

Celebrating two decades of the Snow Leopard Network

By Flavia Franchini-Silveira & Justine Shanti Alexander from the Snow Leopard Network, 23rd October 2023

The snow leopard, a charismatic, solitary big cat, calls the rugged mountains of Asia its home. It roams over a vast terrain across 12 different countries, with large parts of its habitat running along and across international borders. The conservation of this mountain felid therefore depends on the collaboration of conservationists and various stakeholders in a cross-country effort to safeguard a future for the species. The snow leopard, categorized as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, faces threats such as illegal wildlife trade, climate change, habitat loss, a declining prey base, retaliatory killings, poorly planned infrastructure development and large scale development. To booster conservation efforts, an extraordinary initiative was launched in 2003: the [Snow Leopard Network](#) (SLN), a network of dedicated practitioners working tirelessly for snow leopard conservation worldwide. In a recent Conservation News article in [Oryx](#), we delve into the journey of the SLN and its accomplishments over the past 2 decades.



Photo by SLCF Mongolia/ SLT

Camera-trap photo of a snow leopard family. Photo: Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation Mongolia/Snow

Leopard Trust.

In 2001, the [Snow Leopard Trust](#) developed a Survival Strategy to guide global snow leopard research and conservation. This effort led to the Snow Leopard Survival Summit held in Seattle, USA, in May 2002. At the summit, over 60 experts from 17 countries collaborated to discuss and develop the first-ever Snow Leopard Survival Strategy ([SLSS](#)). Inspired by the success of this summit, the participants established the Snow Leopard Network to maintain ongoing communication and collaboration among snow leopard conservationists worldwide.

'On the final day of the Summit, citing close ties formed during SLSS development, attendees established the Snow Leopard Network to ensure ongoing communication within the snow leopard community and foster implementation of the SLSS.' - Tom McCarthy, SLN Executive Director 2002-2009.

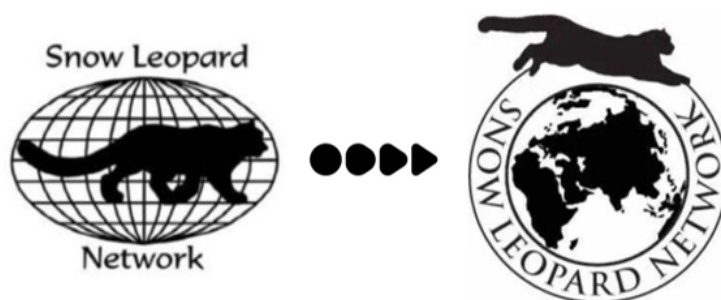


The 2002 Seattle Summit, a crucial moment in snow leopard conservation history. Photo: Snow Leopard Network.

Over the years, the SLN has continued to grow, with many of the original participants from the 2002 summit actively engaged in snow leopard conservation to this day. Today, the SLN brings together over 630 individual members, [33 organizational members](#) and [9 partners](#) from 50 countries, including all 12 snow leopard range countries. It serves as a global platform where practitioners unite to work towards the conservation of these majestic big cats.

The primary mission of the SLN is to advance scientifically sound conservation efforts for the snow leopard, through a set of key strategies:

1. **Facilitating Connections:** The SLN acts as a vital hub, connecting individuals and organizations involved in snow leopard research and conservation. It facilitates the exchange of critical information and expertise.
2. **Mobilizing Collaboration:** By bringing together a diverse array of stakeholders, the SLN encourages collective action towards shared conservation goals, amplifying their impact.
3. **Strengthening Capabilities:** The network provides [training](#), resource libraries, and support services to enhance research and conservation capacity.
4. **Providing Incentives:** The SLN offers [grants](#) and incentives to stimulate the expansion of on-the-ground conservation efforts.



The SLN logo evolving over time.

In response to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, SLN evolved. In 2020, it launched an online webinar series and [training initiative](#), hosting over 38 webinars on topics such as country updates, science and conservation perspectives, and paper discussions. The online training initiatives comprise 15 modules designed to empower participants with skills and knowledge in various aspects of snow leopard conservation. Additionally, the SLN introduced [Summer](#) and [Winter Exchange](#) programmes focused on skill building and information exchange.



