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This summer high up in mountains of Ladakh, SLC-IT has been working towards starting new programs and initiatives to continue where Rinchen Wangchuk left.

From community conservation initiatives, to remote camera trapping for snow leopards in western Ladakh, to snow leopard sightings and new partnerships.

Read more to know about the SLC-IT's quarters work highlights.

Remote Camera set up in Western Ladakh

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank the Department of Wildlife Protection (J&K), Animal Husbandry Department (J&K), and Education Department (J&K). Our program partners Panthera, International Snow Leopard Trust, Snow Leopard Conservancy (USA), Kalpavriksh, Rufford Small Grants, WWF-India, Nature Conservation Foundation, PAGIR, Eco-Sphere, Wildlife Conservation Network, Mountain Initiatives, Friends of Lingshed, Druk Padma Karpo, Australian Himalayan Foundation and Islamia Public School.

MISSION

Since its inception in 2000, the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-IT) has been dedicated to promoting community based stewardship of the endangered snow leopard, its prey and habitat to the benefit of local people and the environment in the trans-Himalayan regions of Ladakh and Zaskar.

CAMERA TRAPPING ON SNOW LEOPARDS



The pilot study on the remote camera traps has been designed by Mr. Koutubh Sharma (International Snow Leopard Trust) with inputs from Dr. Rodney Jackson (Snow Leopard Conservancy USA) and Jigmet Dadul (Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust.) The study is to serve as a pilot for setting up a greater monitoring program. It should serve also to help validate the skills of field personnel in aging scrapes or pugmarks that will make a crucial component of the large scale monitoring program in future using occupancy estimation on the basis of indirect signs.

The Reconyx Cameras have been provided by Panthera, and field implementation is a collaborative effort of Department of Wildlife Protection and SLC-IT.

REMOTE CAMERA TRAP TRAINING WITH DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Before the field implementation, SLC-IT conducted the Remote Camera Training Workshop with Range Officers and Guards of the Department of Wildlife Protection. The workshop included a brief overview of the study objectives and the project to be undertaken. The workshop also included demonstration of the Reconyx HC-500 cameras with detail session on settings and field placements. Mr. Jigmet Takpa, Conservator Forest (Wildlife, Ladakh)

- Department of Wildlife Protection (J&K), also shared some of his field experiences and insights with the participants.



COMMUNITY COOPERATION

The SLC-IT team representatives were Jigmet Dadul and interns Kezia Yephthomi and Manasi Saikia from Ambedkar University Delhi, conducted a community consultation meeting at Ulley and Saspoche in Western Ladakh, to ensure cooperation from the community for the upcoming remote camera trapping for population estimation of snow leopards in area. In Ulley, since SLC-IT has been working since a long time, the community immediately agreed for same. In Saspoche, the forthcoming community conservation ventures supported by Panthera were also discussed in detail.



FIELD SIGN SURVEYS AND SETTING OF REMOTE CAMERA TRAPS

In collaboration with the Department of Wildlife Protection together, SLC-IT conducted surveys around Ulley and Saspoche Villages from 8-11 June. Sign transects to indicate snow leopard presence was conducted at selected sites, where remote camera traps (Reconyx HC-500) were set up in correspondence with favourable snow leopard activity. Subsequently, sign transects were conducted in assigned areas and more cameras were placed in the area by the end of June.



According to the sign transects in Ulley, camera traps were set up on the ridge lines as the activity observed was high in those areas. In Saspoche, the terrain and activity levels were different from that of Ulley region. Snow leopard signs were more frequent in the valley regions of Saspoche compared to Ulley's Spango Nala Valley. The sign transects have showed activity mainly in the upper mountain ridges. Of the 15 camera placed in the field, 9 cameras have captured snow leopard activity. The summer estimation will be conducted till the end of July 2011, after which the analysis will be undertaken for the data collected.

Snow Leopard Captured on 10th June, 2011

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION INITIATIVES



TRAINING ON FINISHING OF HANDICRAFTS

Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-IT) conducted its second handicrafts training program focused mainly on knitting, with the assistance of resource persons Mrs. Tsering Dolker and Miss Tsewang Dolma, both from Rumbak. It was a three day training program with the women's handicrafts group. The training was held from 10th to 12th May, 2011, under the 'Predator Friendly Handicrafts', supported by Rufford Small Grants received by Jigmet Dadul.



The objective of this training program was to give them training on better finishing of products and varying design patterns for the handicraft products. Around 16 women were trained in knitting handicrafts. The community conservation fund collection was also finalized. The agreement to be signed will be undertaken by SLC-IT in the following month. The products will be sold in SLC-IT's office for the initial year, since the number of products is still limited.



