

## **ANNUAL 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:** 1 year of project implementation

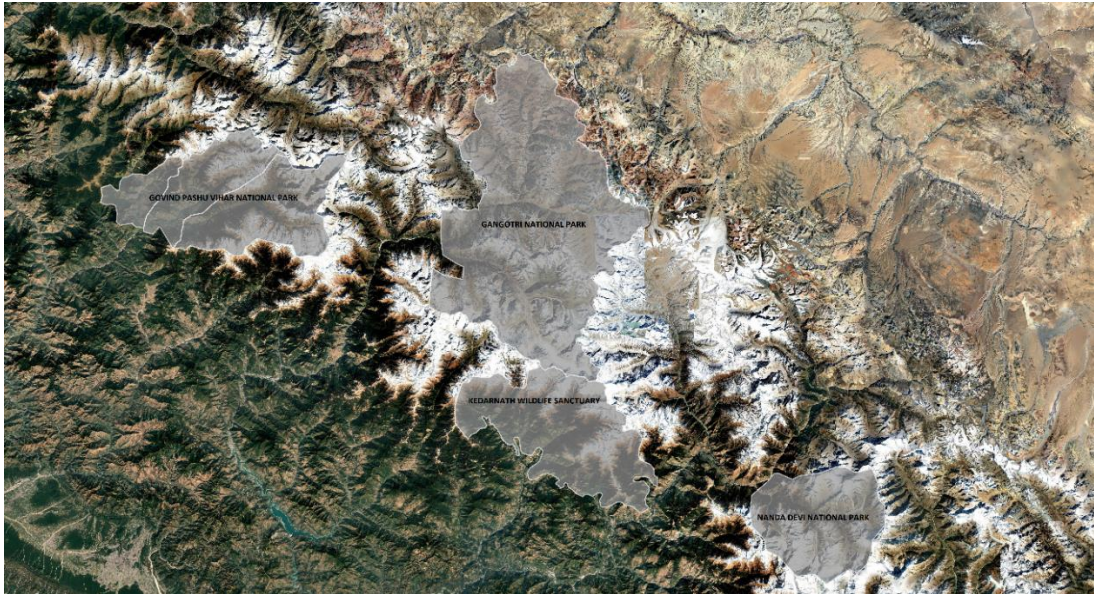
**Project Regions:** Gangotri National Park, Govind Pashu Vihar National Park, Nanda Devi National Park, and adjoining habitats including Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary landscape

### **1. Summary of Progress**

The initial six months were dedicated to foundational field operations, including reconnaissance surveys, site establishment, and the commencement of camera-trapping protocols. Systematic surveys were conducted across high-altitude habitat patches where Woolly Flying Squirrel presence was historically suspected.

Key achievements include the generation of baseline ecological data and the preliminary detection of various nocturnal mammal species through camera-trap imagery. Furthermore, robust engagement with forest authorities and local communities has established the necessary social capital for the upcoming phases of intensive monitoring and outreach-driven conservation.

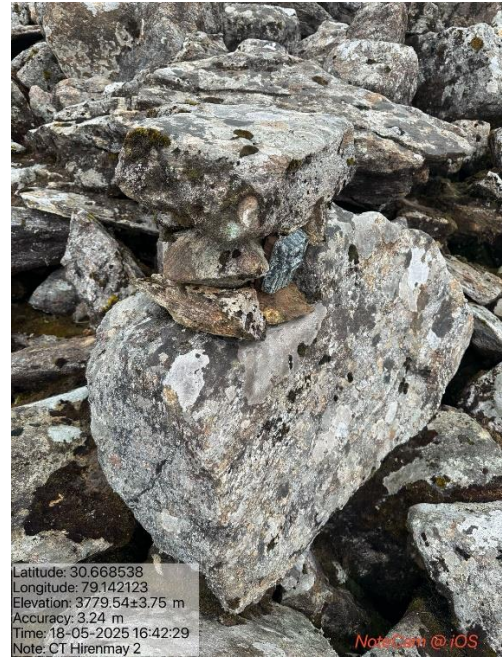
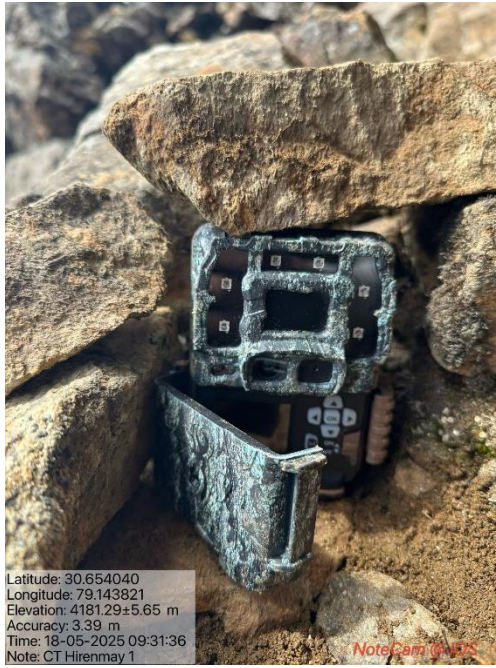
In the following six months, community awareness programs were initiated to bridge the gap between scientific research and local stewardship. These programs focused on educating residents about the ecological significance of the species and the importance of habitat preservation.



