2025 Snow Leopard Training Grant program

Final Report Outline

Please submit your final report as a **Word document** by December 15, 2025

1. **Title** Enhancing the conservation potential of a new protected area for snow leopard protection in Kazakhstan

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

In April 2025, QazaqGeography and the Wildlife Without Borders Public Foundation signed a memorandum of cooperation and a service agreement outlining key areas of collaboration in snow leopard conservation. As a first step, a comprehensive training needs assessment was conducted among the staff of the Merke Forestry. A detailed questionnaire was developed and distributed in Russian and Kazakh, and completed by 35 forestry employees. The survey made it possible to determine the initial level of knowledge about snow leopards, identify key gaps in monitoring skills, assess staff familiarity with research technologies, and define training priorities, with the greatest interest expressed in monitoring methods and legal aspects of conservation. This assessment formed the basis for a tailored, practice-oriented training program adapted to the needs of the region and focused on strengthening both technical and field competencies.

Based on the analysis of the questionnaires, a training program was developed that covered modern monitoring methods, the basics of snow leopard biology, law enforcement practices, conflict reduction, and community engagement. One of the key achievements of the project was the delivery - supported by the Pangje Foundation and the Snow Leopard Network - of practical training sessions for employees of Merke, Lugovoye, Akyrtobe, and Karakonyz (May 29-30 and October 23-24, 2025). About 50 participants received instruction through lectures on modern snow leopard research and conservation methods, as well as practical training in identifying tracks and using camera traps, drones, GPS, and the SMART system. The training also included fieldwork and hands-on installation of camera traps under the guidance of leading experts from the Institute of Zoology and the NGO Wildlife Without Borders. This significantly enhanced staff capacity in the use of modern monitoring technologies and contributed to improved data collection practices in snow leopard habitats.

To further reinforce learning outcomes, an online mentoring program on snow leopard monitoring and protection was launched for the period June - November 2025. Online mentoring aimed at consolidating monitoring skills, assessing threats, and gradually building the human resources capacity of the new nature park. It provided continued expert support to the staff, focusing on practical situations related to snow leopard monitoring and protection, camera trap installation and settings, as well as processing monitoring results and preparing reports.

The project also included a community-focused session aimed at mitigating human - wildlife conflict, increasing local awareness of snow leopard conservation, and promoting

cooperation between protected area staff and local residents. A total of 17 residents of border settlements participated in this work. Meetings covered issues related to reducing human - predator conflicts, sustainable grazing practices, and developing ecotourism as an alternative source of income for local families. Special attention was given to demonstrating how sound natural resource management and cooperation with conservation agencies can bring long-term benefits to both ecosystems and local people. Participants actively shared observations and expressed willingness to support environmental protection measures, participate in wildlife monitoring, and engage in joint environmental initiatives - thus forming a strong social foundation for the future functioning of the protected area.

During project implementation, a major contextual development occurred: the establishment of the Merke Regional State Nature Park by Decree No. 168 of the Akimat of the Zhambyl Region on August 18, 2025. The new park, covering more than 86,000 hectares, protects unique mountain and foothill ecosystems of the Western Tien Shan and is home to rare and endemic species, including eight snow leopards, 120 argali, 20 Indian porcupines, and 22 Turkestan lynxes. Following its creation, many employees of Merke Forestry were transferred to the new institution, which required adapting training activities and mentoring support to evolving staff structures and responsibilities. To strengthen coordination, official notification letters were sent to the Merke Forestry Administration, the Department of Ecology of the Zhambyl Region, and the Territorial Inspectorate of Forestry and Wildlife, expanding stakeholder participation in the development of the new protected area.

Overall, the project significantly improved the technical capacity of Merke Nature Park staff, strengthened conservation practices, and created a solid foundation for ongoing monitoring and protection of snow leopards in the region.

Challenges

Several challenges emerged during the implementation of the project. The transition of staff to the newly established Merke Nature Park required adjustments to training schedules and coordination. Participants demonstrated varying levels of experience with field technologies such as camera traps, drones, GPS, and other equipment, which meant that additional time and repeated field practice were necessary. Limited prior engagement in structured monitoring initiatives highlighted the need for sustained mentoring support. Furthermore, the shortage of equipment and resources - particularly camera traps, batteries, and memory cards-made independent monitoring significantly more difficult and emphasized the need for future resource investment.