MID-TERM HOMESTAY EVALUATION

SLC-IT team conducted mid-year homestay evaluation meetings at Tarutse, Yangthang, Ulley and Hemisshukpachan from the 7th to 9th June, 2011. New homestay interpretation files were distributed to all the homestay operators. Changes were also proposed and implemented in the registration book. A conservation fund column was added. Also, SLC-IT will supporting the homestay with signage along the trekking trail in Tarutse and for the Saspoche Eco-Café. The conservation fund collected was deposited in their respective bank accounts for the commencement of the insurance program.



COMMENCEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY BASED LIVESTOCK INSURANCE PROGRAM

SLC-IT conducted community meeting at Yangthang, Ullay and Hemisshukpachan regarding Community Livestock Insurance Program (CLIP) supported by Snow Leopard Conservancy (USA). The meeting was facilitated by Radhika Kothari, Jigmet Dadul and Rigzin Chorol of SLC-IT. The field visit was from on 7th to 9th June 2011. The objective was to reinstate the community based livestock insurance program and revise the objectives and conditions of the program and to profile the livestock for insurance under the program. There was good participation from all the three villages.



In Ulley, this winter they had reported a loss of seven yaks and Dzo during the winter by Snow leopards and wolves, this program would reassure them compensation. At the same, better guarding practices were emphasized by the team. The total livestock to be insured in Ulley is 20.





It was also decided that the premium will be deposited into the community accounts already held by the Ulley Community in State Bank of India in Leh.

In Hemisshukpachan, with the support of the Goba, the team managed to gather all the community members. CLIP was introduced to all the villages, its conditions and objectives were all discussed in detail. The response was not very positive. They repeatedly mentioned about sending their livestock to Ulley pastures, and most of them were left unattended. The community is still very skeptical of implementing the program, therefore, SLC-IT has decided to shift for program to Tarustse, another homestay project site, where the community themselves asked for implementation for such a program.

In Yangthang, after initial hesitance and after much deliberation and consultation, and the benefits of the program were accepted by the village of Yangthang. Majority of them agreed to be a part of the insurance program. The total livestock be insured in Yangthang was 31. For Yangthang, the premium will be deposited into a new account that will be managed by a village representative and SLC-IT in State Bank of India in Leh.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AT LINGSHED HOSTEL



On the 29th of May 2011, SLC-IT conducted its 1st workshop at Lingshed Hostel Choglamsar Leh, with the students of class 4th to 11th standard. The workshop was conducted by Miss. Tsering Angmo, EE Coordinator, and Mr. K C namgyal, EE Assistant. Before starting the program, Gyashes Nawang Changchup, the hostel in-charge, gave a brief presentation about Lingshed Hostel to the SLC-IT team. He has been the key person to help the Lingshed Hostel and was extremely supportive for the workshop. There were 51 students and 3 teachers participating in this workshop, all of the students were from different villages staying at the hostel, since most of them were from far-flung area. The Lingshed hostel was established to help the needy people from far off villages, to support their children for higher education opportunities in Leh.

We really got an excellent response from the students. They were keen and interested to know about the wildlife of Ladakh. Gyan Nawang Changchup also showed interest and insisted on the continuation of the program.



ORIENTATION PROGRAM ON RI-GYANCHA IN SPITI

Snow Leopard Conservancy-India Trust (SLC-IT), Kalpavriksh along with Eco-sphere conducted training workshops for Ecosphere educators as well as for school students and teachers in the Spiti area from 4th to 13th of June, 2011. The training was facilitated by Sujatha Padmanaban from Kalpavriksh, Pune, and Tsering Angmo of SLC-IT. The objectives of this training were to familiarize the students on the wildlife and environment of their area, and to train the educators on the use the Ri Gyancha resource kit. The program was conducted in three schools namely: JNV School (Kaza), Demul High School and Highlander School.



The program was also conducted with the team at Ecosphere staff, since they wish to introduce the kit in Spiti. The entire kit was discussed in detail with them. Experiences from the Ladakh environmental education program along with suggestions on best practices for the implementation were also discussed.



Among the schools, students were mainly from grades 6th and 7th. Following a consistent 2 day work plan, which included indoor and outdoor interactive activities, power point presentations, talks and a wildlife-related film screening. The students were very active and keen to know about wildlife, especially the marmot which seems to have disappeared from the Spiti area.



Eco-Sphere is keen on taking the program ahead in the near future. The best possible of future collaborations were also deliberated upon.

JZUNU NATURE CLUB

JZUNU NATURE CLUB MEET - MAY

On the 8th of May 2011 Sunday JNC conducted a meeting at Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust Office Leh, and the theme selected for the month is World Bird Migratory Day. The objective of this program was to enable the participants and also to create awareness about the process and the importance of the migration of birds. The problems and difficulties faced by the birds during the process were also explained. The participants were taken to Shey Marshes. The birds spotted included Citrine Wagtail, Blue Rock Pigeon, Laughing Dove, Blue Throat, Mountain Chiff Chaff. Black Bill Magpie, Common Moorhen, Black Red Start, etc. Some of the participants knew some local names for the birds but were unaware of their actual names and migration patterns.





