

Calling all lovers of wide-open spaces and wildlife! Join our trip to Kyrgyzstan!



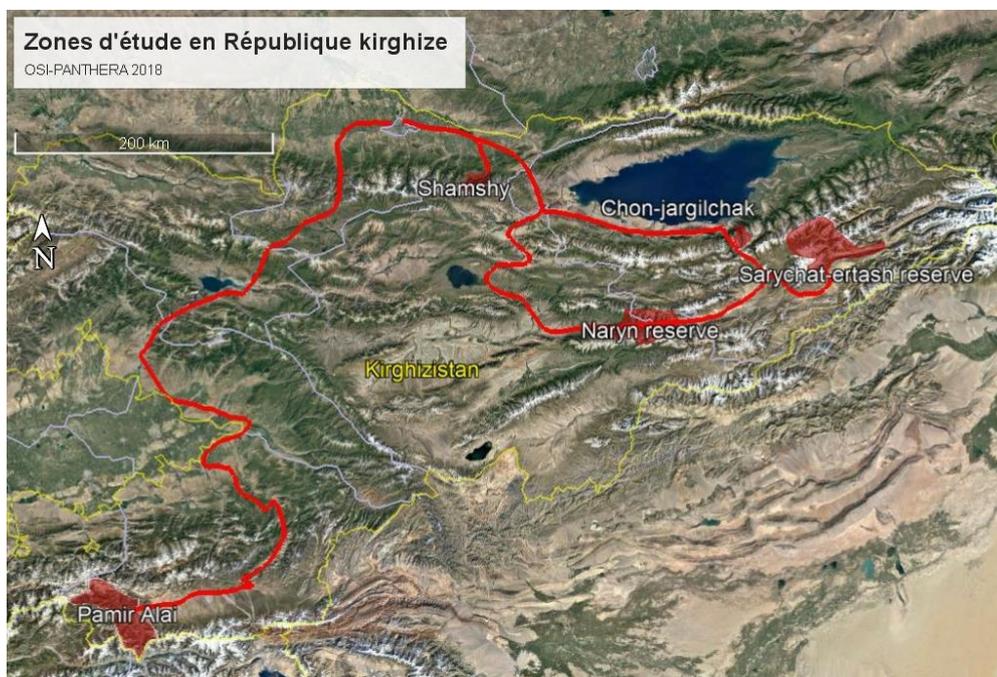
OSI-PANTHERA
CITIZEN SCIENCE EXPEDITIONS



Tracking the snow leopard in the heart of the Sarychat-Ertash State Nature Reserve

Kyrgyzstan is one of the rare places on Earth where the beauty of nature has been pristinely preserved. Rich, diversified wildlife still lives in this small central Asian country, as does a smiling, welcoming population descended from Turk and Mongol nomads.

Our expeditions take place in the heart of the heavenly **Tian Shan** mountains. Located in the northernmost part of Kyrgyzstan, every year the **Sarychat-Ertash State Nature Reserve** welcomes international teams of scientists accompanied by travelers who are passionate about studying and observing wildlife, like the snow leopard.



Map of OSI-Panthera's study areas in Kyrgyzstan

After first making our way through the grandiose landscapes around **Issyk-Kul Lake** (altitude of 1,650 meters), declared a biosphere reserve by UNESCO, we'll take a jeep toward the tableland and our first base camp, located at an altitude of three thousand meters.

It's here that we'll enter the mythical snow leopard's "domain." There, we'll travel on horseback (small Kyrgyz Horses), usually at a walk gait. Our scientific surveys will be done on hikes from our different base camps (an six-hundred-meter increase in altitude each day) on trails called "transects" (a **transect** is a virtual line to follow to study a phenomenon or keep track of occurrences; we'll be looking for clues about the presence of wildlife).

A sciences educator will be supervising in the field, and will oversee all science education and awareness-raising (biology, naturalist and scientific aspects), as well as logistics and general organization, group management, and safety. This person will be assisted by **wildlife officers**, usually two of them. The educator will have first-aid certification and training in mountain rescue and isolated environments. In case a problem arises, the team has a **satellite telephone** and a **health-information helpline**. An **assistant** (French-Kyrgyz or English-Kyrgyz) will also be on hand to discovering Kyrgyz culture !

