
Leopard cat	34
Asiatic black bear	24
Brown bear	19
Raccoon dog	15
Roe deer	15
Yellow-throated marten	12
TOTAL	3,105

Objective 2: Assist LLNP staff to produce park-wide population estimates of leopards and tigers

Our team collected all data from across the park, which we then entered into the CPW PhotoWarehouse database. In autumn 2019, we will use Extract/Compare to identify individual leopards and work with park staff to derive a total count for the park.

LLNP Director Victor Bardyk has now been at the helm of the park for nearly one year. While he is a stable presence for staff and outside partners, the Deputy Director, who is in charge of scientific programs, resigned after returning from maternity leave. This incited concern for potential further disruption to park-wide leopard estimates; however, her replacement, Yuri Darman, is a veteran conservationist and well versed in managing projects. Darman is the former Director of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in the Russian Far East and his experience allowed for a seamless transition. WCS not only renewed our official agreements with LLNP under Darman, but also began exploring other ways to collaborate. We are currently in discussions with Darman about publishing our joint leopard work.

At the International Forum on Tiger and Leopard Transboundary Conservation in July 2019 held in Harbin, China, Darman and WCS Russia Director Dale Miquelle discussed options to develop a more stable agreement of joint population estimates by combining data from LLNP with that from the new Northeast China Tiger Leopard National Park. They then extended these discussions to include the scientists conducting monitoring in LLNP. We hope that these talks will lead to a steady system of information exchange and, ultimately, for statistically-rigorous yearly estimates of the global population of Amur leopards and the Changbaishan population of Amur tigers.



An Amur tiger photographed March 1, 2019 in LLNP. Photo © Land of the Leopard NP/WCS

Conclusion

We remain deeply grateful to WildCats Conservation Alliance for their long-term investments in Amur leopard and tiger conservation. Within the reporting period, WCS has been able to successfully continue our long-term monitoring work while maintaining the quality of our monitoring across LLNP. These efforts have yielded important information about population trends of these critically-endangered subspecies. We look forward to sharing the final results of our 2019 monitoring in our final report.