

Conservation News

New records of the clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* in the Qomolangma National Nature Reserve, Tibet

The clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* is categorized as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and has experienced significant population declines over the past decade, driven by habitat loss and overexploitation. Historically, the species was widely distributed across China (Smith & Xie, 2008, *Journal of Mammalogy*, 90, 520–521), but its estimated range in the country (calculated using the geographical range data published by IUCN) declined substantially during 2000–2020, from 1,211,284 km² (Grassman et al., 2016, *IUCN Red List*) to 62,199 km² (Gray et al., 2021, *IUCN Red List*). Petersen et al. (2020, *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 24, e01354) estimated that key habitat for the species in China has diminished by c. 97% during this period. Recent surveys indicate that the clouded leopard occurs in only four counties in China: Medog County in Tibet, and Gongshan, Yingjiang and Mengla Counties in Yunnan (Li et al., 2021, *Oryx*, 55, 177–180; Ma et al., 2022, *Biodiversity Science*, 30, 22349).

To study felid species in Qomolangma National Nature Reserve in Jilong County, a region characterized by a temperate semi-monsoon climate and located in the core region of the Himalayas, we deployed 200 infrared camera traps that operated continuously during August 2023–April 2024. Two camera traps within the core zone of the Reserve each captured an image of the clouded leopard, on 9 and 16 September 2023, respectively. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first documentation of the clouded leopard in Jilong County, c. 1,000 km from the species' previously recognized habitat in Medog County.







This discovery suggests there may be other potential clouded leopard habitats in China beyond the four currently recognized sites. Additionally, the new record is close to two locations in Nepal where the clouded leopard has been recorded: Langtang National Park (c. 50 km away) and



A clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* captured by a camera trap in Qomolangma National Nature Reserve, Jilong County, China, on 16 September 2023.

Annapurna Conservation Area (c. 300 km away; Ghimirey & Acharya, 2017, *Oryx*, 52, 166–170). This region may serve as a migration corridor for clouded leopards. Further research in this region will promote international collaboration for the conservation of this species.

We thank the Qomolangma National Nature Reserve Administration for their funding and support through the project Snow Leopard Distribution, Population, and Habitat Monitoring in Mount Qomolangma.

YU DING¹ , NAN WU¹ , YIXUAN LIU¹ , HUA ZHONG¹ , LHABA CERING²  and KUN SHI^{1,3}  (kunshi@bjfu.edu.cn)
¹Eco-Bridge Continental, Beijing, China. ²Qomolangma National Nature Reserve Administration, Rikaze, China.
³Beijing Forestry University, Beijing, China

This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).