“The Great Migration Challenge” game was also played with the children. The objective of the game is to understand the entire process of migration along with all the challenges the birds must face. The game required the participants to 'become' birds. The game involved moving from one station to another. Each station had a particular activity to carry out. For example one station may say “Watch out! Power lines ahead! Don't hit them! Crawl ahead 5 feet. Pick a chit and move ahead the number of stations indicated.” The participants were divided into 13 groups. The groups were named after the migratory birds found in Ladakh. Some groups were successful and 'completed their migration' whereas some could not and 'died'. Around 143 students participated and they learnt the process and the importance of bird migration, in relation to the birds found in Leh.



JZUNU NATURE CLUB MEET - CELEBRATING WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

On the 12th June, 2011 Sunday Jzunu Nature Club celebrated World Environment Day. The program was held in collaboration with WWF Ladakh. The objective of this program was to enable the participants and also to create awareness about WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY, and on the issues of garbage management in Leh. The challenges and initiatives undertaken by the local NGO's.



The day started with an orientation by Ms. Radhika Kothari on annual celebrations for World Environment Day – 5th June, its initiation and continuation through the years throughout the world. Later, she emphasized on the topic of Garbage Management issues in Leh, growing concerns and its impact on the environment in the long run. She also emphasized on the increasing garbage issue due to exponential increase in tourism over a couple of years in Ladakh.



Mr. Iqbal (President) from PAGIR was also present for the meeting. PAGIR has been involving physically challenged persons to produce products from waste materials. Mr. Iqbal also emphasized the ever increasing problem of waste in Leh compared to earlier times when there would be less waste, since there were less materialistic products in Ladakh.

Later, the students were briefed on the activity for the day i.e – Scavenge Hunter, where students were expected to go out to the town, collect dry garbage, bring back to the SLC-IT office and create innovative products out of it. Over an hour,



the students were deeply engrossed in their creations as their creative juices flowed to make the most unique products. The prizes were sponsored by WWF-Ladakh. The first three best products were chosen and two more were chosen for consolation prizes. Also, WWF gave 8 Green Hiker T-shirts that were distributed to the students, SLC-IT also distributed WILD Ladakh poster to the students. The first prize was given to Helicopter Garbage Collector, second to Indian Idol, third to Green Alien. The consolation prizes went to Penguin Pen Box and Submarin.

SNOW LEOPARD SIGHTINGS



Ulley village is at the altitude of 4050 meter above the sea level situated in the Sham region, western part of Ladakh. Leh to Ulley is about 89 kilometer distance and falls under Saspol block. Ulley is a small village of seven households, people there depend on agriculture and livestock for their living. On the 2nd of May, 2011 around 3:35 pm. Snow Leopard killed a Dzo (local cattle breed) from Thayok Pa family at Spango nullah. Spango Nullah is one of the best habitats for Ibex.

Mr. Tsetan Phuntsog of the Thayok Pa was in Leh, when the kill took place. There Dzo was left in their pasture unguarded. The following morning, the Thayok Pa's along with Tsewang Norboo search around the village and the high pastures for the Dzo, though it was much later that they found that the Dzo was attacked by the snow leopard on the previous day in the Spango Nullah. That was the seven livestock kill this winter by predators snow leopards and wolves.

The snow leopard spotted in May had a cut on its mouth, it was different from the February and the April sighting. It may be a birth defect or due to some genetic reason. Jigmet Dadul of SLC-IT has had many close encounters with Snow Leopards in the past around these villages, but this cat was different from the rest.



16th February, 2011

Photo Credit: Tsering Angmo



16th February, 2011

Photo Credit: Rigzin Chorol



12th April, 2011

Photo Credit: Jigmet Dadul



05th May, 2011

Photo Credit: Jigmet Dadul



DONOR MEMBERSHIPS WITH SNOW LEOPARD CONSERVANCY INDIA TRUST


Membership with Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust is open to all individuals. Members are invited to participate in project activities. It is entirely up to the member to participate in field or contribute to activities or campaigns in office. As a member with SLC-IT you can also have access to reports, books, and movies available at SLC-IT Leh Office. Members can also avail discounts at the Snow Leopard's Corner (store), Snow Leopard Treks and many more...

Your contributions will support Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust efforts that empower local communities, support environmental education and research. All supporters will be kept posted of the work and are invited to write about their experiences with SLC-IT in our quarterly newsletter SHAN.



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Read experiences of SLC-IT's volunteers and interns of recent years. Their stories in their words. Visit us on - <http://snowleopardindia.blogspot.com/>  **Blogger**

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