

# *Neofelis nebulosa*



**Family:** Clouded leopard

**Common names:** Kung (Bhotia), Amchita (Nepali), Pungmar (Lepcha)

**Classification:**

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carniv

Family: Felidae

Genus: *Neofelis*

Species: *nebulosa*

**Profile:**

Despite its name, the clouded leopard is not closely related to the leopard. The smallest of the big cats, the species is sufficiently distinct from other members of the Felidae family to be placed in a separate genus – *Neofelis*, which is originating from two words, *neo* meaning "new", and *felis* meaning "small cat". The common name is derived from its characteristic coat pattern. The ochre coat is patterned with grey elliptical clouds edged with black, which enable it to camouflage itself in the forest. In size, the species is intermediate between the large and small cats, with a body length of 60-110 cm and weighing between 11-20 kg. The head and the legs are spotted. The animal has two broad bars on its neck, and stripes on its cheeks. It has a very long tail marked with broken black rings and short legs with large broad paws, which give it a rather heavy appearance. The paws are adapted for an arboreal lifestyle. Among the felids, it has the longest canines in proportion to its skull size. The clouded leopard occupies the highest position in the tropical rainforest food chain.

**Lifespan:** Average 11 years (in the wild). They live longer in captivity.

**Distribution:** The clouded leopard is found along the Himalayan foothills, from Nepal, through mainland Southeast Asia and into China. Although historically the species enjoyed a wide distribution in China, current distribution in the region is largely unknown. The species has become extinct from Taiwan, Singapore and China. It is only marginally present in Bangladesh. Clouded leopards are mostly associated with primary evergreen tropical rainforests, but they can also be found in dry deciduous forests, secondary and logged forests, and less frequently, in dry tropical forests, mangrove swamps, grasslands and scrub areas. The species has also been reported in the Himalayas at an altitude of 2500 m.

**Population:** Less than 10,000 mature individuals (IUCN) (Figures are for wild population only)

**Behaviour:** Clouded leopards are very good tree climbers, using their long tail and broad paws for balance and grasp. Often they ambush the prey from the trees and drag it up into the trees to eat. The males are extremely aggressive and can kill with a single bite on the neck. They can hang upside down from trees by their hind legs and tail and can also descend from tree trunks head first. The animal is nocturnal with crepuscular activity peaks. It is a powerful swimmer and is found on certain small offshore islands. Like most cats, the clouded leopards are solitary except during the breeding season, or when accompanied by cubs. Once thought to be exclusively nocturnal, evidence suggests that it may show some periods of activity during the day as well. The litter is usually sheltered in hollow tree trunks. Males usually develop faster than the females. The clouded leopard is very shy and secretive, usually inhabiting areas inaccessible to humans. Hence, not much is known about their social life.

- **Diet:** The diet of the clouded leopard includes a variety of arboreal and terrestrial prey, such as orangutan, hog deer, young sambar deer, barking deer, muntjac, mouse deer, bearded pig, palm civet, slow loris, monkeys, gibbons, bush-tailed porcupine, Malayan pangolin, squirrels, and birds like the Argus pheasant. Sometimes it also preys on fish, poultry and domestic cattle.

- **Reproduction:** Breeding season: No evidence from the wild (March-August in captivity); Breeding interval: Once a year; Gestation period: 85-93 days; Litter size: 1-5; Weaning: 80-100 days; Sexual maturity: 2-3 years (both males and females)

**Current status:**

- **Status:**
  1. IUCN 2008: Vulnerable
  2. CITES 2008: Listed in Appendix I
- **Threats:**
  1. The habitat of the clouded leopard is undergoing the fastest deforestation rate in the world (1.2-1.3% a year since 1990: FAO 2007)
  2. The animal is hunted for the illegal wildlife trade in skin, bones and meat (their attractive pelts have a ceremonial significance in north east India)
  3. Illegal pet trade
  4. Retaliatory killing for livestock depredation
- **Conservation practices:**
  1. The clouded leopard is legally protected along most of its range.
  2. There is ban on hunting clouded leopards in countries like Bangladesh, China, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand and Viet Nam.
  3. Hunting regulations apply in Lao People's Democratic Republic.
  4. The range of the animal lies within several protected areas.
  5. The United States also lists the Clouded Leopard under the Endangered Species Act, prohibiting trade in the animals or any parts or products made from them in the United States.