



OVERVIEW

US

2017

SNOW LEOPARD RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

CONSERVATION AND ADAPTATION IN ASIA'S HIGH
MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPES AND COMMUNITIES PROJECT



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Snow
Leopard
Trust



TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

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PHOTO CREDIT: Sanjog Rai / WWF Nepal

Highlights from snow leopard conservation and research efforts in the six project countries in Asia's High Mountains

PHOTO CAPTION: Yalung is the fourth snow leopard collared in Nepal's Kangchenjunga Conservation Area. Her collar is providing new insights into her transboundary habitat in this difficult terrain.

GLOBAL

WWF AHM supported the production of TRAFFIC's report titled "An Ounce of Prevention: Snow Leopard Crime Revisited," a landmark reports that compiles and analyzes snow leopard crime data collected from across the snow leopard's range for the period from 2003-2016. The report educates the global community on the extent of snow leopard crime, and is a milestone in the fight against snow leopard crime.

FINDINGS

4 SNOW LEOPARDS
are poached every
week, on average.

55%
of snow leopards are
killed in retaliation for
attacks on livestock.

More than
150
snow leopards are
illegally traded each year

90%
of the reported snow
leopard poaching
occurred in five of the
twelve range countries.

Data from the
TRAFFIC report has
been used in various
campaigns to raise
awareness of and
support for the
snow leopard.

A LASTING IMPACT

With indications of unexpectedly high snow leopard crime, the report has changed the global conversation on snow leopard crime, helping all partners in their work to mobilize support for the snow leopard.

Release of the report was covered up by over 60 prominent news outlets, increasing visibility for the snow leopard and highlighting the urgency to protect them.

Data from the TRAFFIC report has been used in various campaigns to raise awareness of and support for snow leopard conservation.

The volume of crime captured in TRAFFIC report and percentage of snow leopard crime due to retaliatory killing will be used by GSLEP as a baseline for snow leopard trade going forward.

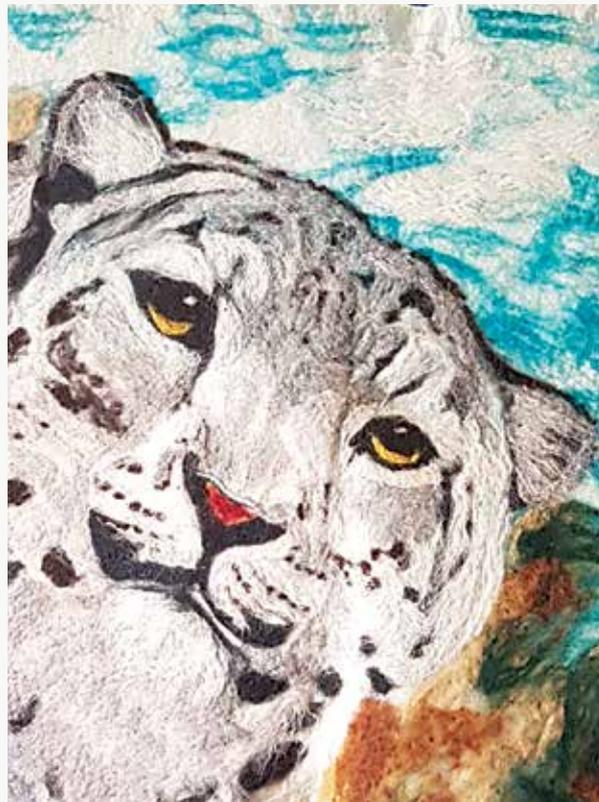


PHOTO CREDIT: WWF

The snow leopard's home in Asia's high mountains, form the headwaters of Asia's important rivers that are the economic lifeblood for nearly one-third of humanity, and is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts.

PHOTO CREDIT: WWF





TENZIN'S STORY

Bhutan's pristine mountains are an important home to the charismatic snow leopard. However, Tenzin, the Head of Research in Wangchuck Centennial National Park (WCNP), had yet to see evidence of one in the park until WCNP's first ever population survey of snow leopards was conducted as part of the WWF Asia High Mountains Project, supported by USAID.

In the 19 years has been working in conservation, Tenzin says that Wangchuck Centennial National Park's first ever population survey of snow leopards has been the most challenging project for him, but also the most satisfying.

The survey counted a total of 14 snow leopards in the area, and provided the WCNP team with confidence that they could independently do the work for Bhutan's subsequent national snow leopard survey. Tenzin went on to work as a key member of Bhutan's first national snow leopard survey covering the entire northern arc of Bhutan.



We were really excited to get photographs of the snow leopards from here. We were also able to show evidence to the communities in these areas, and they were happy because it validated their conservation work.