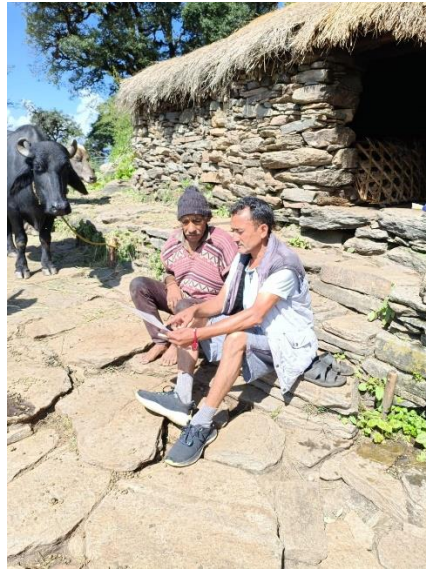
**Figure:** Location map of the protected areas included in the project.

## 2. Activities Completed

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Reconnaissance Surveys</b>	Completed	Habitat assessments across alpine/sub-alpine zones; identification of high-probability occupancy sites.
<b>Permissions &amp; Coordination</b>	Completed	Briefings with forest authorities; secured route-map approvals across multiple Protected Areas.
<b>Camera-Trap Deployment</b>	Ongoing	Units installed at mid-altitude and cliff-edge zones. Note: Mudslides and landslides in Gangotri NP resulted in the loss of several units.
<b>Community Interaction</b>	Completed	Consultations with herder groups, guides, and village heads to integrate traditional ecological knowledge.
<b>Awareness Programmes</b>	Ongoing	Targeted outreach in Dharali, Mukhba, Zhala, and Bagori villages within the Harshil–Gangotri corridor.



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



**Figure:** Discussion with the herders

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

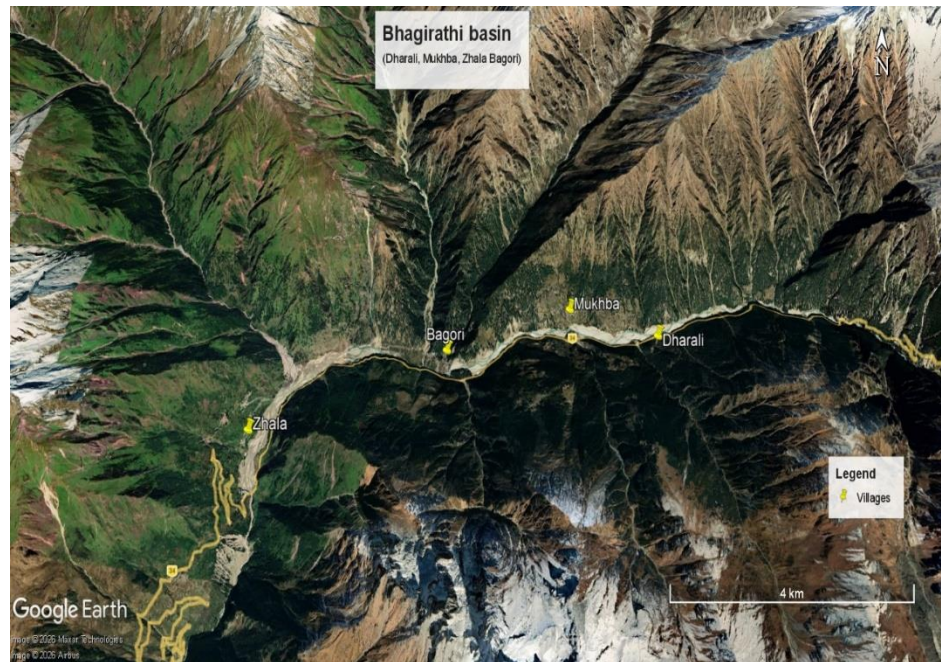
- **Habitat Identification:** Confirmed new potential habitats characterized by rocky cliffs, alpine meadows, and coniferous forest edges within the 2,800–4,600 m elevation range.
- **Ecological Knowledge:** Engagement with local pastoralists revealed significant traditional knowledge regarding high-altitude nocturnal mammals, confirming local awareness of the species.
- **Data Acquisition:** Preliminary camera-trap grids are successfully documenting sympatric nocturnal fauna, refining our understanding of the mammalian community in the study area.

