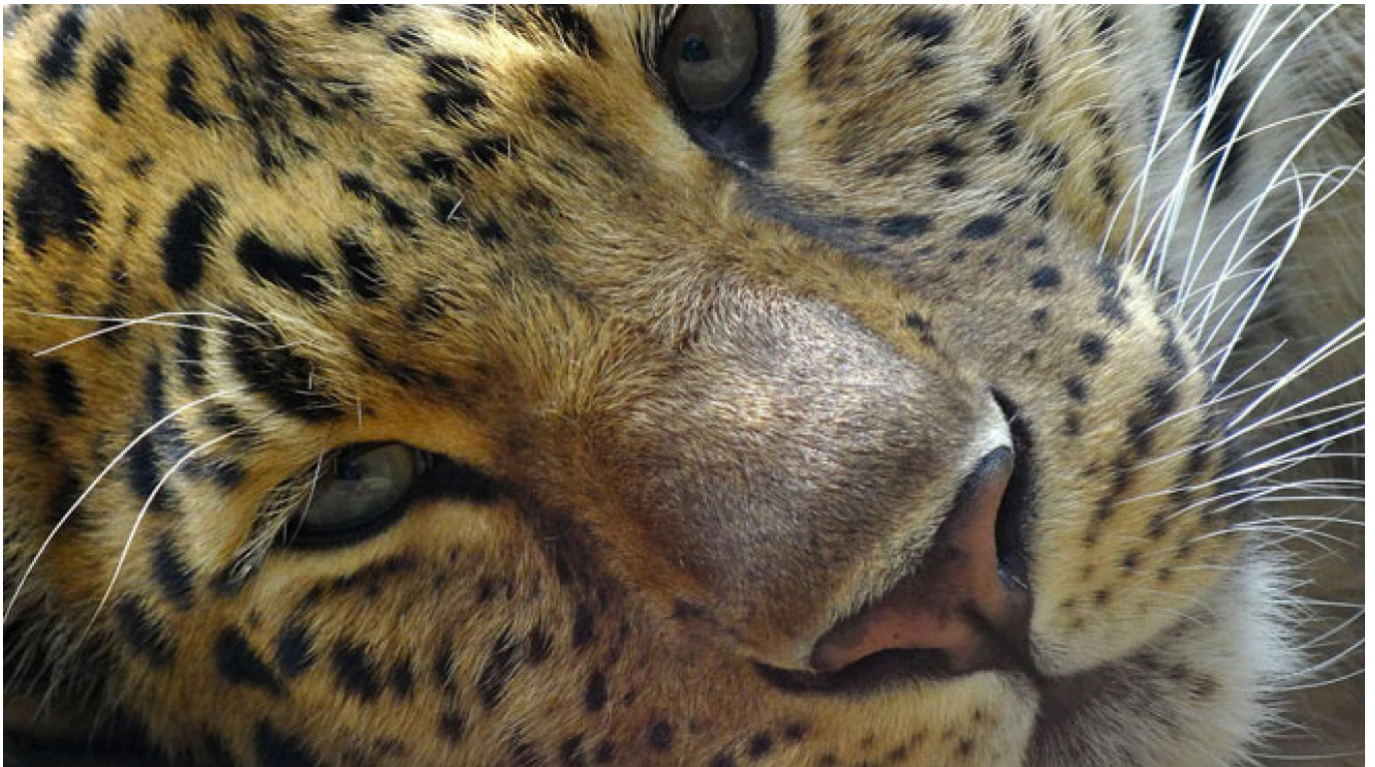


Russian Poacher Faces 7 Years in Prison for Killing Rare Leopard

July 31, 2014



Only 50 Amur leopards remain.

A Vladivostok man faces up to seven years behind bars for allegedly having poached a "critically endangered" Amur leopard and attempted to sell its hide, the Interior Ministry's Primorye branch announced Thursday.

After the 32-year-old hunter began scouting offers for the rare leopard's pelt, local police were tipped off. Officers initially posed as potential buyers before detaining the suspect and launching a criminal investigation.

The hunter may be charged with the unlawful production and distribution of a particularly rare and valuable wild animal, a charge police claim they have ample proof to back up in court. The case materials have been dispatched to a local court for judicial review.

The "ecological crime" inflicted a loss of at least 1.5 million rubles on the region, the police statement said.

According to the most recent available data, a mere 50 Amur leopards remain in existence today, and all of them reside in the southern Primorye region, Interfax reported. The World Wildlife Fund offered an even lower estimate, saying about 30 of the nearly extinct animals are alive today.

The Amur leopard is included in Russia's Red Book endangered species list. The World Conservation Union has warned that the species is on the brink of extinction. They have been classified as "critically endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, meaning they face an extreme risk of extinction in the wild.

More than 20 of them live in captivity at Primorye's Land of the Leopard National Park.

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