HIGHLIGHTS

- First snow leopard population survey of Wangchuck Centennial National Park that estimated a population of 15 snow leopards in the park
- First time capturing the Pallas' cat on camera, a rare cat that hasn't changed in 6 million years, as well as capturing common leopards in the camera traps, indicating how they have moved into snow leopard habitat, potentially due to **climate change**.
- **First** ever Snow Leopard Conservation Committees have been formed in Bhutan, with 60 members in two committees who support anti-poaching patrols, wildlife monitoring, and awareness-raising activities in the park.

A LASTING IMPACT

The WCNP snow leopard population survey trained park staff on survey methodologies, and these trained park staff members went on to lead the work on the national snow leopard population survey for Bhutan.

With support from AHM, the first Snow Leopard Conservation Committees in Bhutan have paved the way for the country to strengthen community participation in snow leopard conservation for years to come.

The snow leopard population count in Bhutan used camera traps to photograph and identify individual snow leopards.



A CITIZEN SCIENTIST

Phuchung Lachenpa is most at home in the high mountain valleys of India's eastern Himalaya, which towers over his hometown of Lachen in Sikkim. A yak herder and trekking guide, he is intimately familiar with the local mountains and the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, which protects the eastern half of the world's third-highest mountain. Today, he wanders these mountains as a citizen scientist, documenting the elusive snow leopard for the USAID-funded WWF Asia High Mountains Project.

After being trained by WWF in July 2015, Phuchung and five other local citizen scientists began the challenging work of setting up camera traps in remote Himalayan valleys. By periodically moving a set of 22 camera traps, their aim was to survey nearly 198,000 acres of potential snow leopard range in northeast Sikkim to establish the first baseline count for the local snow leopard population there.

Results were immediate. In August 2015, Phuchung went to retrieve a camera trap in a high valley near sacred Gurudongmar Lake and was rewarded with the first photos ever taken of a snow leopard in North Sikkim District.

The camera trap photos collected by Phuchung and his team revealed five unique snow leopard individuals present in the survey region, adding an important new dimension to existing knowledge on snow leopard populations in this range area.

HIGHLIGHTS

- WWF-India completed a series of six snow leopard sign, camera trap, and prey species surveys conducted in North Sikkim between August and December 2016.
- Three surveys conducted from September 30- December 10, 2016 along fixed transects counted 85 Tibetan argali and 70 blue sheep while camera trapping seven snow leopard individuals.
- Stray dogs were recorded on camera traps during the survey in snow leopard territory, highlighting the need for new policy and intervention strategies.

A LASTING IMPACT

With proof of the snow leopard's presence in North Sikkim, groundwork for improving snow leopard conservation efforts in this region are now being laid. Survey findings will be used to inform ongoing snow leopard conservation efforts in the adjacent Kanchenjunga Conservation Area in northeast Nepal to the west as well as in contiguous snow leopard range areas of Bhutan to the east. The first ever snow leopard to be collared using GPS technology in Nepal was found to regularly cross the international border between Nepal and Sikkim, which has highlighted the critical importance of the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve as a transboundary corridor for this iconic high mountain species.

Phuchung surveys snow leopard territory near Gurudongmar Lake, above his high altitude village of Lachen in North Sikkim.

PHOTO CREDIT: WWF India



TURNING COMMUNITIES INTO GUARDIANS

The village of Ak-Shyrak, Kyrgyzstan is special to Farida Balbakova and Azat Alamanov. But in 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and they had to watch as people turned desperate and started exploiting nature: Poaching snow leopards became a popular occupation.

Farida remembers spending many sleepless nights contemplating the deforestation, disappearance of animals, and degradation of pastures across the newly independent Kyrgyzstan's various elevations and habitats. "I felt as if the land was asking," she says, "Please save me."

In Ak-Shyrak and other similar, isolated mountain villages, the duo started holding conservation workshops for adults. They organized children's theater productions full of skits and songs about biodiversity, games and festivals around events like Forest Day, and persistently worked with government officials, rallied supporters, delivered petitions, wrote letters, and engaged media.

Over the years, their work paid off. Farida and Azat convinced officials to view environmental impacts differently and understand the challenges associated with

habitat loss and climate change. Poachers shifted from hunting snow leopards to protecting them as park rangers. Herders embraced more sustainable practices. Women began crafting and selling eco-friendly goods. And the children lead a range of festivities for Snow Leopard Day.

A LASTING IMPACT

The first population survey using snow leopard DNA analysis of scat to provide a more accurate estimate of snow leopards in the Sarychat Ertash Reserve is now completed, and will pave the way for science-based conservation interventions.

Public conservation awareness programs are turning inhabitants of mountain communities into snow leopard guardians, with these communities now conducting snow leopard population surveys and anti-poaching work.



PHOTO CREDIT: Andy Isaacson/WWF



PHOTO CREDIT: WWF

SCHOOLCHILDREN SECURE A FUTURE FOR SNOW LEOPARDS

Four years ago, researchers from WWF-Mongolia set up camera traps to photograph snow leopards in and around Khovd Aimag's Jargalant Khairkhan Mountain, located in western Mongolia's Altai Mountains, to determine the elusive cat's population size and distribution.

