

Project Update: May 2018

December 2017 – May, 2018

After getting permits from the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), Department of forest in Kathmandu, the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), the District Forest Office in Lamjung, and the Annapurna Conservation Area headquarters in Pokhara, Kaski, the following activities were carried out during the period covered by this report:

1. A preliminary survey in Ghermu VDC (Village Development Committee).
2. Social surveys and questionnaires.
3. Transect surveys to determine evidence of red panda activity.
4. Herbarium collection.
5. Training of Forest Guardians.

1. Preliminary survey in Ghermu VDC.

I led a preliminary survey with the team members to Lamjung District in December 2017 in order to identify potential sites of red panda activity. Ten localities (Khudi, Ghermu, Taghring, Bahundada, Bhulbhule, Bhujung, Pasagun, Falen, Dudhpokhari, and Pachok) were selected as each was at a suitable elevation and contained the habitat preferred by *Ailurus fulgens*.

2. Social surveys and questionnaires.

Social surveys were carried out and questionnaires distributed in the area of Taghring VDC (in the villages of Sangaya, Mipra, and Rambazer) and in the area of Ghermu VDC (in the villages of Sanjapu, Thani, and Thalthok).

The questionnaires contained simple questions such as:

- Do you know about the red panda?
- Have you seen a red panda in this area?
- When did you see a red panda?
- Did the animal that you saw have red/orange fur?
- Where did you see the red panda? On the ground? In a tree?
- Did you see only one red panda or more than one? If more than one, how many?

The villagers of Rambazer (in Taghring VDC) and Thani and Thalthok (in Ghermu VDC) claimed they had seen Red pandas in the forests near Bhulbhule and Falen.

3. Transect surveys to determine evidence of red panda activity.

Based on the information gathered during the preliminary survey, the project team carried out line transects between 2000 - 4100 m asl in the localities of Thalthok, Pipero, Tobare, Chitro, Tijure, Norgau, Lok danda, and Moga danda.



Fig. 1: Members of the field survey team at the top of Moga danda after a series of line transects.

As the first two field surveys produced no evidence of red panda activity, I enlisted local people to help guide the survey team to areas where villagers had reported seeing red pandas. This approach was more successful and resulted in the team's first sighting of a red panda in the forest at Nakhola fada (Bhulbhule VDC) at 3537 m.

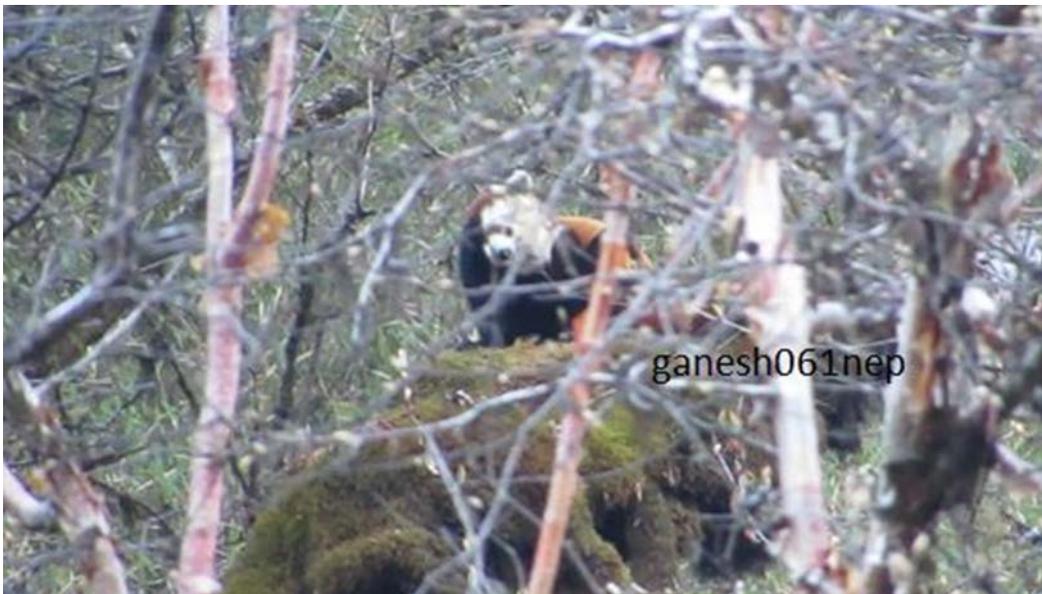


Fig. 2: The project team's first sighting of a red panda at Nakhola fada, Bhulbhule VDC, Lamjung District.

Evidence of red panda activity collected by the survey team included droppings, foraging marks, footprints, and scratch marks.



Fig. 3: Droppings of red panda in the fork of a tree at Kargu fada, Bhulbhule VDC, Lamjung District.



Fig. 4: A member of the field team collecting fresh Red panda droppings from a tree at Nakhola fada. The team member is wearing a Red panda awareness T-shirt produced as part of the Rufford project.



Fig. 5: Distinctive red panda scratch marks on a tree trunk at Nakhola fada.

4. Herbarium collection.

Specimens of the bamboo plants found at each site of red panda activity were collected and retained for taxonomic identification. Bamboo is the preferred food of *A. fulgens* and the conservation of this food source is critical to the survival of the species.

5. Training of Forest Guardians.

First stage training of Forest Guardians involved an explanation of GPS and instruction in how to use hand-held GPS units and how to record location points.



Fig. 6. Forest Guardians were trained in the use of GPS to record the co-ordinates of localities where evidence of Red panda activity, such as fresh droppings (above), had been observed.

The following activities are scheduled to take place in the next phase of the project:

- Further transects to collect evidence of red panda activity.
- Further collection of herbarium samples.
- Further social surveys and questionnaires.
- Conduct of the awareness programme.
- GIS Mapping of red panda sightings and locations of red panda activity.