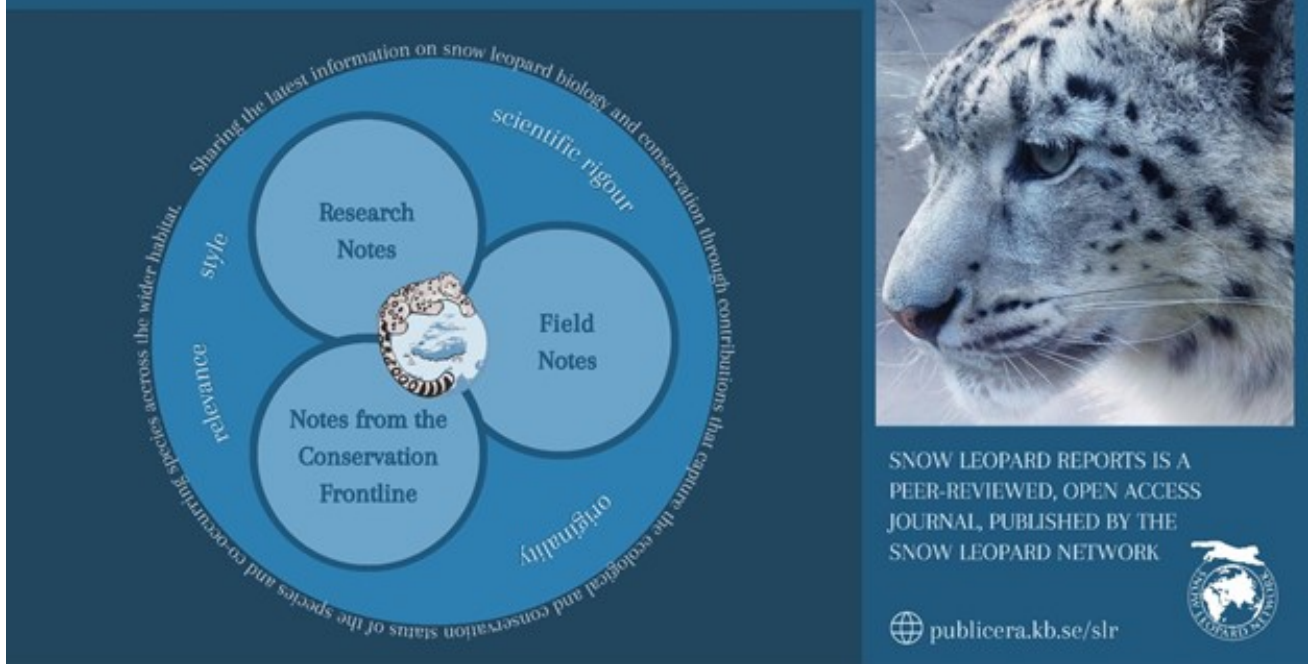
The current SLN Steering Committee (left) and SLN members (right) 'roaring' for snow leopards during a video call.

'SLN continues to support collaborative responses and shape creative ideas for the future. Building a supportive snow leopard community has been especially important during challenging times such as Covid-19' – Justine Shanti Alexander, SLN Executive Director 2020–present.

A recent milestone for the SLN is the launch of its very own scientific journal, [Snow Leopard Reports](#). This peer-reviewed journal, first published in 2023, publishes notes related to the ecology and conservation of snow leopards and co-occurring species. It is dedicated to encouraging exchange amongst snow leopard practitioners by collating and making available the latest research on snow leopard biology and conservation.

While assessing tangible outcomes of the Snow Leopard Network's activities can be challenging, it has undeniably contributed to snow leopard conservation. SLN has provided intellectual leadership, showcasing good practices and drawing attention to urgent needs that had been previously neglected. For example, SLN has supported the establishment of standards for monitoring methods, particularly for carnivore and ungulate species, through initiatives such as the Survival Strategy and PAWS (Population Assessment of the World's Snow Leopards). These efforts have promoted the adoption of comparable and robust population estimation methods across various countries and regions. In its earlier years, SLN assisted country governments in developing National Action Plans, which served as guiding frameworks for on-the-ground conservation efforts. This role has now been taken up by the unique alliance known as GSLEP ([Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program](#)). SLN continues to provide direct policy recommendations to all snow leopard range countries through its support of the GSLEP Steering Committee or Position Statements on key issues. The SLN [Grants Program](#) has been instrumental in initiating several small-scale projects, especially those focused on surveying new areas and commencing conservation efforts. Furthermore, the network actively supports the next generation of conservationists, including women who have been underrepresented in snow leopard conservation and research, by showcasing their work and offering freely available tools to help them build their skills. This has made the snow leopard community exciting, expanding the network to over 600 members today.

SNOW LEOPARD REPORTS



The logo for Snow Leopard Reports is a circular emblem with a snow leopard's head in the center, surrounded by the text 'SNOW LEOPARD REPORTS'. The cover image shows a close-up profile of a snow leopard's face, looking towards the left. The background is a dark blue gradient.

Sharing the latest information on snow leopard biology and conservation through contributions that capture the ecological and conservation status of the species and occurring species across the wider habitat.

scientific rigour

style

relevance

originality


Research Notes

Field Notes

Notes from the Conservation Frontline

SNOW LEOPARD REPORTS IS A PEER-REVIEWED, OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL, PUBLISHED BY THE SNOW LEOPARD NETWORK

publicera.kb.se/slr



SLN's peer-reviewed journal, Snow Leopard Reports.

