

## HALF-YEARLY PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT - 1<sup>st</sup> Rufford Small Grant

**Project Title:** Conservation and Community Engagement for the Endangered Woolly Flying Squirrel (*Eupetaurus cinereus*) in the Uttarakhand Himalayas

**Project ID:** 43681-1

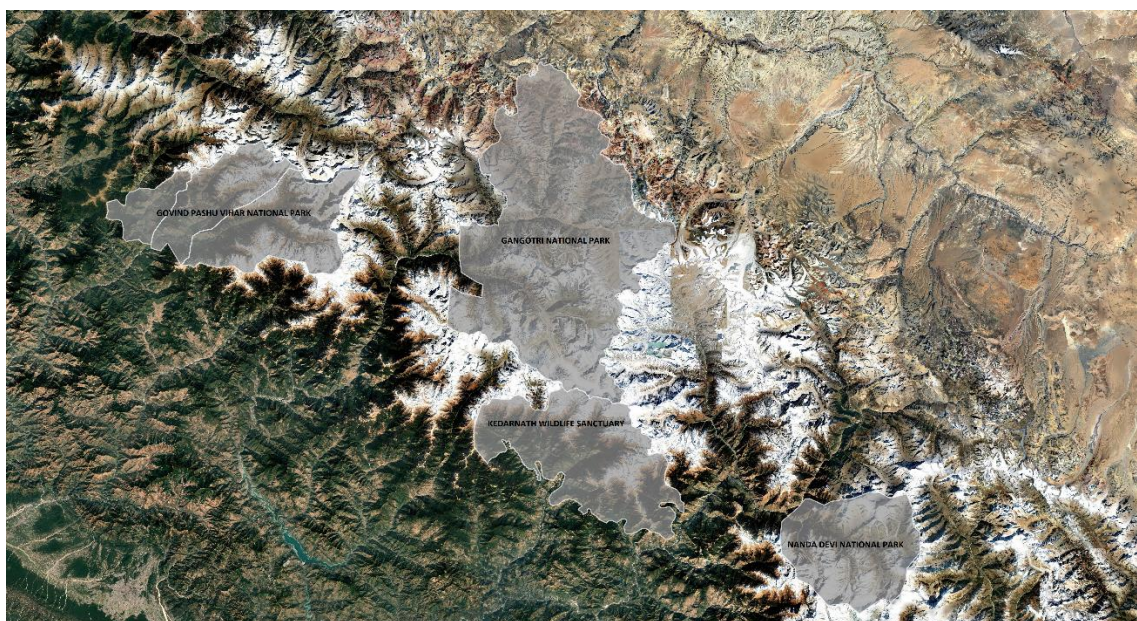
**Principal Investigator:** Hiranmoy Chetia

**Reporting Period:** First 6 months of project implementation

**Project Regions:** Gangotri National Park, Govind Pashu Vihar National Park, Nanda Devi National Park, and adjoining habitats including Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary landscape

### 1. Summary of Progress

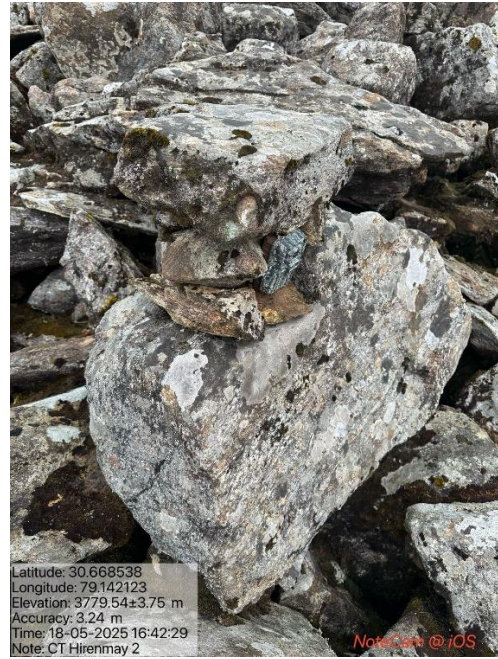
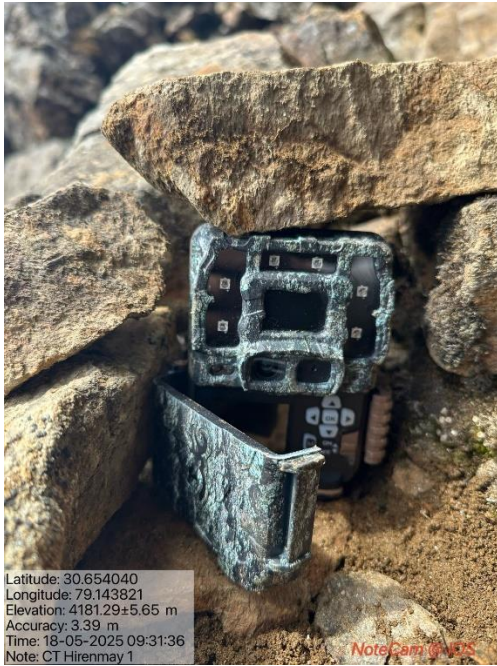
The first six months of the project focused on reconnaissance surveys, establishing field sites, stakeholder consultations and initiation of camera-trapping. Surveys were completed across key forest ranges and high-altitude habitat patches where the Woolly Flying Squirrel has been historically suspected. Baseline ecological and logistical information was generated and preliminary camera-trap data already indicate the presence of several nocturnal mammal species that share habitat with *Eupetaurus cinereus*. Engagement with forest authorities and local community members laid a solid foundation for the next phase of field monitoring, awareness programmes and outreach-driven conservation.



