

Living with Snow Leopards

**Wildlife conservation through education and
capacity building amongst indigenous communities of the
Spiti trans-Himalaya, India.**



Final Report

by

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1. Level of achievement of the project's original objectives

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Himalayan Nature Clubs (HNCs)			√	All 20 HNCs formed, with registration forms duly filled and signed by school authorities, activities started with teacher workshops and nature education camps in most
Youth Awareness Clubs (YACs)			√	All 10 YACs formed and registered with NCF/SLT
Training workshops			√	All three workshops (two for teachers and one for youth) completed successfully
Nature education camps			√	Ten camps conducted instead of five as we did not raise adequate funds for conducting the proposed nature trail activity, this needed more time allocation partly influencing the other activities planned
Nature trails	√			This activity was first seen as an entry point activity for HNCs, but we could not procure funds for this, so we had to cancel it and included more schools in Nature Education Camps. Despite limited resources, we could do it for 11 out of 20 schools during 2007-08.
Children's workbook			√	About 1,200 school children in classes VI to IX from the schools of Spiti Valley and Ladakh are currently using these workbooks to record their learning and feedback emanating from the HNC activities conducted in-and-

				around their school campuses by our field staff and teachers.
Teacher's guide			√	Over 50 teachers and teacher coordinators from schools with HNCs are actively using this resource to conduct conservation education activities in/around their schools and assisting our field staff in doing the same. This product has been found to be very useful by them and we've received requests fro Hindi translation of the same. We intend to do this by raising additional resources.
Slide show		√		Due to unforeseen circumstances, we were unable to produce this as per the timeline. It is in pre-production stage and stalled for a while. The text and photographs are ready. We need to develop the animation for storyline and record the voice-over.
Posters based on paintings			√	A series of four posters made from paintings made by Spiti's school children have been distributed to schools in Spiti and Ladakh as well as in government offices, to NGOs and at places of interest and importance for tourists.
Posters on high altitude food chains			√	Two posters (The Living Himalaya) depicting natural food chain and human-modified food chains of the high altitude regions have been made and distributed to schools for use in conducting specific activities. A variant of the same poster titled The

				Living Mountains has been made for SLT and used in the conservation work in central Asian countries where SLT works.
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2. Unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled

There were many such instances which arose that were unforeseen, but I list three major ones here since it was relatively difficult to tackle these.

1. The high altitude region, where my project was implemented (mostly above 3,600 m) is climatically harsh, challenging and unpredictable in terms of weather. We essentially have six to seven months (April to October) when any work of this nature and mobility is possible in this region. This means that a one-year plan anywhere else becomes a two-year plan here by default. This was something that we did not comprehend well before starting the project. Unexpected snowfall during early October 2007 and a heavier fall during September-October 2008, so we had to cancel/postpone some of our planned activities. The transport failed us often and since private vehicle was not always possible due to constraints on funding, we had to comply to the dictates of the situation. We countered this difficulty largely by alternative arrangements including postponement and reorganising of the outdoor modules as well as roughing it out on a couple of occasions, thanks to the brave and capable field team that we have in Spiti. But, this put pressure on our already delicate timelines. However, since this was our pilot programme, we took this as a very important learning.
2. One of the key members of our team Ms. Pavithra Sankaran got selected for a Master's Degree course on Science Communication and had to go to UK for almost a year. Product development was thus held up from planning to design and production stage. We explored for alternatives, but found it difficult to get someone appropriate within the given time. Despite this setback, we could produce food chain posters in time. Children's workbooks, Teachers' guide and CD preparation were delayed. The products have been developed and completed now.
3. Organising outdoor activities in the region is challenging due to frequent inclement weather and difficulties of transport, communication and logistics. Almost 10 people (including our field staff) are required on the camp site to run our outdoor activities smoothly. Our field staff and other youth are farmers and herders by occupation. Their Buddhist communities have collective decision-making processes for farming related matters (sowing/harvest/winnowing) to which all have to comply. Further, any urgent meetings called for religious/cultural purposes (with heavy penalties for not attending meetings) have to be attended by them. Without their co-operation and involvement it is not possible to organise these activities. This coupled with inclement weather even forced us to cancel the outdoor camps on one occasion. We countered this issue by rotating the staff which attended to these events/meetings and even paid fines on some occasions.

