



Since its inception in 2000, the Snow Leopard Conservancy-India Trust (SLC-IT) has been dedicated to promoting innovative grassroots conservation measures that lead local people to become better stewards of endangered snow leopards, their prey, and habitat. Our mission is to work closely with livestock-herding communities to enhance their income with activities closely linked to conservation of snow leopards.

SLC-IT goes to the Land of the Rising Sun

In the first week of October, SLC-IT's Dr. Tsewang Namgail and Jigmet Dadul were invited by Tokyo-based Liferbirds as panel speakers at the Snow Leopard Symposium at Tokyo City University, which saw a gathering of snow leopard researchers from various universities and zoo officials in Japan.

Dr. Namgail enlightened the audience on the snow leopard conservation efforts in India and around the world. While mentioning the importance of the Himalayas as a safe sanctuary for the snow leopards and noting the current status of their population, he also highlighted the need for regulating tourism in Ladakh to keep the wildlife safe.

Jigmet Dadul followed it up with a brief on the activities being carried out by SLC-IT to resolve the human-snow leopard conflict. He also focussed on the homestay initiative and how it was helping the local community offset livestock loss that was attributed to the snow leopard.



Dr. Tsewang Namgail addresses the audience at the Snow Leopard Symposium in Tokyo, Japan

Zoo officials from Japan flagged the challenges that they faced in breeding snow leopards, and the concerns that they had about inbreeding. The panel discussion that followed reflected on the snow leopard populations around the world, and the need for greater coordination among researchers and zoos to maintain a healthy population.

In this Edition

- ✦ SLC-IT goes to Japan
- ✦ Story from the Field:
Nubra Valley calling
- ✦ Story from the Field:
Learnings at Tarchit
- ✦ Young guns
- ✦ Felt work
- ✦ Workshop at Yangthang
- ✦ An ibex, at last!
- ✦ Time to celebrate
- ✦ Director's Message

Did you know?

The Ladakh urial – the smallest sheep in the world – is an endemic species of Ladakh

STORY FROM THE FIELD

A week-long survey was carried out between December 20 and 26 to study the presence of the snow leopard in Nubra Valley, alongside its prey base.

The three-member survey team of Jigmet Dadul, Skalzang Chosphe and Mohd Raza visited the valley that lies in the northern-most part of Ladakh, bound by the Karakorum mountains in the north, and the Ladakh range to the south.

The Nubra Valley is best known for its scant vegetation, except along the Shayok River that has seabuckthorns in good number in the lower valley. The staple diet of the locals comprises wheat, barley and peas, which is cultivated on the land using the water that flows through the artificial nullahs that have been created for irrigation purposes.



Jigmet Dadul, Skalzang Chosphe and Mohd Raza during the expedition to Nubra Valley



The pug marks of a snow leopard as documented at Henache in the Nubra Valley

Direct evidence of the presence of the Tibetan grey wolf and the red fox was also recorded during this time.

In addition, eight Asiatic ibex herds that added up to 68 in all, two herds of blue sheep that added up to 15 in all, one herd of the Ladakh urial comprising 17 numbers, and a cape hare were spotted.

Seventeen species of birds such as the Golden eagle, lammergeier, common kestrel, mallard, Himalayan snow cock, chukar, white winged redstart, solitary snipe and fire-fronted serin were also recorded during the survey.

The same nullahs were the location for the exercise as trail transects were laid out along them, and were surveyed from vantage points to locate the prey species, in addition to the snow leopard.

Eight such transects were set up in an area near the Siachen Glacier Base Camp, following a route along the villages of Warsi, Nungstet, Tongstet, Henache, Changlung, Yarma Gonbo and Sasoma in the Panamik mountain range.

Though a snow leopard was not spotted during this period, 206 sign encounters of its presence were discovered including pug marks, rock scents, scats and scraps.



Skalzang Chosphe and Mohd Raza inspect the carcass of an Asiatic ibex at Henache in the Nubra Valley

STORY FROM THE FIELD

It was found that livestock never went higher than 3600 metres while blue sheep grazed between 3900 and 4200 metres

higher than 3600 metres. Early snow forced domestic sheep downhill, 10 days into the study, while at the same time, blue sheep left the study area.

