

Snow Leopard Conservation Grants, Snow Leopard Network

FINAL REPORTS FOR 2014 PROJECTS

DUE: 15 FEBRUARY 2015

Please submit your final report by the due date above. We would appreciate it if you could follow the suggested format below. Additionally, please send us copies of any detailed technical report(s), papers, and other output arising from this work. Please refer to your original proposal for items such as objectives, methods, etc. unless those were substantially altered during the course of the work. If so, please explain why.

1. Executive Summary: No more than 750 words. Please describe the original goals and the final results of your project. This may be used in press releases and other publicity material about the Grants Program, so please write it for the general public who may not have scientific background.

The local communities in Ladakh know little about the region's wildlife, their population densities, distributions and conservation status. When visited to schools, one witness students referring to wild ungulates in Ladakh as deer, which shows the level of their ignorance, as we do not have any deer in Ladakh. Therefore, an urgent need was felt by the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-IT) for a comprehensive conservation awareness campaign. Thus, started the Snow Leopard Conservation Education Program (SLCEP), promoted by the SLC-IT in collaboration with the Kalpavriskh. Under this program, we developed the Ri Gyancha, a biodiversity resource kit for Ladakh. The resource kit was so popular that we ran out of copies in 2013, and given the demand from teachers and students alike, we decided to reprint it with revision suggested by various stakeholders. Thus, we reprinted 500 copies of the Ri Gyancha with appropriate revision by including additional birds, mammals and conservation issues. We also printed 1000 copies of information pamphlets on the birds and mammals of Ladakh. Once the Ri Gyancha was reprinted, we disseminated the information in it widely. Initially, we selected monastic communities, travel agents/tourists and military personnel as target audience. We conducted workshops in a nunnery in Karsha nunnery and Phugtal monastery in Zaskar. We apprised the monks and nuns of the status and distribution of various wild animals in Zaskar. We urged the monks and nuns to preach villagers against harming wild animals. Since Zaskar is cut off from the rest of India for almost 7 months in a year, and hence very little influence of modernization, we saw a great role that the monks and nuns could play in spreading conservation awareness among the local populace. The monks and nuns were very receptive to the ideas propounded, and they readily agreed to issue directives to villagers against harming wild animals. We also conducted a workshop for the travel agents in Leh to sensitize them about the precarious state of wild animals in Ladakh. They were especially made realize the impact of mass tourism on the unique biodiversity of Ladakh; how tourists feeding wild animals like the marmot harming their populations. For instance, after shooting the Bollywood movie 3 idiots at the Pangong lake, more and more domestic tourists are visiting the lake and feeding marmots. The tourists probably mean well, but their food can make the marmots fat and slow, and thus more vulnerable to predators. It can also adversely affect the natural skills of marmots in finding food in the wild. The travel agents were also sensitized about various other issues like off-road driving, which spoils the top-soil of rangelands and disturbs wild animals. Unregulated tourism also pollutes important wetlands that are important breeding grounds for migratory birds. They were requested to take the non-degradable garbage back and dispose the degradable garbage carefully at the camping sites. However, we could not carry out the workshops for the military as there were time clashes. We approached the military headquarters in Leh for conducting these remaining workshops in April. We will update SLN on the progress of these workshops.

2. Objectives: What was the purpose of the project? How was it expected to contribute to the knowledge or conservation of snow leopards, their prey, or habitat?

The purpose of the project was to create conservation awareness through content creation and workshops among various stakeholders, largely the monastic communities, travel agents/tourists and military personnel. The Ri Gyancha is a popular source of information on the snow leopard and other wild animals of Ladakh. The information pamphlets on birds and mammals of Ladakh that we printed are also useful for creating awareness among people. The workshops with the monks and nuns enhanced their knowledge on snow leopards of Ladakh, their status, distribution, and the various threats to them. The monks and nuns will educate the villagers about the importance of the snow leopard as an apex predator. The primary objective of the workshop with the travel agents was to sensitize them about the conservation issues besetting the snow leopard and the impact of mass tourism on the mountain ecosystem.

3. Methods: Describe the methods you used in detail, so that someone else could repeat the work, or, avoid the problems that you encountered.

For the Ri Gyancha revision, we gathered information on mammals and birds that were not included in the original biodiversity resource kit. We relied on authentic sources like the birds and mammals of Ladakh by Otto Pfister. We involved various volunteers in gleaning information on the additional birds and mammals that were included in the revised version. We also updated the information on conservation issues and protection interventions by various organisations. For this Sujatha Padmanabhan from Kalpavriksh was invited to Leh to interview various stakeholders. For publishing the info pamphlets, we gathered information on the species of birds and mammals from the literature as mentioned earlier. The Ladakhi names of the mammals were confirmed from various linguists in Ladakh. The birds and mammals were illustrated by Sushama Durve in Pune.

