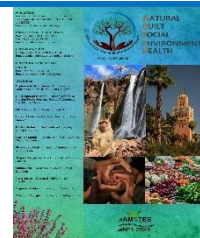




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VIEWPOINT

Guardians of the Irbis, Our Beloved Snow Leopard

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This *Viewpoint* reflects on the lifelong commitment of Oleg and Irina Loginov to the protection of the snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), a symbol of Kazakhstan's mountain ecosystems. Their work combines scientific observation, artistic expression, and cultural heritage to inspire public awareness of nature conservation. Through their books, exhibitions, and the *Snow Leopard Fund*, the Loginovs try to integrate research and creativity — transforming knowledge into empathy, and conservation into an act of cultural preservation.



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Abstract: This *Viewpoint* traces the scientific and cultural contribution of Oleg and Irina Loginov to the protection of the snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), a rare species showing the fragile balance of Kazakhstan's mountain ecosystems. Their lifelong work demonstrates how conservation can be both a scientific and artistic mission, expressed through education, photography, and literature. By integrating field observation, creative expression, and community awareness, the Loginovs have brought together ecological research and public understanding. Conservation of a rare cat species means safeguarding a shared heritage of biodiversity, memory, and national identity.

Keywords: Snow leopard, Kazakhstan, conservation, cultural heritage.

Irina and Oleg Loginov have been studying leopards for more than thirty years. The Snow Leopard Fund, established by them in 2009, implements long-term projects for the study and preservation of this species [1–4]. For example, they presented the national park with camera traps that recorded not only the first snow leopard, but also a rare species of cat, the Pallas's cat (*Manul*), which climbed to great heights and had not been recorded there before; this became a scientific discovery.

The Loginovs fell in love with snow leopards for life when they began working at the Almaty Zoo on the recommendation of one of its founders, the world-famous zoologist and folk writer Maxim Zverev. He, like the Loginov biologists, was a graduate of the historic Tomsk University, in Siberia. Oleg and Irina Loginov have written several books about the snow leopard: *Lord of the Heavenly Mountains*, *Snow Leopard – Snow Leopard*, and *Wildlife of the Mountains of Kazakhstan*. The series *Myths and Legends of the Snow Leopard* brings together folk tales and works by modern authors dedicated to the snow leopard, also known as the irbis (Figure 1).

Biologists and naturalist writers, the Loginovs were among the first in Kazakhstan to protect this rare animal, listed in the International Red Book. Maxim Zverev, a naturalist writer, warmly supported the Loginovs' publication of a journal about animals and nature in Kazakhstan titled ***Irbis***, and he became one of its first contributors

The Loginovs are also the organizers of the first NGO in Kazakhstan, whose main purpose is the protection of the snow leopard. According to their recollections, the renowned Kazakh archaeologist Professor Kemal Akishev, together with his friend Beken Nurmaganbetov, the founder of the Museum of the Golden Man in the city of Yesik, assisted them in its establishment. It is remarkable that Academician Akishev was a student of the distinguished professor from Leningrad, S. S. Chernikov. In 1956, under his supervision, he defended the first dissertation in archaeology in Kazakhstan.

S. S. Chernikov discovered petroglyphs depicting wild animals near Katon-Karagai and later donated the engraved stone to the Hermitage Museum, in St Petersburg.



Figure 1. (a) Artistic realization of the snow leopard wearing a traditional Kazakh *chapan* (robe), symbolizing the union of wildlife and national identity — a creative reflection of the “Irbis” spirit expressed in Kazakh folklore and contemporary art; (b) Digital drawing by Katya Savchenko, granddaughter of Oleg and Irina Loginov, portraying the intergenerational bond of empathy and guardianship towards the snow leopard.

The Loginovs learned of this event from teacher N. V. Zenkova, who, when still a schoolgirl, took part in an archaeological expedition in 1965 and assisted Professor Chernikov. Later, in 1969, during an excursion to the Hermitage, she saw the petroglyphs stone on display there.

In addition to his degree in biology, which he teaches, Oleg Loginov is passionate about wildlife photography, videography, and painting. He regularly organises photo and solo art exhibitions. His work is in many private collections. For instance, his paintings are held in the house-museum of Chingiz Aitmatov, in the Museum of Almaty, and in the collections of Olzhas Suleimenov, Professor Kathleen Braden, and in private galleries across America and Europe (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Oleg Loginov, biologist and wildlife artist, holding one of his published works dedicated to the snow leopard (*Irbis – A Symbol of Kazakhstan*), symbolizing his lifelong dedication to wildlife conservation and environmental education.

Oleg Loginov frequently is in touch with renowned domestic and international wildlife artists. Scientists continue to study the animal style represented in the imagery of ancient creators. Today, contemporary artists preserve this tradition, portraying snow leopards and natural landscapes not on rocks but upon the walls of buildings (Figure 3). Murals featuring the snow leopard and the celebrated Belukha Mountain have now appeared in Ust-Kamenogorsk.



Figure 3. Mural depicting a snow leopard on a residential building in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan — symbolizing the harmony between human beings and nature and expressing the cultural appreciation for wildlife conservation fostered by the Loginovs.

When tourists visit Katon-Karagai and the recreation centre at Yasnaya Polyana to experience wildlife, guides welcome them with Loginov’s books on the snow leopard and excursions to the surrounding mountains where the animals dwell. Oleg Loginov often travels by car with his grandson Yaroslav, who shares his enthusiasm for photographing wildlife. Together, they organized a joint exhibition of their photographs (Figure 4).



Figure 4. (a) Oleg Loginov and his grandson Yaroslav presenting their published works on the snow leopard and the wildlife of Kazakhstan. (b) Oleg Loginov showcasing his own books dedicated to the snow leopard and biodiversity education in Kazakhstan.

Loginov's stories and articles have also appeared in international scientific and popular publications. Grandfather and grandson remain regular contributors to the distinguished journal *Young Naturalist* (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The “Guardians of the Irbis” collection — works by Oleg and Irina Loginov uniting scientific insight and cultural identity in the protection of Kazakhstan’s mountain wildlife

The Loginovs are currently preparing new books on the snow leopard and the natural heritage of Kazakhstan, and are working on the realization of a new issue of the *Irbis* magazine (Figure 6).



Figure 6. (a) Educational soft toy of a snow leopard used in awareness activities for children, symbolizing empathy and the intergenerational transmission of conservation values. (b) Photograph of a snow leopard by Oleg Loginov, created for *International Snow Leopard Day* (23 October) [5], illustrating the global commitment to the protection of this endangered species.

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