Cockerill had a first-hand experience of the conflict between villagers and snow leopards, and witnessed six attacks on five goats and a calf in daylight. While there were no recent reports of attacks on snow leopards, a worrying sign was the news that the villagers of Tarchit were growing restless and wouldn't hesitate if they were to kill a predator.

On October 7, David Cockerill, an intern with SLC-IT, visited the village of Tarchit in the Rong Valley to understand the sharing of grazing grounds between wild ungulates and domestic sheep and goats.

Tarchit became the perfect area for this study over 20 non-consecutive days, considering it is one of the last villages in the area to herd sheep and goats, where most have turned to working as day labourers for road maintenance.

A couple of the 250 villagers are assigned the task of taking the 230-odd animals to graze on pastures that also see blue sheep in large numbers. The villagers said that these blue sheep were not afraid of them or their livestock, and were comfortable grazing amid them. It was also found that the blue sheep were responsible for damaging crops, and were difficult to scare away.

During field observations, herders were followed to high pastures and a variety of data on livestock and blue sheep grazing characteristics was recorded. It was found that while blue sheep grazed between 3900 and 4200 metres, livestock never went



Six snow leopard attacks on domestic livestock were recorded during this period in Tarchit

YOUNG GUNS

SLC-IT conducts its fourth workshop in Rangdum, Zaskar

In continuation with their drive to catch them young, SLC-IT conducted their fourth workshop at the Government Middle School in Rangdum, Zaskar, on October 3.

Thirty one students were educated on a host of topics such as the man-animal conflict, the threat to Ladakhi biodiversity, illegal trade, global warming and the disturbance to the nesting sites of birds.



KC Namgail addresses the students on a host of topics such as Ladakh's biodiversity and global warming

The kids were then engaged in educational games such as 'Keep predators out' that highlighted how a strong enclosure could keep out predators, and 'Nature rummy', that informed them about the various species of animals found in Ladakh.

The students were also informed on biodegradable and non biodegradable waste, and other threats faced by their habitat.



Children were taught about various issues afflicting their surroundings through games

FELT WORK

SLC-IT conducts its first workshop in Henasku, Kargil

A three-day workshop was conducted between November 9 to 11 by SLC-IT, in collaboration with CHARKHA, to help the locals of Henasku village in Kargil, generate an additional income through handicraft.

Before starting, the 15 participants were briefed on different techniques that would help them design well-finished products. They were then taught how to make better handicraft products using local wool, while also familiarising them with using a dry felting needle.

Ms. Utte, an expert in dry needle felting work from Germany, led the workshop, and at the end of the third day, was happy with the progress the participants had made. Before the conclusion of the workshop, the villagers were handed out dry felting needles at no charge to encourage them to make it a regular feature in order to boost the local economy.



Villagers from Henasku village in Kargil created figures of animals such as the snow leopard and ibex

WORKSHOP AT YANGTHANG

A wood carving and handicraft training workshop was conducted at Yangthang village from November 30 to December 4 by SLC-IT, in collaboration with Panthera.

A total of 31 participants from Yangthang and Hemis-Shukpachan, Ulley, Yangthang Tokpo, Saspotsey and Tai participated in the five-day workshop, which was held to help local farmers generate an income through tourism and to raise awareness on wildlife conservation.

SLC-IT's resource person Mr. Jolden explained how the materials were to be handled, and after sharpening the tools, the participants got ready to start the process.

By the end of the workshop, the participants had created beautiful carvings of yak, ibex and horse, and were eager to continue the art in the future.



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) A villager from Yangthang displays a finished handicraft of the snow leopard; a horse carved out of wood; the wood carving process

STORY FROM THE FIELD

An ibex, at last!

Since the ibex is a part of the snow leopard's prey base, a survey on its numbers in the Spango Valley, a livestock grazing free reserve for ibex, was carried out on November 15 by a six-member team led by Rigzin Chorol and KC Namgail.

