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Friday, April 23, 2010

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**EVIDENCE OF RARE SPOTTED LEOPARD IN MALAYSIA
CAPTURED WITH CAMERA TRAP BRINGS GLIMMER OF HOPE TO
CONSERVATIONISTS: STATE OF WORLD'S BIG CATS STILL DIRE**

Populations of the world's largest carnivores continue to decline, but recent sightings and innovative conservation programs provide reasons for optimism

NEW YORK, NY — Experts from Panthera (www.panthera.org), the world leader in the conservation of big cats, reported today that a rare spotted leopard had been photographed in Malaysia. The [image](#) of the unusually marked cat (previously, only black leopards were believed to exist in the area), was captured by a Panthera camera trap in Taman Negara Endau-Rompin National Park in the southern state of Johor. This research, in partnership with the Johor State Government is part of Tigers Forever, a collaborative project between Panthera and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) which aims to increase tiger numbers by 50% at key sites over a ten year period across tiger range. Panthera is testing unique new digital camera traps as a key component of Tigers Forever, as individual tigers can be identified by their unique stripe patterns resulting in population density estimates. The photographic 'capture' of the spotted leopard was an unexpected bonus during routine surveys for tigers in the park.

The news marks a high point in an otherwise bleak outlook for the world's tigers, lions, jaguars and snow leopards this Earth Day. While events commemorating 40 years of environmental progress continue to multiply, the iconic cats that have roamed the globe for years continue to dwindle. Widely viewed by scientists as "keystone species" whose existence indicates healthy ecosystems – big cats are plagued by a sharp loss of habitat due to deforestation and development, as well as relentless poaching for the illegal wildlife market and as a retaliatory measure for human-wildlife conflict.

In honor of Earth Day, Panthera scientists compiled report cards reflecting the state of the four major species of cats. Full reports and photos for reprint can be found here <https://gloverparkgroup.box.net/shared/kvy7h0fs5t#/shared/kvy7h0fs5t/1/41262738>.

Panthera researchers continue to fight these discouraging trends with innovative programs that incorporate local stakeholders and leaders in the process of protecting big cats. In 2010 alone, the organization made incredible strides in protecting tigers with WCS through Tigers Forever, securing a vital jaguar corridor in Colombia, growing South Africa's leopard population, and unraveling the mysteries of the elusive snow leopards of Mongolia.

Some key findings include:

In the Year of the Tiger, fewer than 3,000 wild tigers live in Asia today. Tigers occupy only seven percent of their historic range and they are being hunted by poachers to sell tiger parts on the lucrative wildlife black market. But Tigers Forever, with WCS, is working to protect and increase tiger numbers at key sites, one of which is the Hukaung Valley Tiger Sanctuary in Myanmar (Burma), the world's largest tiger reserve which was established by Panthera's President and CEO, Alan Rabinowitz.

The iconic lion is not faring much better. The cats have been extirpated from 83% of their historic range and their numbers in the wild have fallen from 200,000 to less than 30,000. Poaching is rampant primarily due to conflict with humans, and lion habitat is being lost or fragmented at an alarming rate. Through Project Leonardo, Panthera is creating a Pan-African Lion Corridor that connects core lion populations by mitigating human-lion conflict.

Illegal trade of the elusive **snow leopard** has also impacted their populations. Snow leopard pelts are in high demand, with prices ranging from tens to thousands of dollars in the illegal wildlife market. Panthera has been deeply involved in saving the snow leopard since inception in 2006 and their Vice President, George Schaller, captured the first known photograph of this species in the early 1970's.

Jaguars have lost nearly 40 percent of their range and their numbers in the wild continue to plummet due to illegal hunting, loss of wild prey, and deforestation. In Brazil alone, deforestation caused the loss of nearly 150,000 square kilometers of forest—an area larger than Greece - between 2000 and 2006. Panthera works in 13 of the 18 jaguar range states, securing and linking jaguar habitat, protecting prey, collaborating with local communities to mitigate conflict, and partnering with local governments.

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