Opportunities

Despite the challenges, the project created significant opportunities for long-term conservation impact. The establishment of the Merke Nature Park provided a strong institutional framework for snow leopard conservation in the region, while the confirmed presence of a snow leopard population increased staff motivation and demonstrated the relevance of the training. Collaboration with national experts and the support of the Panzhe Foundation and the Snow Leopard Network strengthened knowledge transfer and helped introduce advanced monitoring practices. Community engagement opened new avenues

for reducing human-wildlife conflict and for building local stewardship of conservation initiatives.

The project also revealed high motivation among participants, with 63% expressing professional interest and 43% expressing personal interest - an encouraging factor for developing a long-term, sustainable workforce. The willingness of the local population to cooperate and engage in dialogue strengthens prospects for joint initiatives, while the active support of regional environmental authorities contributes to institutional strengthening. Additionally, the work demonstrated strong potential for cross-border cooperation with Kyrgyzstan, which is especially important for conserving the snow leopard as a transboundary species that moves across international migration routes.

Verification document on the establishment of Merke Nature Park

3. **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?)

The implementation of the project showed that a comprehensive approach - combining training, fieldwork, community engagement, and interagency coordination - is the most effective tool for preparing a newly established specially protected natural area for successful operation. The project successfully achieved its interim goals and demonstrated that capacity building must be based on a clear understanding of real field conditions, staff needs, and the social context of conservation.

Several elements proved particularly important. First, integrating theoretical knowledge with intensive field-based practical training significantly increased staff readiness to apply modern monitoring methods independently. Second, adapting training content to the actual needs of employees ensured high engagement and made the learning process directly relevant to their daily tasks. Third, systematic work with local communities - especially in areas with high potential for human - wildlife conflict - proved essential for building trust and fostering long-term cooperation. The high level of participation (about 50 staff members and 17 local residents) confirmed both the relevance of the project's topics and the effectiveness of the selected training formats.

From a methodological perspective, the project demonstrated that effective snow leopard conservation requires a multi-component strategy. Conducting a detailed preliminary needs assessment allows practitioners to create training programs that are not generic but truly useful and targeted. Field training remains the most effective tool for practical skill development, while long-term professional support - such as online mentoring - plays a crucial role in consolidating and expanding the skills acquired. Work with local communities proved indispensable: without their involvement, sustainable conservation outcomes are not possible, especially in landscapes where people and predators live side by side. The experience also showed that the establishment of a new protected area must go hand in hand with the development of human resources, since only trained specialists can effectively carry out monitoring, prevent conflicts, and implement conservation measures.

The lessons learned can be useful for others wishing to implement similar projects. These include the importance of early coordination with government agencies; the need to secure adequate field equipment before starting training; and the value of building a long-term mentoring system rather than limiting activities to short training sessions. Another important lesson is the value of community engagement: early dialogue, transparency, and practical demonstrations increase trust and create a supportive social environment for conservation.

The results obtained provide a strong foundation for future conservation work. They ensure that the Merke Nature Park is better prepared for full-scale operation, with improved technical capacity among staff, strengthened monitoring of snow leopards and other rare species, and reduced risks of conflict with the local population. The formation of a trained and motivated network of specialists in a key part of the Tien Shan region contributes to long-term ecosystem stability and supports coordinated conservation efforts, including potential future cross-border cooperation. Ultimately, the project results will help improve biodiversity protection and promote sustainable coexistence between people and wildlife.

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

The next stage will focus on strengthening the professional capacity of staff and developing a systematic, long-term monitoring system. Planned activities include continuing online support for specialists, providing guidance on data interpretation, assisting in the preparation of their first independent field reports, and offering additional training in threat analysis and risk mapping. Camera traps will be installed in key mountain areas, complemented by further practical sessions on equipment maintenance, and an assessment of potential snow leopard movement corridors will be carried out to improve spatial planning.

At the same time, support will continue for the establishment of the Merke Regional Nature Park through participation in developing the conservation concept, preparing zoning recommendations, and designing a comprehensive monitoring plan for priority species and habitats. Work with local communities will be expanded by introducing measures to reduce livestock losses, engaging residents in citizen science initiatives, and promoting ecotourism opportunities as alternative livelihood options.

In the longer term, the project aims to develop policy recommendations for government agencies, strengthen cross-border cooperation with Kyrgyzstan for transboundary monitoring, and create a unified database on snow leopards in the northern Tien Shan. These steps will significantly enhance the effectiveness of species protection and lay the groundwork for coordinated, science-based conservation efforts in the region.

