

2024 Snow Leopard Training Grant program

Final Report Outline

4. Title

Guardians of the Ghost: Training and Capacity Building of Frontline Staff and Stakeholders in Snow Leopard Landscapes of Jammu and Kashmir, India

5. Results (What was achieved? What were the challenges and opportunities encountered in the implementation of the project?)

The project successfully achieved its enlisted objectives of skill enhancement, building capacity and raising awareness about snow leopard conservation among key stakeholders including frontline staff of the forest and wildlife departments and students especially female. The major achievements of the project are listed below:

- A. Capacity Building Training and Capacity Building for Frontline Staff:
 - i. Inauguration of Training Program on July 8, 2024 which was attended by more than 100 participants.
 - ii. Field-Based Training Sessions for Guraiz landscape at Bandipora in which 20 frontline staffers of Bandipora Forest Division and North Wildlife Division underwent one week's training on capacity building and skill enhancement.
 - iii. One week Field-Based Training Sessions for at Dachigam National Park. 30 staffers from Ganderbal Forest Division and Wildlife Division Central Division, posted in Snowleopard landscape were trained.
- B. Empowering Stakeholders through Education and Capacity Building:
 - i. Nature Camps
 - Two-day Nature Camp for Female College Students of Bandipora District.
 - Two-day Nature Camp for Female High-School Students at Chitternaar Bandipora.
 - ii. Photo exhibition of Wildlife and Landscape of Snowleopard Areas.
 - Event at Dachigam National Park for school kids..
 - School Event at Hill Top Educational Institute Ganderbal.
 - College event at Degree College Ganderbal.

S.NO	OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITY	DATE	VENUE	PARTICIPANTS	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
1	Empowering Stakeholders (Students) through capacity building initiatives	2- DAYS NATURE CAMP FOR FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS.	2 ND -3 RD June 2024	Chitternar Forest Division, Bandipora	Female College students from Bandipora District	30 (25+5)
2		2- DAYS NATURE CAMP FOR HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS.	4 TH -5 TH June 2024	Chitternar Forest Division, Bandipora	Female School students from Bandipora District	30 (25+5)
3		PHOTO EXHIBITION OF IMAGES FROM SNOWLEOPARD LANDSCAPE	21 st Oct 2024	Dachigam National Park	School Students of age group 10-16	80
4			4 th Nov 2024	Hill Top Educational Institute Ganderbal	School Students of age group 12-16	200
5			6 th Nov 2024	Govt Degree College, Ganderbal	College Students of age group 18-22	120
6	Training and Capacity Building of Frontline Staff (Forest and Wildlife Department)	Inauguration of Snow leopard Training for Frontline staff of Wildlife and Forest Department	8 th July 2024	Dachigam National Park	Forest and Wildlife Staff of Ganderbal, Bandipora , Central and North Division along with PG Students	130
7		1 st Training session for Bandipora Forest Division and Wildlife Division North.	9 th - 15 th July 2024	Bandipora District	Frontline staff Bandipora Forest Division and Wildlife Division North Kashmir.	15
8		2 nd Training session for Ganderbal Forest Division	(Oct 18–22, 2024)	Dachigam National Park	Frontline staff Ganderbal Forest Division and Wildlife Division	30

		and Wildlife Division Central.			Central Kashmir.	
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Challenges Encountered:

1. The biggest challenge faced during the project was related to security. This challenge became particularly unmanageable during the second batch of training. A day before the scheduled training at Gagangeer Sonmarg, a deadly terrorist attack occurred just 200 meters away from the venue, resulting in the tragic loss of seven civilian lives and injuries to several others.

<https://www.greaterkashmir.com/front-page-2/7-killed-5-injured-in-gagangeer-terror-attack/>

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/militants-shooting-in-kashmirs-ganderbal-district/article68776745.ece>

In light of the incident, we had no choice but to prioritize the safety of all participants and reschedule the training to a safer location at Dachigam National Park, approximately 100 kilometres away. This unexpected shift posed logistical challenges but was necessary to ensure the continuation of the project under secure conditions.

2. Student Participation: Convincing parents and school authorities to allow female students to participate in overnight camps posed a significant challenge because such type of camps had never been organised in far areas of Kashmir especially Bandipora.
3. Security Permissions: Organizing activities in sensitive areas like Thajiwas-Baltal was delayed due to restrictions from local authorities and the Amarnath Pilgrimage. Hence no activity could be organised in Thajiwas -Baltal Landscape during summer.
4. Logistical and funding Constraints: The large-scale inaugural event and the activities around the project required extensive coordination and logistics, but support from the Wildlife Department, Forest Department and Nature Conservation Foundation ensured its success.