For the workshops with monks and nuns in Zanskar, we hired a couple of resource persons, and drove to Zanskar in August 2014. First we conducted the workshop at Karsha, and then at Phugtal monastery. For Phugtal monastery, first we drove till Cha, then trekked for three hours to get to the monastery. During the workshops we had a series of lectures by the resource persons; we also allowed the monks to play nature-based games like the 'web of life' in Ri Gyancha. The workshops for the travel agents was conducted at the conference hall of the Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG). We apprised the attendees of the wild wealth of Ladakh, and the various threats faced by them. We sensitized the travel agents about various biodiversity issues emanating from mass tourism. We then encouraged some of the travel agents to speak about their experiences and what they think about the increasing number of tourists to the natural areas, and how that is affecting the flora and the fauna of the region.

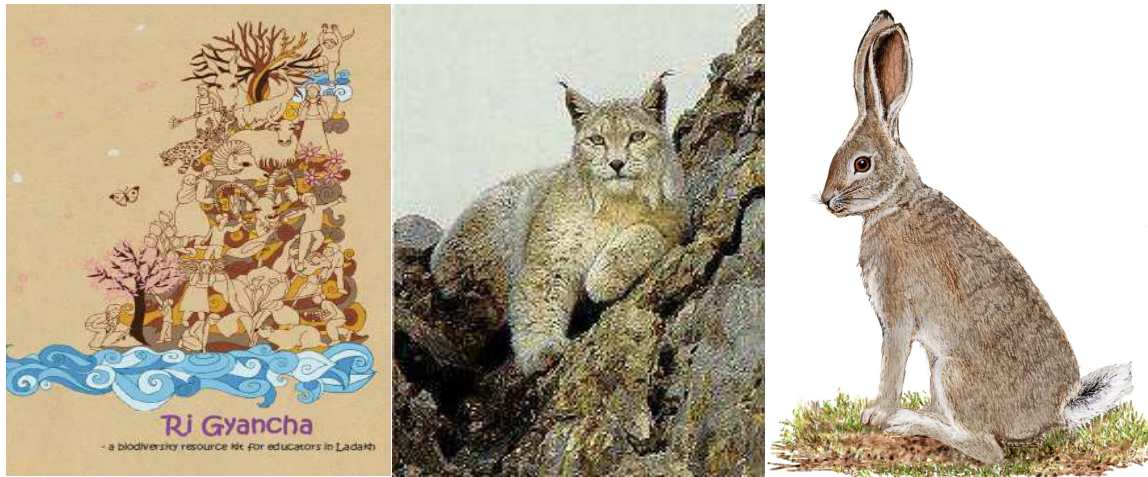
4. Results: Please describe in detail the results of your project. Please illustrate clearly how your stated goals and objectives could be met. You may wish to include tables or graphs in this section if appropriate. This section will be very important to explain the value of these grants to funders of the Snow Leopard Conservation Grant Program. Please be clear, concise, and thorough.

1. Ri-gyancha Revising and Reprinting

Ri-Gyancha, a biodiversity resource kit for educators in Ladakh, was first published in 2010 by the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-IT) and Kalpavriksh. It provides useful localized information on Ladakh's wild flora and fauna, and resource materials including posters, nature cards, games and worksheets on local wildlife and environmental issues. The resource kit was released in July 2010 by Shri Jairam Ramesh (the then Minister for Environment and Forests) in Leh, and by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Nubra.

By 2013, SLC-IT had no more copies of Ri-Gyancha as all of them had been sold. Since there continued to be a demand for copies, we decided to re-publish it but after appropriate revisions. During the workshops that we conducted, many teachers suggested that we add more information on wild flora and fauna of Ladakh in the book. The information was collated in September-October of 2013, and subsequently the newer portions were written out. The revised edition of Ri Gyancha was published in March 2014. In the revised version, we included seven more species of mammals, nine more species of

birds, and a small section on fish. Volunteers were also involved in browsing the literature on these birds and mammals.



We also updated information on various conservation programs. For this, Sujatha Padmanabhan from Kalpavriksh came to Leh, and interviewed several people to revise the conservation issues included in the resource kit. The illustrations of animals, added to the revised version, were done by Sushama Durve, a Pune-based illustrator. Because three years had passed since the first print, we also updated the chapters with newer information or fresh statistics on animal populations and villages covered by SLC-IT's conservation programs.