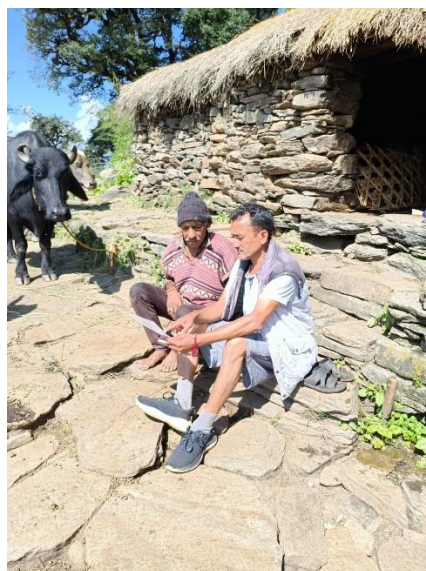
**Figure:** Location map of the protected areas included in the project.

## 2. Activities Completed

Activity	Status	Details
Reconnaissance surveys	Completed	Habitat surveys across sensitive alpine and subalpine zones; identification of high-probability sites
Permissions and coordination	Completed	Project briefings and route-map approvals with forest authorities across multiple parks
Camera-trap deployment	Initiated and ongoing	Traps installed at selected mid-altitude and cliff-edge zones; preliminary detections recorded. Camera traps were also deployed in Gangotri National Park, but a major landslide and mudslide in the area resulted in the loss of several units.
Local community interactions	Initiated	Discussions with herder groups, guides and village heads for information, awareness and field support.



**Figures:** Placement of camera traps and the potential habitat of Woolly Flying Squirrel



**Figure:** Discussion with the herders

### 3. **Field Observations and Initial Outcomes**

- Identification of new potential habitats dominated by rocky cliffs, alpine meadows and coniferous forest edges suitable for Woolly Flying Squirrel.
- Elevation range between 2,800–4,600 m emerged as the most promising zone during the initial phase.
- Local pastoralists displayed high interest in learning about the species and contributed traditional ecological knowledge on high-altitude nocturnal mammals.
- Camera-trap grids are now positioned to enable documentation of the species in the coming months.

### 4. **Constraints and Challenges**

Fieldwork was affected by both natural and administrative restrictions:

#### • **Terrain & landslides**

Different locations of Uttarkashi and adjoining Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary slopes experienced repeated landslides, and rockfall, particularly on approach trails to higher survey sites. This caused delays, forced rerouting and reduced the number of deployable camera-trap sites during the monsoon and post-monsoon period. The Gangotri National Park region also underwent heavy landslide and mudslide activity, resulting in the loss of several deployed camera traps.

#### • **Government restrictions on high-altitude access**

Due to safety concerns, government authorities have become stricter about researcher mobility in alpine zones, especially above ~3,500 m. Even with permits, access required, mandatory forest escorting, time-bound clearances and cancelled surveys during red-alert weather days

As a result, several high-altitude target sites could not yet be accessed. However, the project timeline remains intact, and we are hopeful that administrative restrictions will be lifted and weather conditions will improve soon, enabling safe entry into the intended high-altitude survey areas.

### 5. **Outreach and Stakeholder Interaction**

- Project objectives shared with 3 communities near survey sites.
- Informal awareness sessions conducted with herder groups and trekking guides.
- Forest staff briefed during reconnaissance phases to encourage long-term support.
- Community awareness programmes planned for Dharali village (Buffer of Gangotri

National Park), adjacent to an area where the Woolly Flying Squirrel was recorded earlier, were postponed due to a severe landslide on August 5, that claimed multiple lives (nearly 70 people). The programme will now be carried out in the next phase when conditions are safe.

#### **6. Plan for Next Six Months**

- Completion of camera-trap installation in high-altitude zones when safe access resumes.
- Retrieval and analysis of accumulated camera-trap data.
- Structured community workshops and awareness drives, with priority initiation in Dharali village.
- Reinforcement of camera-trapping in different regions, including recovery deployments in Gangotri National Park where cameras were lost.
- Development of a Hindi outreach booklet on the Woolly Flying Squirrel for distribution to communities and authorities.
- Preparation of a scientific manuscript based on preliminary findings.

#### **7. Conclusion**

The project has progressed strongly despite challenging Himalayan terrain and safety-driven administrative constraints. Field surveys and camera-trapping have been successfully initiated across targeted habitats, and community interest has been encouraging. Although landslides resulted in setbacks, including the loss of cameras in Gangotri National Park and postponement of awareness work in Dharali, the project remains fully on schedule.

**Photo plate:** Some of the camera-trap records of mammalian fauna from the landscape of Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary adjoining Gangotri National Park.



