

## Project Update: July 2015

During this field work, we basically communicated and discussed the findings from last year's field work. We carried out land use history cross checking with local herders, since the information we derived last year was basically through limited interviews on a few old herders. These key findings include:

1. In the study area, the land use intensity was significantly increased after the privatisation of livestock in 1984. The change of pasture land use is the trigger of grassland degradation.
2. Climate change also plays a role in the degradation process, since we have detected the pattern of severe degradation in the edge zone of permafrost edge zone in study region. The repeated thawing and freezing of the frozen soil layer is sensitive to additional disturbances, and continuous using of summer pastures may have led to erosion. From pasture management perspective, we suggested that carefully manage winter pastures on high altitudes, and avoid over-grazing on the summer pasture where the permafrost layer is melting. (we have developed a manuscript which has just been accepted, we acknowledged The Rufford Foundation in this paper, will send you a copy for archive as long as it is formally published)
3. The current distribution of bird richness is experiencing the legacy effect of land use between the 1980s and 1990s. The change of pasture management also contributes to the uneven distribution of bird richness across the landscape. Particularly, infrastructure development after the 1990s increased the number of generalist birds. At the same time, the degraded grassland provided unique habitat for the white-rumped snowfinch.
4. Shrubland provides key habitats for local endemic species pink-tailed bunting and Tibetan bunting, which should be protected by local communities. Firewood collecting in the breeding season should be prohibited.
5. However, the biggest threat to the study area now is not from the community, but from the potential mass tourism, since the government has just approved a billions of RMBs tourism planning in the Nyanpo Yutse region, which includes building highways and an airport. The sharply increased tourists will increase the disturbance to the breeding habitats of local birds, and other organisms. We have been following this up and trying to build up contacts to initiate communication with the local tourism bureau to address our concerns.
6. We have also figured out that even though local people are Buddhists and share the value of wildlife protection, they have little recognition of the bird species of the region, especially small birds (song birds). We recommend developing a bird watching interest group in the local primary school.

