SNOW LEOPARDS



1 Warm up

Look at the photo of a snow leopard. These large felines (cats) live in cold and difficult environments in the mountains of Central Asia. How do you think their bodies are adapted to these conditions? Think about these features:

- nose
- chest
- fur
- paws
- tail
- legs

Can you also think of a feature inside their bodies that helps them live high in the mountains?



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2 Read for main idea

Read the text Snow Leopards to check your ideas about snow leopard adaptations, and answer these questions:

1. What are snow leopards sometimes called?
2. How many snow leopards are left in the wild?
3. What problems do snow leopards face?

Body parts and adaptations:

nose

1. _____

chest

2. _____

inside their bodies

3. _____

fur

4. _____

paws

5. _____

tail

6. _____

legs

7. _____

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3 Read for detail

You are going to do a reading activity: read the sentences and remember/predict the missing words. The missing words have the same or similar meaning as the words in red. The first letters of the missing words have been given.

Read the text again to check.

1. Snow leopards i_____ (live in) the highest altitude of any cat.
2. Their h_____ (usual living environment) includes the highest mountain ranges across Central Asia, with altitudes up to 20,000 feet.
3. Snow leopards have adapted to thrive in these extremely high e_____, (heights above sea level) where the air has low levels of oxygen.
4. To keep warm in this i_____ (unwelcoming) climate, snow leopards have the densest fur of all cats, with nearly 26,000 hairs per square inch.
5. The long tail helps snow leopards to hunt a_____ (able to move your body quickly) wild sheep and goats in steep r_____ (going very quickly between high and low) environments.
6. It helps them balance and quickly p___ (turn) as they chase nimble (quick and accurate in their movements) prey.
7. Snow leopards can l_____(make a large, sudden jump) farther than any other animal.
8. Snow leopards are vulnerable to e_____ (a situation in which a type of animal no longer exists).
9. Increased ranching and h_____ (a way of life where people depend on animals like sheep or cows, and move them around to find food in different places) has caused the decline in wild prey.
10. Climate change might impact their habitat, reducing the big cats' r_____(the area where an animal or group of animals find food) and food sources.
11. When wild prey is scarce, snow leopards prey on domestic l_____ (domestic animals like sheep or cows).
12. This causes herders to lose income, and some then kill the cats in r_____. (revenge)

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Snow leopards

Snow leopards are one of the world's most elusive cats. Nicknamed ghosts of the mountains, they live in the world's highest ranges and are one of the least understood felines.

Snow leopards inhabit the highest altitude (documented) of any cat. Their habitat includes the highest mountain ranges across Central Asia, with altitudes up to 20,000 feet. Snow leopards have adapted to thrive in these extremely high elevations, where the air has low levels of oxygen. They've developed wide nasal passages and large chest cavities that increase the volume of air breathed in. And they have smaller and more numerous red blood cells than typical cats, maximizing the amount of oxygen absorbed by the body.

Snow leopards can endure temperatures as low as negative 40 degrees Fahrenheit (-40 C). To keep warm in this inhospitable climate, snow leopards have the densest fur of all cats, with nearly 26,000 hairs per square inch. A human only has about 1,300 per square inch. Snow leopards also have giant paws that act as snowshoes, distributing their weight so they can walk on top of snow instead of sinking in. To stay warm while they rest, snow leopards wrap their furry tails around their bodies like a blanket.

Snow Leopard tails are balancing tools. The snow leopard tail is one of the thickest and longest tails of all big cats. It can grow up to 90% as long as their bodies (onscreen measurement given - body 44 in/1.1 m and tail 40 in/1m). The long tail acts as a counterweight, similar to a tightrope walker's balancing bar. This helps snow leopards to hunt agile wild sheep and goats in steep rugged environments. It helps them balance and quickly pivot as they chase nimble prey.

Snow leopards can leap farther than any other animal. Snow leopards can grow to 7 feet (2.1m) long including their tail.
Thanks to strong legs, they can leap distances up to 50 feet (15.2 m) - that's 7 times their own length. Snow leopards' front legs are shorter than their hind legs, helpful for quick starts and rapid speeds. Their broad muscular chests are like shock absorbers, dampening the impact of nearly vertical hunts.

Snow leopards are vulnerable to extinction. By some estimates there could be fewer than 8,000 wild snow leopards.
Climate change might impact their habitat, reducing the big cats' range and food sources. Increased ranching and herding has caused the decline in wild prey, and conflict between snow leopards and humans has developed. When wild prey is scarce, snow leopards prey on domestic livestock. This causes herders to lose income, and some then kill the cats in retaliation. Community-based conservation efforts have focused on reducing this conflict. Creating greater understanding and protection of these mountain ghosts is needed to prevent them from disappearing entirely.

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4 Vocabulary

	words related to where snow leopards live	words related to snow leopards' hunting	words related to conservation of snow leopards
noun			
adjective			
verb			

Underline the stressed syllable of each word.

Answer these questions about the vocabulary.

1. Find three pairs of words which are synonyms or near synonyms.
2. Which verb and noun share a common Latin root?
3. Which word can be both a noun and a verb?
4. The word *range* was used in two different ways in the video. What are the two meanings?

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