

# Leopard conservation in Africa: Where science, hunting and policy converge

With **Luke Hunter, PhD**  
Of **Panthera**  
Wednesday June 13, 2012  
7pm



The leopard (*Panthera pardus*) is the smallest of the four "big cats" after the tiger, lion and jaguar. Leopards are the most versatile of big cats and occupy all habitats from the Congo rainforest to true deserts. However, even with their remarkable adaptability, leopards have vanished from almost 40% of their historic range in Africa, and from over 50% of their historic range in Asia. Leopards are now extinct in 6 countries they formerly occupied, and their presence in 6 additional countries is very uncertain.

In Africa, the vast majority of leopards are found outside of protected areas and, consequently, they are the most persecuted large felid in the world. They are hunted by farmers and pastoralists because of the real and perceived threat they pose to livestock; they are legally targeted by commercial trophy hunters, and they are killed by poachers for traditional uses that range from ceremonial dress to folk medicine.

Despite such widespread persecution, leopards are often assumed to warrant low conservation priority. Although there have been numerous studies on the ecology and behaviour of leopards, the conservation concerns of the species have rarely been addressed. Tonight we will learn about the natural history of leopards, as well as the conservation efforts that are being employed to protect this magnificent big cat.

**Dr. Luke Hunter** is an Australian biologist and is the President of Panthera ([www.panthera.org](http://www.panthera.org)), which is dedicated to the range-wide conservation of the world's wild cat species. Before joining Panthera, Hunter headed the Wildlife Conservation Society's Great Cats Program and taught wildlife ecology at several universities in Australia and South Africa.

Hunter has worked on the ecology and conservation of carnivores since 1992. His doctorate and post-doctoral research developed methods to re-establish populations of large cats in areas where they had been extirpated from Southern Africa. His current projects include developing conservation strategies for lions across their African range, assessing the effects of sport hunting on leopards and lions, working with teams in the Brazilian Pantanal to reduce the conflict between ranchers and jaguars, and the first intensive study of Persian leopards and the last surviving Asiatic cheetahs in Iran. Hunter supervises graduate students working on carnivores around the world including the first comprehensive studies on some little-known species such as African golden cats and Sunda clouded leopards.

Luke Hunter has contributed to over 100 scientific papers and popular articles, and has published six books that are available on Amazon, including *Cats of Africa: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*, *Cheetah*, *Watching Wildlife: Southern Africa*, *Cheetahs*, and *Watching Wildlife: Central America*. His sixth and current book, *A Field Guide to Carnivores of the World*, was released in 2011.

Dr. Hunter will bring copies of his latest book for sale and signing!

**All meetings are free and open to the public!**  
**95 Harbor Road (Rt 25A), Cold Spring Harbor**  
**Please check our website [www.hobaudubon.org](http://www.hobaudubon.org) for updates**