You don't need to know how to ride a horse, **but we ask that participants have a fair amount of stamina and not be scared of mounting** so they can fully appreciate the permanent spectacle these beautiful lands offer us: eternal snows, verdant gorges, steppe landscapes, and alpine grasses, where great numbers of snow leopards' prey live, such as mouflons and ibexes. But these lands are also home to competitors, like wolves and bears. For your safety, **trotting and cantering are prohibited and you must wear a riding helmet.**

The observation sessions will launch and close our days. While traveling through our "transects" or spending nights "on the lookout," we can look to the skies to see golden eagles, bearded vulture and Himalayan vultures—we'll take a true odyssey through nature!

At night at our base camps, our Kyrgyz friends will delight us with their culinary specialties, songs, epic tales, and wonderful laughter.

Note: In July and August, since melting snow makes river and other icy torrent levels rise, crossing the Ertash River (the main river within the nature reserve) will be difficult, even on horseback.

One alternative is to take the right bank of the Ertash River **south of the reserve**, and to set up the base camp in Eshegart (camp 1). We'll travel around it on horseback and at night on foot. Other bivouacs may be set up all along the right bank of the river, allowing you to discover the "southern" half of the reserve!

A second possibility is to depart from the **northwestern-most part of the reserve**, close to Kumtor gold mine, and trek through the well-preserved valleys on the left banks of the Sarychat and Ertash Rivers. We'll pass through three of the camps located along the main river. We'll change bivouacs every two or three days, and return through the northwest. This version will have you riding more and breaking camp more often.



We're also offering an expedition to the **valley of Jangart**, located south of the Sarychat-Ertash reserve. There are discussions about integrating this area into the reserve, which would create an ecological corridor between the Sarychat reserve and the new Enylchek National Park.

During our expedition, wildlife surveys and data on the snow-leopard population, its prey, and competitors in the valley will help support this proposed integration into the nature reserve.

*This scientific expedition also has **social goals**. Sometimes that we organize an expedition, we either invite Kyrgyz teens so they can discover their mountains and the ecosystems that compose them, or we renovate base camps (insulation, installing solar equipment) to improve the daily lives of Kyrgyz wildlife officers during the coldest periods of the year.*

Here is a typical schedule for an expedition on the right bank of the Ertash (left-bank trips are the same):