3. Most important outcomes of the project

- **Establishment and functioning of local level institutions to spread awareness:** Through this pilot project, we have created local institutions for sustained environmental awareness generation in the form of 20 Himalayan Nature Clubs (HNCs) in rural schools and 10 Youth Awareness Clubs (YACs) in villages/clusters in the Spiti Valley. This is the first time that such a mechanism has been established in this region. About 500 children, 50 teachers and 150 youth from roughly 30 villages have become direct beneficiaries of this intervention. This has enabled us to reach more than half the villages of Spiti Valley. We have initiated the HNC activities in almost all schools through Nature Education Camps and/or Teacher orientation/training Workshops as well as regular in-and-around the campus activities twice a year.
- **On ground conservation action/motivation:** Ten nature education camps saw participation of close to 300 children (age 10 to 14) and almost 30 teachers. The written feedback shows a high degree of assimilation of positive values, emotions and knowledge indicating a change in their overall awareness levels about local wildlife, landscape and their conservation. In one instance, a group of students in our field base – Kibber village (where we also conducted the camps) were so motivated and proud of their village pasture that they spent almost the entire winter there exploring, recording wildlife and improving their knowledge. This association was observed by villagers as well as some of our staff and a research student who interacted with them. They actively sought our storybook “Nono, the Snow Leopard”, read it in turns and returned the copies. This group has provided us very valuable written feedback on how Nature Camps turned them on. We received casual, informal feedback from a number of parents (mostly village youth and elders) about the camps and how excited and interested children have been for this activity. Members of the Youth Council, Kibber (and YAC, Kibber) actively volunteered for the camps and in one instance, we had the chief (*Pradhan*) of the village council visit us for a day at the camp-site. Three school principals also stayed at the camp-site watching the proceedings with interest and even participating. The state Forest Department has already extended its support for this activity and we may be able to hold more programmes in the coming years with their support. The greatest milestone for this activity was when **Dr. George Schaller** stayed for a full camp’s duration at the camp-site with children sharing his rich knowledge and experience and motivating them all along.
- **Creation of resources for teachers and students for conservation education:** All the resources created through this project viz. posters, workbook, teachers’ guide etc. have been distributed and widely used by the schools (teachers and children) in Spiti as well as Ladakh through our conservation education programme and reach over 1,500 children and 50 teachers in over 30 schools. These are also shared with several other educators and NGOs who have made use of the same. Hence, a critical gap in raising awareness about the snow leopard, other high altitude wildlife and their habitat in the Indian trans-Himalaya has been partially filled by these resources. We intend to build on this and create more such resources to equip ourselves and others to carry out effective conservation education programmes.

- **Capacity enhancement of local field staff:** Through various education and awareness activities, the capacities of our field staff and other youth in Kibber village have been enhanced in conducting environmental education activities. Such activities, especially camps and workshops also helped us in identification of motivated teachers from local schools. Our field co ordinator from Ladakh visited the camp-site at Spiti, interacted with our local field staff and is now in the process of implementing a similar programme in Ladakh. He has formed HNCs in more than 10 schools and three YACs. This pilot project thus helped us expand our reach and strenghten our interventions in two regions – Spiti Valley and parts of Ladakh.

4. Involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project

- **Direct beneficiaries:** Two generations of local community viz. youth and children have already been targeted directly by our interventions. A third group i.e. parents are also partly involved as children share their experiences home and many parents know about our interventions now. So, in essence we have been able to reach nearly 500 families – a sizable part of the local community. These learners and indirect beneficiaries are already involved or going to be involved in our community-based cosnervation programmes such as livestock insurance schemes and better herding practices. Several of the youth are going to be involved in documentation and monitoring of wildlife populations.
- **Livelihood and voluntary involvement of local community:** As shown earlier, all our outdoor activities required involvement of at least 10 people on site. Apart from our field staff, few youngsters who worked during these activities were paid honoraria for this work, while some just gave their time (one or two days) voluntarily. In general, most of our education activities received a lot of help (voluntary and otherwise) from local people everywhere and we felt that they were partly able to perceive the importance of such activities. Our local field staff has earned a new identity within their community that is linked with their wildlife-related knowledge and skills.
- **Capacity enhancement:** The capacity of our field staff, other rural youth and school teachers in planning and implementing environmental education and awareness activities was enhanced through this project. Their knowledge, skills and confidence all have increased in this area as borne by their oral and written feedback. This would be very helpful in sustaining these initiatives in the region and also empower the local communities with appropriate human resource.

5. Continuation of this work

This pilot project was conceived with a view to strengthen and facilitate our decade old ongoing work in research and community-based conservation in the Indian high altitudes. We are now in the process of consolidtaing this work in Spiti this year and hope to establish and implement HNC and YAC calendars in schools and villages respectively. The YACs will get more active with assignments of

wildlife documentation and monitoring exercises. These local institutions are also likely to play a key role in the preparation and implementation of management plans under the recently commissioned Project Snow Leopard. With at least one Annual Event for Environmental conservation for all schools having HNCs and all YACs, we will facilitate better sharing and networking in our efforts. Nature education camps, nature trails and teacher/youth workshops are now part of our annual activity calendars. Ultimately, we are also looking forward to train at least four good conservation educators (two each in Spiti & Ladakh), who will take this programme forward in these areas. We have learnt a lot on both success and failure fronts from this pilot project that we have used to expand to Ladakh during 2008. We have already established more than 10 HNCs and 3 YACs, including one YAC consisting of Post-Graduate students of Botany and Zoology of the University in Leh in Ladakh, the state of Jammu and Kashmir. As we move along, we will document the success through relevant assessment techniques and share it with the larger conservation community.

6. Sharing the results of this work with others

We have shared the results in two major ways: through direct sharing by presentation of papers in conferences/workshops and through articles in print media and peer-reviewed journals. Some of the initiatives already taken/underway in this regards are given below:

- Paper titled “Living with snow leopards: using conservation education to strengthen community-based conservation in Spiti Valley, Indian Trans-Himalaya” presented at the International Conference on Range-Wide Conservation Planning for Snow Leopards at Beijing, China during 9-11 March 2008.
- A presentation titled “Role of education in snow leopard conservation” was made at a meeting of the representatives of country organisations and partner organisations of Snow Leopard Trust (SLT) (China, Mongolia, Pakistan, Kyrgystan and USA) in Beijing, China during 1-6 March, 2008.
- A paper titled “Rekindling child-nature links in the Himalayan high altitudes” was presented at a workshop on “Learning for life – Conservation education in our work and world” - a skill share workshop for practicing environmental educators, programme coordinators and applied researchers held at Bangalore during 18-19 December, 2008.
- Contributed an article titled “Rekindling the children-nature link: Nature education camps in the Himalayan high altitudes” in a special magazine brought out on the occasion of Wildlife Week with the theme “Wildlife: Melting like ice?” brought out by the Himachal Pradesh State Forest Department.
- Have shared the learning and experiences in the Annual meetings of Nature Conservation Foundation, inspiring young researchers to include and implement conservation education components in their respective studies. Informal sharing and presentation of the outcomes and interventions was done during meetings/discussions with NGOs and individuals.
- A paper is under preparation for publishing in a peer-reviewed journal based on the project’s learning and impact from 2007-10.