5. **Expenditure Details (**Details on how the funds were utilized)

In terms of expenditure details, measures were implemented to train Merken Forestry employees in snow leopard monitoring methods, including training sessions, practical field trips, and a session with the local community aimed at raising awareness and reducing conflicts with wild animals.
The grant amount of USD 1,500 at an exchange rate of 510 tenge per US dollar is 765,000 tenge.
The following expenses were incurred as part of these activities:

- **1,173.84 USD** - travel expenses for the Wildlife Without Borders team (transportation, accommodation, and per diem) during training, practical exercises, and sessions with the local community.
- **65.84 USD** - transportation for a QazaqGeography employee in May to conduct training.
- **69.39 USD** - per diem for a QazaqGeography employee in May.
- **34.51 USD** - purchase of drinking water for training participants.
- **65.66 USD** - per diem for a QazaqGeography employee for a trip in October to conduct practical training on installing camera traps.
- **54.31 USD** - travel tickets for a QazaqGeography employee for the October trip.
    Project expenses were incurred on different dates and therefore were converted at different exchange rates:
  • 517 KZT per USD - payment to WWB

• 510 KZT per USD - travel expenses in May
• 539 KZT per USD - travel expenses in October

Because expenditures were made at three different exchange rates, the total amount spent in tenge (758,301 KZT) cannot be directly converted back into USD at a single rate. The remaining balance of **6,699 KZT** was fully used to cover **bank commission fees**. Therefore, the calculated remaining balance in USD (≈ USD 36.45) represents an exchange-rate-based theoretical value and does not correspond to an actual unspent amount in USD.

6. **Photographs:**

Photo 1: Welcome speech for the training session

Photo 2: Group photo

Photo 3: Aleksey Grachev during a field training session on camera trap installation and use

Photo 4: practical part of the training, October 2025

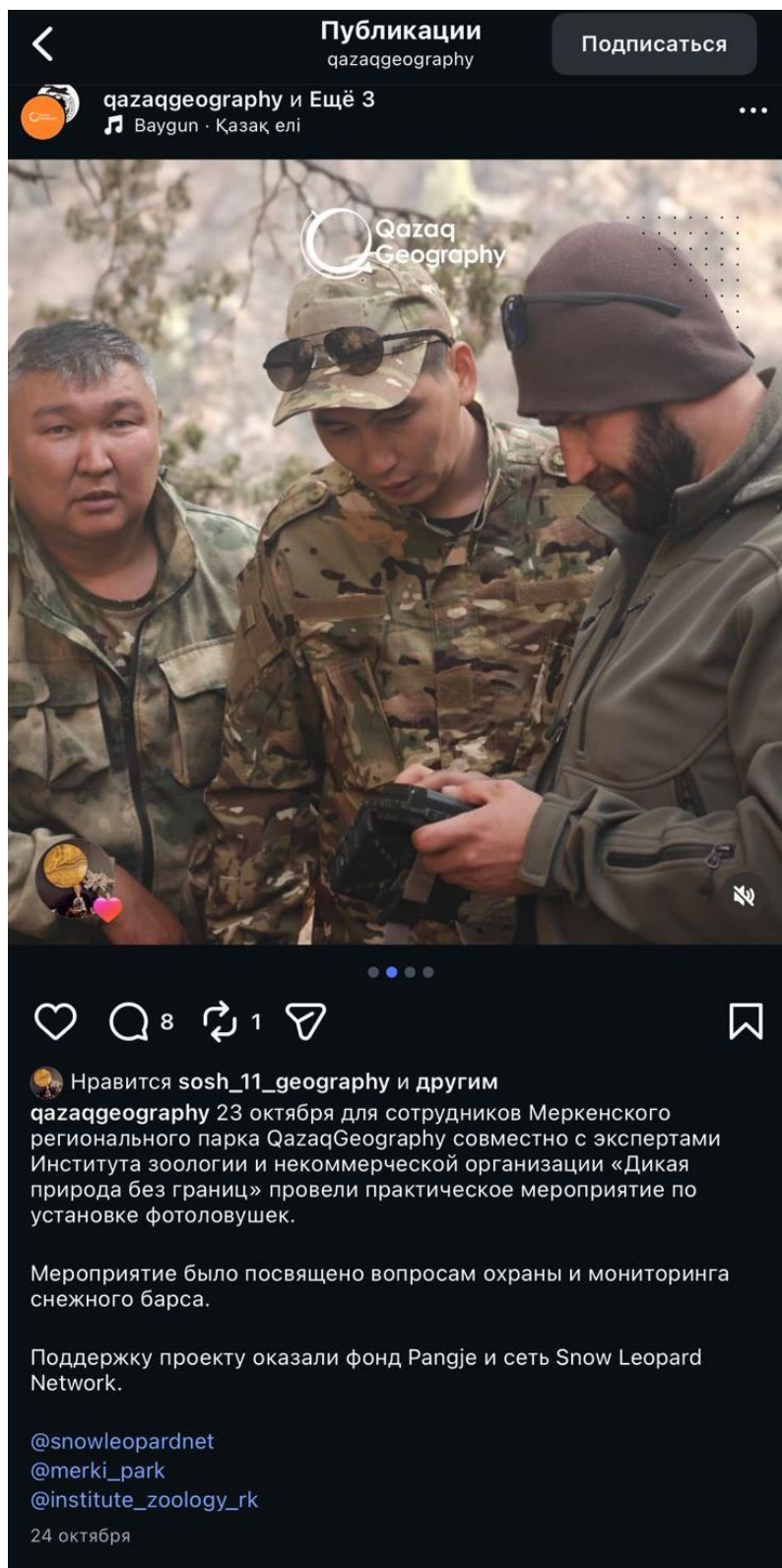**Photo 5:** Maxim Bespalov during a field training session on camera trap installation and use