2. Workshop for travel agents/tourists

Ladakh is a major destination for nature and adventure tourists. Visitors wanting to see snow leopard is increasing steadily. However, not all tourists are well-informed about the conservation issues besetting wildlife of Ladakh, and there is an urgent need to educate them about the precarious status of many of the wildlife, so that they become less inimical to wildlife and nature.



A one-day workshop on biodiversity and conservation issues of Ladakh was organized on the 22nd June 2014 for travel agents. Over 20 travel agents attended this workshop. In the first session, we talked about biodiversity of Ladakh. The agents were conveyed the message that despite the low plant productivity, Ladakh has a diverse group of animals (34 wild mammals, about 318 wild birds, 11 reptiles and 4 amphibians). This relatively high diversity for an arid region like Ladakh is because of its location at the boundary between Pala arctic biogeographically region (Europe, Middle East, Central Asia and Russia) and the Oriental biogeographical region (South and Southeast Asia).

Furthermore, Ladakh is a transition zone between the vast plains of the Tibetan plateau and the rugged mountains of western Himalaya and Hindukush mountains. And animals like the Asiatic ibex (Skin in Ladakhi) that are adapted to rugged mountains and animals like the Tibetan argali (Nyan in Ladakhi) that are adapted to open plains occur together in Ladakh, thereby enhancing the biodiversity of the region. But populations of several species are declining due to illegal hunting, grazing competition with domestic stocks and habitat destruction. Mass tourism is a more recent threat. Animals like the Himalayan marmot are suffering at the hands of irresponsible tourists. Pangong Lake's popularity, because of 3-idiots, is proving to be a big loss to the marmots. People visiting the lake are feeding these animals as if they were their own pets. Tourists probably mean well, but human food can make the marmots fat and slow, thereby making them vulnerable to predators. In the long-run, these animals will also lose their skills of searching food in the wild. But more importantly, they will get exposed to new diseases.

3. Engaging Buddhist monks and nuns in wildlife conservation in Zangskar

Zangskar harbors a diverse assemblage of flora and fauna. Very little is known about the species in the region. The limited number of studies indicate that the plants and animals in this region are highly threatened. For instance, the snow leopard, which is the apex predator in the region, is persecuted by farmers, as the animal kills domestic livestock. There have been several incidences of snow leopard jumping into livestock corrals at night, often killing multiple livestock, and the farmers beating them to death. This is largely due to the environmental ignorance among the farmers. They do not realize that killing snow leopard upsets the ecological balance of the region, which ultimately harm the farmers in various ways. Therefore, we made an attempt to educate the villagers through the region's monks, who are held in high esteem by the villagers.



On 12 August 2014, SLC-IT conducted a workshop at Chushikjal Nunnery at Karsha, Zangskar. A total of 23 nuns and novices attended the workshop. The main objective of the workshop was to familiarize the nuns with the flora and fauna of Zangskar as well as of Ladakh. The other major objective of the workshop was to sensitize the nuns about importance of predators like snow leopard and wolf, which are the prime retaliatory target of the villagers, because these predators prey on domestic livestock, as mentioned earlier. Other reason for holding the workshop in the nunnery was to request the nuns to preach the villagers not to harm wild animals such as the snow leopard and wolf. Most of the people in the villages of Zangskar are Buddhist, and being preacher of Buddhism, the words/orders of the nuns and monks are mostly obeyed by all the villagers.

Mr. Jigmet Dadul, Program Manager at SLC-IT, started the workshop by giving a brief introduction about SLC-IT. After that K.C. Namgyal told them about biodiversity of Zangskar, and how it is unique in terms of its flora and fauna. He apprised the nuns of the precarious status of several birds and mammals in Zangskar. He also told the nuns about the predator-prey dynamics. For instance, what happens if an apex predator like the snow leopard goes extinct? Subsequently, Ms. Thupstan Dolker gave a brief account of plants in Zangskar. The nuns also played some nature-based games. They liked the 'web-of-life' game the most. This game demonstrates the inter-dependency of all species in an ecosystem.



After the successful workshop at the nunnery, the team proceeded to Phuktal Monastery to conduct a workshop with the monks there. Against all odds, the team arrived at Phuktal on the 14th Aug 2014 to create conservation awareness among the monks, and to urge them to preach the people so that the latter do not harm wildlife. Lungnak valley is one of the hotspots of livestock depredation by wild predators such as the snow leopard and wolf. Through the workshop at Phuktal monastery, we spread conservation message among the monks about the importance of wild predators and their conservation. We also requested these monks to spread this message among people in all the villages that they visit, because all the villagers hold the monks in high esteem.

