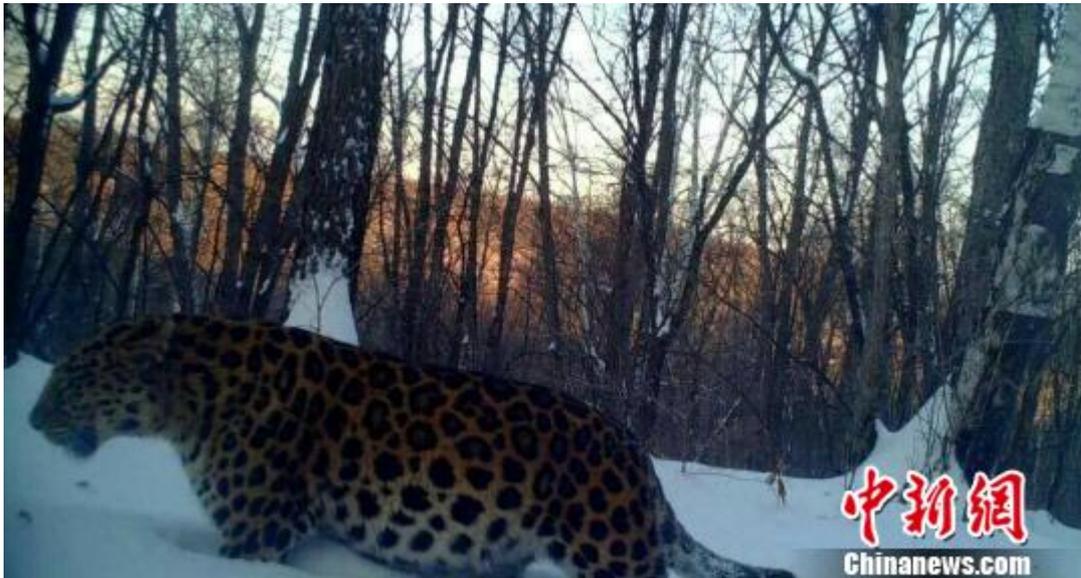


Pregnant looking Amur Leopard confirmed as fat male



The pregnant looking rare Amur leopard in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province [Photo/Chinanews.com]

Excitement over sightings of what was thought to be a pregnant rare Amur leopard has been dashed after it was revealed the animal was a male that had eaten too much.

The overweight leopard was spotted in a Siberian tiger national nature reserve in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, according to experts from the Longjiang Forest Industry, quoted by Chinanews.com on Saturday.

Rangers in the reserve filmed the leopard, with a big belly which almost touched the ground, and conjectured whether it was pregnant.

But closer inspection of the video by experts at the wildlife research institute in Heilongjiang province revealed the patterns on the back of the leopard appeared similar to those of a male found in September, 2014 in the same area.

The researchers confirmed the leopards were one and the same, and the male leopard's "pregnant" appearance was simply down to eating too much.

"It's not hard to believe," said Zhou Shaochun, associate researcher at the wildlife research institute in Heilongjiang province. "In the winter of 2016, there were 2.6 roe deer and 3.2 wild boars in every kilometer, which means food was densely distributed. So, leopards eating too much is not hard to understand."

The abundance of wildlife in the national nature reserve in Heilongjiang province has brought joy and hope to staff members. In 2016, Siberian tigers were spotted on five occasions and wild Amur leopards 17 times by cameras. It later turned out that there were four individual Amur leopards and 6

individual Siberian tigers.

Fu Jingfeng, director of the Suiyang Forest Industry Bureau, said that the healthy condition of tigers and leopards are the result of concerted efforts by the whole of society. He said a reduction in tree cutting in the forest had encouraged the breeding of roe deer and wild boars, which provided stable living conditions for leopards which are at the top of the food chain.

The Amur leopard is listed as Critically Endangered on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Data published by the World Wildlife Fund indicates that there are roughly 70 adult Amur leopards in the wild today.