Photo 6: Participants from Merke, Lugovoy, Akyrtobe, and Karakonyz forestry and wildlife protection institutions

Posting on social media:

https://www.instagram.com/p/DQMR6Aagmu8/?igsh=MW5nOXh6OWQxZ3FwZQ==

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qazaqgeography 4 нед.
🐆 Как в Жамбылской области охраняют снежного барса?

С 29 по 30 мая в селе Мерке QazaqGeography совместно с экспертами из Института Зоологии @institute_zoology_rk и при поддержке фонда Pangje и Snow Leopard Network @snowleopardnet провёл тренинг по сохранению и мониторингу снежного барса.

В ходе тренинга участники:
📍 Обучались работать с дронами и фотоловушками.
🍃 Обсуждали аспекты сосуществования человека и дикой природы.
📷 Изучали методы мониторинга снежного барса.

85 отметок "Нравится"
10 июнь

Войдите, чтобы поставить «Нравится» или прокомментировать.

В ЖАМБЫЛСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ ПРОШЕЛ ТРЕНИНГ ПО СОХРАНЕНИЮ СНЕЖНОГО БАРСА

qazaqgeography и institute_zoology_rk
Оригинальное аудио

qazaqgeography 3 нед.
Создание природного парка «Мерке» — шаг к сохранению редких видов 🏞️🐆

На живописных просторах Меркенского лесхоза 🌲 зарождается важная инициатива — создание регионального природного парка «Мерке». Эта уникальная территория — дом для редчайших животных:

🐆 снежного барса,
🐏 тяньшанского горного барана
🦔 индийского дикобраза
и 🐱 туркестанской рыси.

Как отмечает Алексей Грачев, заведующий лабораторией териологии Института зоологии МОН

118 отметок "Нравится"
17 июнь

Войдите, чтобы поставить «Нравится» или прокомментировать.

АЛЕКСЕЙ ГРАЧЕВ
Заведующий лабораторией териологии,
Институт Зоологии Министерства
науки и высшего образования РК

qazaqgeography и ещё 2
Оригинальное аудио

qazaqgeography 2 нед.
«Мерке» — парк будущего: шаг к защите редких видов природы Казахстана 🏔🐾

На живописных склонах Меркенского лесхоза стартует важная экологическая инициатива — создание регионального природного парка «Мерке».
Это не просто охраняемая территория — это шанс сохранить уникальные ландшафты, леса и редкие виды животных, включая снежного барса, символа свободы и силы.

При поддержке фонда Pangje и Snow Leopard Network, QazaqGeography совместно с Институтом Зоологии организовал обучающий тренинг для

91 отметок "Нравится"
24 июнь

Войдите, чтобы поставить «Нравится» или прокомментировать.

ҚАР БАРЫСЫ ОСЫ
АКЫЛБАЕВ АЙДЫНБЕК
Бас орманшы