Day 1	Early-morning arrival at the Bishkek airport . A short sleep and first meeting with your team, plus a trip to the center of the Kyrgyz capital, which is at eight hundred meters in altitude. Setup at the guesthouse. First contact with the assistant. Tour of the city, its open market, the oriental Osh Bazaar, its parks. <i>In Kyrgyz, a "Bishkek" is a churn used to make fermented mare's milk (kumis), Kyrgyzstan's national drink!</i>
Day 2	Departure by minibus to Lake Issyk-Kul (1,650 meters in altitude, 180 kilometers from Bishkek); <i>second-largest mountain lake after Lake Titicaca in Peru/Bolivia</i> . Afternoon at the lake, in the biosphere reserve. First potential birds observations. Stroll through the village of Chong Jargylchak. Possible swim in water ranging from 18–23°C. Night spent at the villager's, at the farm overhanging the lake. <i>"Issyk-Kul" means "warm lake"—the lake is fed by eight rivers and streams, as well as hot springs. It doesn't freeze in the winter because of its light salinity.</i>
Day 3	Travel by jeep to the Sarychat-Ertash reserve; the road will become mountainous, then subalpine and alpine. <i>The road criss-crosses through high plateaus interspersed with fordable torrents and high-altitude ponds.</i> If your mission is in the South of the reserve, arrival by the end of the day at camp 0 at the entrance of the reserve , located at 3,200 meters in altitude. If you do the mission in the north, you will arrive in the late morning near the gold mine, from where you will spend half a day riding to the first camp. Bivouac at the camp. Traditional Kyrgyz meal and introduction to the Kyrgyz guard team.
Day 4	Day of acclimatization to the altitude; rest and short hike near the camp. Meeting with horses that will be our travel companions all throughout the trip. <i>The small Kyrgyz Horses, which have a leading place in this country's culture, are sure-footed and will help us transport our scientific material, food, and camping equipment.</i> Equipment tests (GPS, binoculars, camera trap, etc.).
Day 5	Preparing supplies for our first horseback trip. Our caravan will slowly ride toward our first base camp in the heart of the Sarychat-Ertash reserve. Setting up camp and first points of reference. <i>We sometimes renovate base camp #1; we install thermal insulation and solar equipment so our Kyrgyz friends are more comfortable during the coldest months of the year.</i>
Days 6 to 8	Transects: During our hikes along ascending topographical lines, we'll search for signs of the presence of wildlife, collect scat, and control our camera traps in strategic places. We'll also count the species we observe as part of our "monitoring populations" goal. Significant time will be devoted to observation (splendid high-altitude avian fauna), taking in the view, videos, and photos. <i>Renovating the camp (for volunteers !) can be done in alternation with transects.</i>
Days 9 to 13	Horseback riding to our second base camp . Then second part of our transects/installing camera traps/detecting the presence of animals. <i>Possibility of "lookout" nights for those interested—extraordinary sunrises, exceptional light, and wildlife all around! Possibility of heading toward a third camp.</i> These days deep within the Tian Shan mountains are the most out-of-this-world part of this trip! An unforgettable time for all in the heart of the most spectacular forces of nature. Be careful of temperature variations (sometimes -5°C at night up to 30°C during the day)! Our meals will be prepared using local food. We will sleep in tents and sleeping bags.
Day 14	Return by horseback to base camp #1 . On the way back, we'll pick up the camera traps. <i>The snow leopards will surely have left us a few surprises!</i>
Day 15	Return trip on horseback to the entry camp of the reserve . <i>Festive final evening along with the wildlife officers in the heart of the heavenly mountains!</i> Night at camp.
Day 16	Jeep ride to Chon Jarguilchak , a small city on the eastern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul where we stayed on the outward journey.
Day 17	Day at the village of Chon Jargylchak to digitize the collected data, perform a first round of sorting, begin the analysis of camera-trap photos, and a report on the assignment you have just completed. We'll do all this in between two dips in the lake, of course!
Day 18	Trip to Bishkek (minibus) and visit of Osh's bazar buying souvenirs.
Day 19	Return flight to Europe via Moscow or Istanbul in the early morning.

* An illustrated overview is available on the website with the "Logbooks" of past missions.

<https://www.osi-panthera.org/-Kirghizie-66-.html>

Some useful information about our expeditions:

Immersion: Our expeditions are totally immersive. We will spend most of our time in an isolated reserve, several hours or days by horseback from human contact. Rescues can only be done by helicopter, and take at least one day to arrive. Participants must be aware of this and be ready to accept and not fear the psychological and safety risks this kind of isolation can entail.

Rusticity: Our expeditions have a limited amount of comforts. We'll be sleeping in tents (provided by the NGO) every day, and we'll sometimes be bivouacking under the stars. The highly variable weather high in the mountains will be felt more keenly, especially because of the fatigue caused by our elaborate equipment. Washing up will be done along a river using cold water.

Autonomy: We'll be completely autonomous for at least twelve days thanks to the food carried on horseback, like the rest of our materials. It won't be fine dining (starches and mutton) considering the constraints out on the field, but the food is always satisfying and most of our participants enjoy it. We make our own bread once the bread we brought along with us runs out. Since we'll be in a state reserve, we will not forage, fish, or do any other similar activity.

Fitness level and riding experience: Our expeditions are not athletic hikes or horse-riding vacations. We travel from one camp to another by horseback, while going on foot allows us to study the zones where snow leopards live. This prospecting will be done on uneven terrain, off trails, and with climbs of 500–1,500 meters per day. You should be in shape for the expedition and have experience in off-trail hiking, though you don't need to be an elite athlete! Horses and riding will be an important part of the day-to-day life of our expedition. However, it is clearly not a horseback-riding trip; for safety reasons, for example, galloping is forbidden during the expedition. A riding helmet is compulsory.

Duration: Eighteen days on-site (twenty days including the round-trip plane ride)

Or five weeks

Lodging: Full board (hotel, yurts, tents)

Travel: Plane, minibus, jeep, horseback, on foot

Group: 8 participants

Monitoring: 1 sciences educator, 1 assistant and 3 wildlife officers

Information and registration:

www.osi-panthera.org

Tel: + 33 9 72 30 55 95

direction@osi-panthera.org

Dates: May to October