4. Info-pamphlets on birds and mammals

The printing and designing of information pamphlets on the birds and mammals of Ladakh was completed in the month on November 2014, but it took a while to reach Ladakh. Finally on 02/03/2015, we received the pamphlets. These pamphlets provide information on scientific name, common name and vernacular names of the birds and mammals, of Ladakh. SLC-IT for a long time, has been trying to bring forward accessible information on the birds and mammals of Ladakh, which people carry in the field.



There are illustrations of seventy birds and thirty four mammals of Ladakh with local name and scientific name totaling thousand copies each of mammals and birds pamphlets. Compilation for these pamphlets has been going on for a long time, and after months of continuous hard work, the pamphlets finally took the present shape. All illustrated were done by Sushma Durve, a well-known illustrator. The pamphlets were also designed by her.

5. Workshop with army personal

Ladakh is a place with heavy military presence; there are lots of army camps, because it's situated on the border of Pakistan and China. In many areas the wildlife gets disturbed because of military activities. They throw their wastes outside the camp and dogs get plenty of stuff to eat. Because of that dogs are thriving around Leh and their numbers are increasing day by day and many times these dogs are chasing the wildlife like blue sheep, Ladakh urial, woolly hare, red fox, etc. They also kill domestic livestock. Military personnel do not know much about the flora and fauna of Ladakh and their importance. When we discussed this entire situation with army officers, they were very happy to organize such workshops. But finally they could not organize due to visits of several dignitaries. They will let us know dates.

5. Discussion: Please evaluate your own work. What did you learn that could help others wishing to do similar projects? How do you see the results being applied to conservation? What additional work is now needed based on your findings?

The revision of Ri Gyancha involved many volunteers. The volunteers quite like it, because they like to know about the local flora and fauna. The volunteers also enjoyed working on the info pamphlets. They were interested in knowing the local names of all mammals. The conservation implications of these publications are immense. The number of students/people using these publications to enhance their knowledge about the wild animals of Ladakh will reflect the success of the project. We already sold more than 50 copies of the revised Ri Gyancha. We will monitor children in schools to ascertain the level of knowledge among school children and people in remote areas of Ladakh. We are visiting these schools on regular basis to find out the interest among school kids about the wild animals that are listed in these publications. These are not only used by school children, but also adults, and especially by the rising number of tourists in Ladakh. In the info pamphlets, we have provided the Ladakhi names of birds and mammals especially for the local populace, so that they can tell the tourists about the wild animals in their surroundings. The results of this project will directly affect the conservation of wildlife. It will help school children and local communities in understanding the snow leopard and other wild animals better, which will help them in having a positive attitude towards snow leopards and other wild animals.

During the workshop for monks and nuns in Zaskar, several monks and nuns pledged to preach villagers not to harm wild animals. These workshops were very enriching for us, as we did not only told the monks and nuns about the wildlife of Zaskar and the threats faced by them, but we also learned a lot from them regarding the relationship between Buddhism and Ecology. The monks and nuns requested us to continue the program, which in a way reflects the importance of the program. Since the monks promised us that they will spread conservation messages among the villagers and will preach them against harming snow leopard and other wildlife, we can rest assured that the villagers will become more conversant with the conservation issues besetting the snow leopard and other wild animals and take measures that will improve the habitat conditions of the wild animals. These will also help in reviving the socio-religious protection of the snow leopard and their prey species. These kind of awareness campaign is crucial for people in areas like Zaskar where people still uphold their religious principles.

The workshops with the travel agents was quite fruitful for educating and sensitizing them about the environmental issues in Ladakh. We learned a lesson about the timing of the workshop, i.e., workshop for the travel agents should be organized in seasons other than summer, during which they are quite busy with their clients. Fliers with dos and don'ts for the tourists to follow will indicate the success of the project. All the travel agents promised that they will instruct their guests manually. Such efforts will definitely help the wild conservation awareness drive to move forward.

6. Photographs: If you have good photographic (preferably digital) images of your project that we could use to advertise the Grants Program, please submit them at this time. Please be sure to include a brief description of the photo and provide the credits for the photographer.

If you have any questions on the format or other aspects of your final report, please contact us at grants@snowleopardnetwork.org.

Final reports and digital images should be emailed to grants@snowleopardnetwork.org.