'If I recall in my mind's eye all that has been done meanwhile, I see some fifteen modules with hundreds of online participants, a few seminars, a number of discussion groups, the award of several grants, and—last but not least—the birth and development from scratch of our new journal Snow Leopard Reports. I would say that, in spite of all limitations coming from Covid and anti-Covid restrictions, we could hardly have done more!' - Sandro Lovari, SLN Steering Committee Chair.

Opportunities and threats for snow leopard conservation continue to evolve in a rapidly changing world. The Snow Leopard Network has a special ability of bringing people together from around the world to share the latest thinking. For two decades, it has united individuals, organizations, and governments in a shared mission to protect these magnificent creatures. As Lu Zhi, a professor at Peking University, aptly expressed in the Editorial of the first [issue](#) of Snow Leopard Reports, 'the snow leopard is bringing people together for better conservation'. With the continued efforts of the SLN and its global community, we are optimistic for the future of snow leopards, their habitat and the people who share Asia's breathtaking mountain landscapes with these wonderful cats.

'Since its inception, the SLN has played an important role in facilitating communication, cooperation, and capacity enhancement amongst conservationists from around the world. Two decades on, it continues to play that critical role.' - Charudutt Mishra, SLN Executive Director 2010-2019.



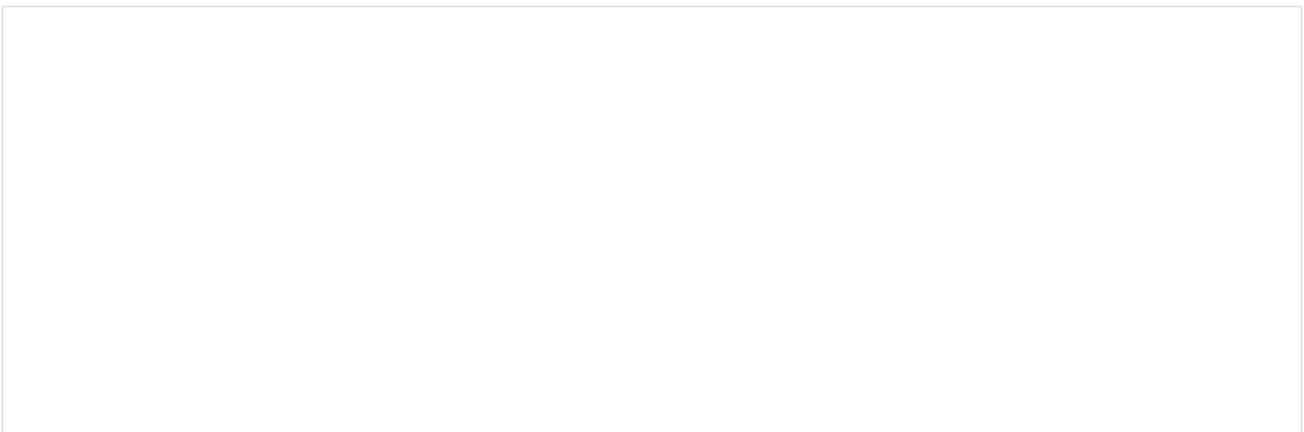
Dive into the 20 years of the network’s history by watching this video [here](#).

Connect with the Snow Leopard Network through their social media channels ([Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and their [Blog](#)), where they share the latest events and resources available to the community.

*The Conservation News item ‘[Snow Leopard Network: 20 years of collaboration among practitioners](#)’ is available open access in *Oryx—The International Journal of Conservation*.*

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Flavia Franchini-Silveira & Justine Shanti Alexander from the Snow Leopard Network

Flavia Franchini-Silveira joined SLN's team in 2021, leading the Network's social media communications. She has been actively involved in member engagement through various strategies, working to build awareness about the snow leopard. She is a conservation biologist working towards the conservation of wild cats across the world. She completed her MSc in the human dimensions of wildlife, to understand how different interest groups perceived the reintroduction of wood bison in Alaska, working closely with native and non-native communities in the state. She is particularly interested in human-wildlife coexistence, movement ecology, and the ecology and conservation of big cats.

Justine Shanti Alexander, Executive Director of the Snow Leopard Network (2020-2023) and Senior Scientist at the Snow Leopard Trust, has dedicated over a decade to High Asia's snow leopard conservation efforts. Her adventure began in 2011 when she pursued her PhD in snow leopard conservation at Beijing Forestry University. Justine believes in the remarkable ability of snow leopards to inspire collaborative conservation efforts, offering hope for their future.