

3 snow leopard cubs found in Shiqu

Four villagers in Shiqu county in Southwest China's Sichuan province found three snow leopard cubs in a cave in the Luoxu White-lipped Deer Nature Reserve on Friday.



Three snow leopard cubs huddle in a cave in the Luoxu White-lipped Deer Nature Reserve in Shiqu county, Southwest China's Sichuan province. [Photo provided to chinadaily.com.cn]

On Thursday afternoon, a villager found a dead blue sheep in the reserve. The next day he and three other villagers found a cave near the site of the dead sheep.

In the cave were three snow leopard cubs, said Wan Xu, a leading official in

the reserve's management committee.

Although snow leopards are sighted from time to time in Shiqu, it is rare to find them so near to a village. The three snow leopard cubs are only two kilometers away from the nearest village, he said.

Forestry workers are monitoring the cubs far from the cave. They will withdraw if the mother leopard returns. If something goes wrong with the mother and she does not return, the forest workers will rescue the cubs, he said.

In the past five years, infrared cameras at the reserve have captured images of snow leopards more than 20 times. Villagers have taken pictures of them with their cell phones, too.

There might be more than 30 snow leopards in the reserve, which is Sichuan's largest snow leopard habitat, Wan said.

Frequent sighting of snow leopards in Shiqu has much to do with the increase in the number of blue sheep in the reserve, a result of conservation methods, he said.

China's number of snow leopards ranks first in the world, accounting for about 40 percent of the total, he said.