Opportunities Identified:

1. Regular Training Needs: The workshops revealed a strong need for consistent training programs for frontline staff to improve conservation skills.
2. Youth Engagement: Female student camps demonstrated the potential to cultivate a conservation mindset among the younger generation, highlighting the importance of expanding such initiatives in areas where conservation works need greater impetus.
3. Collaborative Efforts: Effective coordination with various stakeholders—Forest Department, Wildlife Department, district administration, and educational institutions—underscored the importance of multi-agency partnerships for successful conservation outcomes in conserving species like snowleopard.

4. Involving Army, security agencies: Both Guraiz and Baltal fall under high security zone, the former because of being close to LoC (Line of Control) and latter because of Amarnath Yatra. Hence involving army and Security agencies posted in these areas in wildlife conservation becomes empirical.

6. 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?)

Evaluation of the work:

This project demonstrated the value of engaging diverse stakeholders, particularly women and frontline staff in snow leopard conservation. The integration of outdoor activities, leadership exercises, and hands-on training created a transformative experience for participants, enhancing their understanding and commitment to biodiversity conservation.

Lessons Learned:

- Customized Training Programs: Tailored workshops for frontline staff proved to be effective in building skills for biodiversity monitoring and data management. Most of the frontline workers lack such kind of knowledge.
- Community Involvement: Building trust and collaboration with local communities and stakeholders is vital for long-term conservation success.
- Empowering Women in Conservation: Female engagement in conservation is crucial but underrepresented. Programs targeting young women can break gender barriers and inspire future conservationists.
- Tremendous hidden potential of Guards (Forest and Wildlife) needs to be honed as they have a great potential and play key roles in conservation in modern times if trained and harness properly.

Application of Results to Conservation:

The enhanced skills and awareness generated through this project have directly contributed to strengthening conservation efforts in the snow leopard landscapes of Jammu and Kashmir. Empowered frontline staff and educated youth can act as advocates for biodiversity conservation, creating a ripple effect in their respective communities. In the feedback phase of our trainings, the trainees themselves admitted of getting benefitted from our tailored workshops and have since then gathering useful data from the field and also contributing towards citizen science initiatives taught during the training.

7. Next steps (What additional work is now needed? What happens next?)

Next Steps

1. Expand Nature Camps: Organize similar programs for which would be more knowledge based with hands on trainings and spread over longer durations, focusing on biodiversity education and gender inclusivity.
2. Additional Training for Frontline Staff: Conduct regular training sessions for the entire staff of Thajiwas-Baltal and Guraiz, with advanced techniques in ecological monitoring.
3. Equipping staff: The staff not only needs training but also equipment in the form of outdoor gears and accessories like trekking shoes, all weather protection gear, head torches, medical kits and other essential field gear along with equipment like Camera, Gps units, Binoculars etc. Equipping staff would also be one key next step we would be targeting in coming years.
4. Stakeholder Engagement: Strengthen partnerships with district authorities, Army and Security Agencies, local communities especially nomads and tribals, and educational institutions to ensure sustained conservation efforts.
5. Develop a Conservation Network: Create a network of trained participants and conservationists for continuous collaboration and knowledge sharing. So that all the snowleopard area could be surveyed and regularly monitored.

8. Expenditure Details (Details on how the funds were utilized)

	Category	Details	Amount in USD
1	Travel	Transportation for participants and Staff	410
2	Food and Refreshments	Meals and refreshments for participants and staff during camps and training sessions	950
3	Others	Printing materials, Stationary etc	90
	TOTAL		1,450

* Forest and Wildlife Departments provided accommodation and space for trainings along with other logistics

**NCF (Nature Conservation Foundation) provided significant support to the project.

9. Photographs:

A. TWO- DAYS NATURE CAMP FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS (2nd TO 3rd JUNE 2024)



Soft outdoor adventure skills /tent pitching demonstration imparted to female students of different Colleges of Bandipora District. Guraiz landscape which falls in Bandipora District has a great tourism and adventure potential, if honed properly can benefit both the communities and the Snowleopard ©WRCF



Students engaged in an interactive game which helps them understand various factors responsible for animal behaviour movement ©WRCF



Guided biodiversity walks for a better understanding of the local flora and fauna ©WRCF



Interactions with experts for livelihood options in ecological sciences and sustainable ecotourism practices. ©WRCF

B. TWO- DAYS NATURE CAMP FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS (4th – 5th JUNE 2024)



Student interaction with experts learning about the roles students and young minds play in wildlife conservation ©WRCF



Tahir demonstrating soft outdoor activity to girls at nature camps, this the first time these young female students were subjected to this kind of learning ©WRCF



