

Reproduction and development of the Arabian Leopard, *Panthera pardus nimr*, in captivity

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Abstract: The reproduction and development of the Arabian Leopard, *Panthera pardus nimr*, as determined in captivity, is similar to other subspecies although not previously documented and important from a captive breeding perspective. The following reproductive data was determined: inter-oestrus period 32.2 days; oestrus period 6.9 days; gestation period 97.5 days; mean number of cubs 1.25; cubs eyes open after 7.5 days.

Kurzfassung: Die Fortpflanzung und die Jugendentwicklung des Arabischen Leoparden, *Panthera pardus nimr*, verläuft in Gefangenschaft sehr ähnlich wie bei anderen Unterarten, doch waren sie bisher noch nicht dokumentiert. Die Kenntnis dieser Parameter ist insbesondere für Nachzuchten sehr wichtig. Für die folgenden Fortpflanzungsparameter wurden folgende Durchschnittswerte bestimmt: Phase zwischen zwei Östrus-Perioden: 32,2 Tage, Dauer des Östrus: 6,9 Tage; Trächtigkeitsdauer: 97,5 Tage, Anzahl der Jungen 1,25 und Anzahl der Tage bis zum Öffnen der Augen der Jungen: 7,5 Tage.

Key words: *Panthera pardus nimr*, Arabian Leopard, Arabia, Middle East, United Arab Emirates, captive breeding.

Introduction

Arabian Leopard, *Panthera pardus nimr*, numbers have decreased dramatically over the last century, mainly due to human presence and pressure (HARRISON & BATES 1991). This is especially evident when domestic stock are killed by Leopards throughout its range. The Arabian Leopard is endemic to the Arabian Peninsula and is nowhere secure (OSBORNE 1996). It is estimated that the entire population numbers less than 100 individuals (HELLYER 1993). Of these, less than 20 Leopards are estimated to inhabit the mountainous eastern part of the United Arab Emirates (STUART & STUART 1995). The Arabian Leopard is classified as critically endangered ("facing an extreme high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future") by HORNBY (1996). Due to its vulnerable position in Arabia, breeding programmes have been established at the »Sultan Qaboos' Breeding Centre« in Oman and at the »Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife« at Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. The aim of above mention institutions is to breed Leopards in captivity for possible future re-introduction into the wild. It is important to understand the reproduction and development so as to ensure successful breeding of the subspecies in captivity.