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Siberian Snow Leopards Photographed for the First Time

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The scientists were accompanied by Eric, a German shepherd trained to search for snow leopard traces, including hair and feces. Snow-cover thwarted his tracking abilities on this trip.

A Russian-Mongolian expedition has captured the first-ever photographs of snow leopards in a remote part of the Altai Mountains.

Scientists climbed to altitudes of up to 4,000 meters to post 10 photo-traps on Chikhachyova Ridge, on the Russian-Mongolian border.

Two snow leopards were photographed by the motion-sensitive cameras between Oct. 26 and 30, before researchers returned to recharge the devices.

It's the first time that the ridge — which is believed to be home to about 15 of the elusive predators — has has been simultaneously monitored.

Although it bears the name "leopard," snow leopards are actually more closely related

to tigers. Their exact numbers in the wild are unknown, but the cross-border population on Chikhachyova is believed to be key to maintaining continuity of habitat between groups in Mongolia and Russia.

The pictures released Wednesday also include an eagle, an Altai snowcock (a bird related to pheasants) and a rarely seen wild cat called the manul, or Pallas' cat.

The project is a joint effort by Russian and Mongolian wildlife reserves, WWF branches in both countries and the Snow Leopard Conservancy, an international NGO.

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