Students playing games and solving nature based puzzles , these activity helped the students to dive into understanding the core issues of wildlife and its conservation ©WRCF



Tahir conducting a tree walk with students to understand the phyto-biodiversity, uses and their conservation ©WRCF

Nature jaunts in Bandipora Chitternar Forest (Nature Walk) ©WRCF



Interim Report on *"Status of Snowleopards and other high-altitude mammals in J&K"* released by Regional Wildlife Warden Kashmir at Dachigam National Park ©WRCF



Dr Mehreen and Dr Kasturi Saha interacting with Post graduate students during the Nature Walk at Dachigam National Park ©WRCF

C. TRAINING SESSION FOR BANDIPORA FOREST DIVISION AND WILDLIFE DIVISION NORTH.



Capacity building of Front line staff of forest and wildlife Department at Chitternar Forest Training School, Bandipora ©WRCF



Demonstration and hands-on camera trap surveys and installations ©WRCF



**Trainees conducting a vegetation assessment as part of the assignment during the training
©WRCF**



Capacity building and skill enhancing biodiversity monitoring of frontline staff of Bandipora -Guraiz Landscape ©WRCF



First Batch of Trainees which included Staff from Bandipora Forest Division and North Wildlife Division held at Chitternar Forest College Bandipora ©WRCF



2nd Batch of Trainees from Ganderbal Forest Division and Central Wildlife Division held at Dachigam National Park ©WRCF

D. Photo Exhibitions



Photo Exhibition related to Bio-Diversity of Snowleopard Landscape including images of elusive Snowleopards and other evasive wildlife of Snowleopard Landscape held at Hilltop School Ganderbal @WRCF



Photo Exhibition of Bio-Diversity of Snowleopard Landscape including images of elusive Snowleopards and other evasive wildlife of Snowleopard Landscape held at Hilltop School Ganderbal @WRCF



Glimpse of Photo exhibition held at Degree college Ganderbal @WRCF



Interaction with Faculty and Staff of Degree College Ganderbal During Photo exhibition at GDC Ganderbal @WRCF



Photo Exhibition of Bio-Diversity of Snowleopard Landscape including images of elusive Snowleopards and other evasive wildlife of Snowleopard Landscape held at Dachigam Natinal Park @WRCF



Interaction with Students during Photo Exhibition held at Dachigam National Park @WRCF.

E. TRAINING SESSION FOR GANDERBAL FOREST DIVISION AND WILDLIFE DIVISION DIVISON CENTRAL AT DACHIGAM NATIOANL PARK..



Wildlife official (Range Officer Dachigam National Park) speaking during the capacity development workshop at Dachigam National Park @WRCF



Dr Mehreen imparting skills for indirect observation and recording the data related to snow leopard survey techniques during the training and capacity building of front line staff of forest and wildlife Department at Dachigam National Park @WRCF.



Experts imparting BLS and other life sustain skills to frontline staff of Forest and wildlife Staff to overcome field vulnerabilities in difficult Snowleopard terrains during surveys and other activities @WRCF



Experts imparting BLS and other life sustain skills to frontline staff of Forest and wildlife Staff to overcome field vulnerabilities in difficult Snowleopard terrains during surveys and other activities @WRCF



Expert (Yasir Mursaleen) demonstrating provision of Basic First aid and treating fractures in the field @WRCF



Vegetation sampling using quadrant method being demonstrated to front staff @WRCF



Hands on training on the use of camera traps in field for Snowleopard surveys @WRCF



Knowledge about the equipment used in Wildlife especially the use and working of Camera Traps for Snowleopard surveys being demonstrated to the frontline staff by Dr Mehreen @WRCF.



Frontline Staff being taught about the tenting and adventure activities @WRCF



Vegetation Sampling being conducted by trainees in Dachigam National Park @WRCF



Participant engagement and team building activities being conducted with the trainees to impart leadership and problem solving skills @WRCF



Skills of Pug mark identification and differentiation of various sympatric species of Snowleopard landscape being imparted to the trainees. Here the cast replicas of pug marks of Snowleopard, Common leopard, Brown bear and wolf are imprinted for pug mark identification and measurements @WRCF.

F. INAUGURAL OF SNOWLEOPARD TRAINING FOR FRONTLINE STAFF OF WILDLIFE AND FOREST DEPARTMENT.



Inaguration of Training workshop (Group Photo) at Dachigam National Park, more than 100 people participants. The event was graced by the Regional wildlife warden Kashmir and the Conservator of the Forests along with DFOs. Students from various college also paricipated in the inagural. ©WRCF