### **4. Outreach and Stakeholder Interaction**

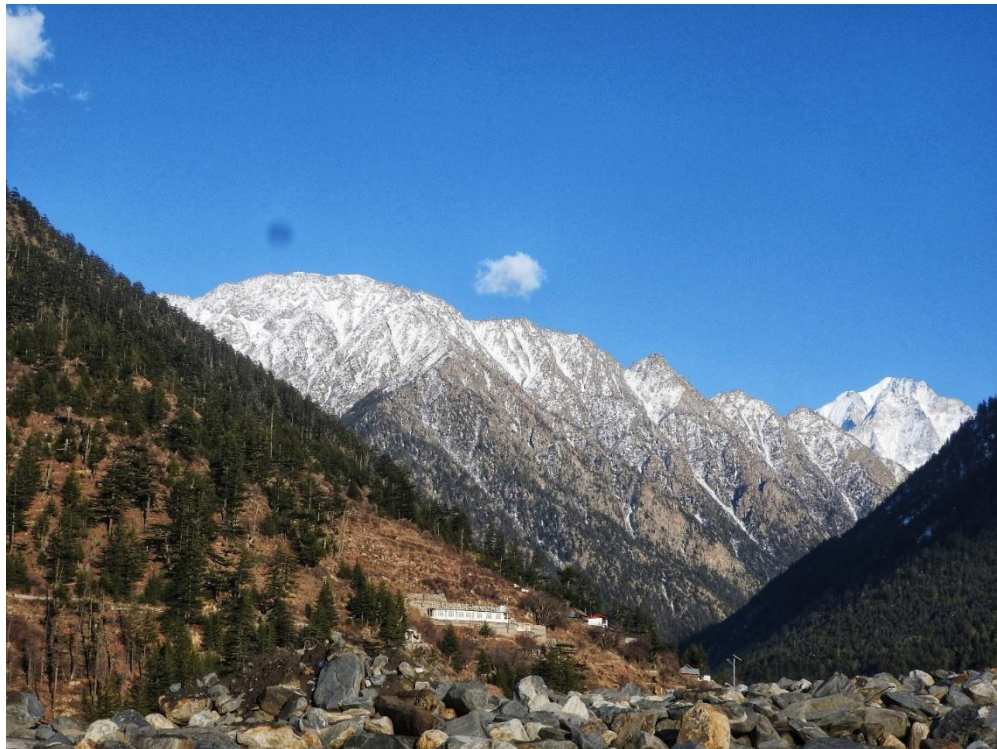
- Shared project objectives with three distinct communities adjacent to critical survey sites.
- Conducted informal awareness sessions with trekking guides and herder groups, who serve as primary informants for species presence.
- Briefed Forest Department staff to ensure long-term institutional support for the conservation of WFS.

## 5. Community awareness programmes

Awareness activities centered on the villages of Dharali, Mukhba, Bagori, and Zhala were conducted.



**Figure:** Location of villages viz., Dharali, Mukhba, Bagori and Zhala for community awareness programmes



**Figure:** Potential habitat for Woolly Flying Squirrel near Dharali village



**Figure:** Awareness activity at village Mukhba, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand



**Figure:** Awareness activity at village Bagori, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand

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

- **Deployment Recovery:** Re-deploy and reinforce camera-trap grids in Gangotri National Park to replace lost units and expand the survey area.
- **Educational Materials:** Produce and distribute a bilingual (Hindi/English) outreach booklet on the Woolly Flying Squirrel for local communities and forest staff.
- **Scientific Output:** Begin drafting a manuscript for a peer-reviewed journal detailing the preliminary findings and habitat suitability of the species in the Uttarakhand Himalayas.

## **7. Constraints and Challenges**

- **Geological Instability:** Significant landslides, mudslides and rockfalls in Uttarkashi and Kedarnath WLS caused delays and forced trail rerouting. Specifically, heavy mudslides in Gangotri National Park led to the unfortunate loss of several camera-trap units, requiring a strategic adjustment for future deployments.
- **Administrative & Weather Restrictions:** Enhanced safety protocols by government authorities have restricted movement above 3,500 m. Mandatory Forest escorts and "red-alert" weather cancellations have delayed access to the highest-altitude target sites.

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

