

# Bhutan Wild Cat Health Project

## Species Overview

Bhutan is home to nine wild cat species, making it one of the most felid-rich regions in the world. These range from apex predators like the snow leopard, which sit at the top of the food chain, to smaller mesocarnivores such as the Manul (Pallas's cat). Each species plays a distinct but interconnected role in regulating prey populations, controlling disease, and maintaining the overall balance and resilience of Bhutan's mountain and forest ecosystems.

IUCN Red List status:

### Endangered

- *Panthera tigris* (Tiger)

### Vulnerable

- *Panthera uncia* (Snow Leopard)
- *Neofelis nebulosa* (Clouded Leopard)
- *Panthera pardus* (Leopard)

### Near Threatened

- *Pardofelis marmorata* (Marbled Cat)
- *Catopuma temminckii* (Asian Golden Cat)

### Least Concern

- *Otocolobus manul* (Pallas's Cat)
- *Prionailurus bengalensis* (Leopard Cat)
- *Felis chaus* (Jungle Cat)

## Why conserve these cats?

While the IUCN Red List identifies global conservation status, many wild cat species remain poorly understood. A lack of basic ecological and health data limits our ability to design evidence-based management strategies—especially in regions as biologically rich and rapidly changing as Bhutan.

Wild cats also serve as powerful umbrella species. Protecting wide-ranging carnivores like snow leopards safeguards entire ecosystems and the species that share them. As climate change pushes snow leopards toward higher elevations, conservation efforts for this apex predator highlight broader climate impacts on other high-mountain wildlife. Similarly, tigers anchor the biodiversity of Bhutan's tropical forests, where protection measures benefit elephants, pangolins, and countless other species at risk.

## Tourism and zoonotic disease

Bhutan's expanding tourism industry brings economic opportunity—but also conservation challenges. As more visitors enter national parks (which cover over 50% of the country), free-roaming domestic dogs often follow. These dogs can chase wildlife, disrupt behavior, and transmit diseases such as rabies and canine distemper to wild felids.

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The Bhutan Wild Cat Health Project applies a One Health approach, recognizing that human health, animal health, and ecosystem health are deeply interconnected. By analyzing wild cat scat for parasites, viruses, stress hormones, and genetic diversity, we will identify hotspots of disease risk and work with government agencies, communities, and tourism operators to reduce spillover threats.



Tiger in Wangchuck Centennial National Park

## Study Design and Objectives

This project represents Bhutan's first long-term, nationwide camera-trap survey focused on all nine wild cat species. Combined with the creation of the country's first K9 Conservation Unit, the project will generate essential ecological and health data to inform national policies, protected area management, and domestic dog control strategies.



Asian Golden Cat in Jigme Dorji National Park

## Methods

### Camera Traps

- 400 camera traps across four major protected areas
- 24/7 monitoring of wild cats, domestic dogs, prey species, and human activity

### Scat Surveys

- Specialized detection dogs locate wild cat scat across habitat transects
- Samples analyzed for disease exposure, parasites, stress hormones, and genetic diversity

### Objectives

- Assess how human disturbance and free-roaming dogs affect wild felid behavior and health
- Quantify zoonotic spillover risk
- Strengthen national and community awareness of human-wildlife interactions



Clouded Leopard in Jigme Singye Wangchuck NP

## You can help

By supporting the Bhutan Wild Cat Health Project, you help protect all nine of Bhutan's wild cat species and the ecosystems that sustain them. Your contribution directly fuels groundbreaking research and One Health action benefiting wildlife, biodiversity, and public health. Every gift —no matter the size—creates impact.

Scan the QR Code or visit  
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