The team left Leh at 7.30am and en route, picked up spotting scopes, binoculars and wildlife survey forms, which were given to the villages of Tarutse, Yangthang, Sasputse and Ulley for an earlier survey. The team reached the valley at 10.10am, and got down to business with a long trek. However, despite best efforts, they were unable to spot any ibex. This was their third survey in the valley, and on both occasions before this one, the team had managed to spot ibex.

But their efforts bore fruit that afternoon as they spotted one herd that comprised 12 males, eight females, two yearlings, and three kids. They were observed feeding on a south-facing slope at an elevation of 4400 metres.



The six-member team had a long wait until they finally spotted a herd of ibex in the Spango Valley

TIME TO CELEBRATE

SLC-IT gets an award!

The Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-IT) was conferred with the prestigious Earth Guardian Award by the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS). Nominations for the award were received from across the country and the jury selected seven individuals and organisations including SLC-IT.

The Earth Guardian Award has been institutionalised by RBS to bring recognition and honour to individuals and institutions who work exceptionally hard to preserve and protect India's natural ecosystems.

SLC-IT was recognised for its work on environmental conservation and community development work in Ladakh.

The award ceremony was held in New Delhi on the October 13, and was



Dr. Tsewang Namgail of SLC-IT receives the Earth Guardian Award at the award ceremony in New Delhi

attended by various dignitaries including Jairam Ramesh, Member of Parliament and former minister for Environment and Forest, Govt. of India.

Director's Message

Ladakh, the name conjures up snow-clad peaks, blue sky, brown hills, howling winds and fluttering prayer flags on high passes. Three mountain ranges: Karakoram, Ladakh and Zaskar dominate the moonscape of Ladakh. It is also geographically unique with rugged mountains in the west and vast open plains in the east. Despite the low primary productivity, the region harbours a diverse assemblage of flora and fauna that have adapted to this high altitude.

The diversity of wildlife in this remote area marvelled travellers for centuries. At first glance, nobody can imagine that there would be life in the harsh and inhospitable mountains, but if one examines closely, there are thousands of shining eyes and flickering tails of animals bestowed with special ability to optimise the meagre resources of this wonderland. The high floral and faunal diversity of Ladakh could also be attributed to its location at the junction of two of the six biogeographical zones of the world. Furthermore, it forms a transition between the vast plateau of Tibet in the east and the rugged mountains of the Himalaya-Hindu Kush in the west.

Tens of thousands of years ago, Ladakh was lush but the slow rise of the Himalayas intercepted the rain-bearing winds and clouds from the Indian ocean, which made it progressively drier. Himalayas came into existence as a result of the Indian plate drifting northwards, ultimately buckling under the Eurasian plate some 50 million years ago. This created a massive mountain system on earth, and opened up new dispersal routes and habitats for animals. Several species moved up north of the Himalayas to explore the drier areas, forming an assemblage of tough and hardy animals. Currently, we have 34 species of mammals, over 310 species of birds, 11 reptiles and four amphibians in Ladakh.

The population of many species declined in the last century. Some like the Tibetan gazelle, wild yak, Tibetan argali and Ladakh urial suffered at the hands of hunters. A network of protected areas has been established in Ladakh to save these animals. Unfortunately most of these protected areas do not harbour viable populations of these animals. Most of the protected areas have huge expanses of permanent snow fields, which are not usable by the wild animals. Thus, we need to incorporate more suitable habitats in the current network of protected areas to conserve the species in the face of increasing habitat encroachment by human endeavours.

The Team at SLC-IT

Tsewang Namgail, *Director*

Jigmet Dadul, *Program Manager*

Tsering Angmo, *Program Manager*

Rigzen Chorol, *General Manager*

K.C. Namgyal, *Field Coordinator*

Kalzan Chospel, *Field Manager*

Tsering Lazes, *Office Assistant*

Nawang Gyalton, *Field Assistant*

Tsewang Dolma, *Program Manager*

SLC-IT Upcoming Events for January-March 2016

- Two-day workshop on biodiversity of Ladakh for teacher Masters at DIET
- Camera trapping at Takmachuk
- EE workshop with Rangdum hostel students
- Myanmar visit
- Snow leopard trek

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To contribute to SLC-IT's efforts, please contact:

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