But when they retrieved the photos and videos, they were shocked by what they found.

A snow leopard was caught on camera, hobbling around with a heavy steel jaw trap on one leg. The most tragic footage was of two three-legged snow leopards that had lost a leg to a jaw trap.

WWF Mongolia needed to find a way to protect Jargalant Khairkhan's snow leopards from jaw traps. Working with the children of herders living around Jargalant Khairkhan, the team came up with a novel trap exchange campaign. In exchange for traps surrendered to school eco-club members, local herders would receive a milk can or other useful household items.

The children gathered an impressive collection of 250 jaw traps, and decided to get rid of them permanently by creating a sculpture out of the metal jaws. The work of art commemorated the task the students took on to protect snow leopards and other wildlife in western Mongolia.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Three snow leopards caught on camera traps in distress, identifying urgent need for trap campaign, which led to children collecting and disabling traps.
- Four baby snow leopards eventually caught on camera, the first snow leopard quadruplets, signifying healthy snow leopard populations here.

A LASTING IMPACT

The successful trap collection campaign was eventually scaled up to the national level. As a result of the trap removal campaign, an estimated 7,210 animals have been saved, and it has raised the interest in snow leopard conservation. The first snow leopard quadruplets subsequently caught on camera show the thriving snow leopard populations in Mongolia now.

The project has laid the groundwork for a human-snow leopard conflict mitigation strategy for Mongolia, with a national human-snow leopard conflict mitigation strategy for Mongolia that is currently being prepared.

Children pose in front of the sculpture made from traps they collected in Jargalant Khairkhan mountains in Mongolia.



In order to mark International Snow Leopard Day on October 23, 2016, WWF worked with the Gilgit office of Radio Pakistan to develop and broadcast a 45-minute snow leopard conservation awareness broadcast in Urdu as well as other local languages. Titled “Snow Leopards and Mountain Landscapes,” this program discussed the ecological importance of the snow leopard, threats to the snow leopard, and the need for landscape-level conservation management planning in northern Pakistan to protect this endangered species.

HIGHLIGHTS

In the Hoper Valley, WWF worked with 18 citizen scientists to conduct snow leopard sign and prey species surveys, setting up camera traps at various locations in the Hoper Valley that captured the first photo of a snow leopard from this area.

In the mountain communities of northern Pakistan, predator proof corrals have been set up to help reduce human-snow leopard conflict in AHM project areas in Pakistan.

Village wildlife guards have been recruited and trained to monitor snow leopards and their prey

and to combat wildlife poaching. These wildlife guards now work closely with district wildlife departments and help communities implement voluntary hunting bans..

A LASTING IMPACT

Survey on snow leopard killings in the Khunjerab and the Central Karakorum National Parks in Gilgit-Baltistan found a decline in snow leopard killings since 2013, due, in part to AHM Project conservation awareness raising and anti-poaching activities in this district.



A predator proof corral in Pakistan helps reduce human-snow leopard conflict.

FOUR SNOW LEOPARDS COLLARED IN FOUR YEARS

Yalung is the fourth snow leopard to be successfully collared in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in Nepal's eastern snow leopard conservation complex. An initiative that started in 2013, the first ever GPS collaring of a snow leopard was performed in Nepal in 2013, with support from the AHM Project. Data from the collars have provided insight into the transboundary habitat of snow leopards in Nepal, stretching into China and India, as well as many new insights into the snow leopard's behavior.

Collar data will also be important in developing landscape-scale conservation management plans and refining the existing snow leopard habitat in the Himalayas. With the completion of this mission, two female and two male snow leopards have been collared in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area.

Citizen scientists have been active in monitoring snow leopard and blue sheep populations, through various methodologies including camera traps. They have even been trained to be core members of the collaring team.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Four snow leopards** collared in **four years**.
- The first collared snow leopard reached an altitude of **19,219 ft.** – the highest documented so far for snow leopards around the globe.
- Collar data shows that snow leopards move regularly across the border to India and China, highlighting the need for **transboundary cooperation**.

A LASTING IMPACT

An exercise that started with support from international experts in 2013 has resulted in a strong, capable national collaring team in 2017. These expeditions have not just built national capacity for advanced snow leopard research, but provided new insights into the transboundary habitat of snow leopards in Nepal, stretching into China and India.

This data has also been important in developing landscape-scale conservation management plans and refining the existing snow leopard habitat in the Himalayas as part of Nepal's commitment to the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP).

With new research insights into the snow leopard, its population and its transboundary habitat, conservationists are able to make better decisions on how to protect the snow leopard and its fragile mountain home in the face of a changing climate.

PHOTO CREDIT: Sanjog Rai/WWF Nepal







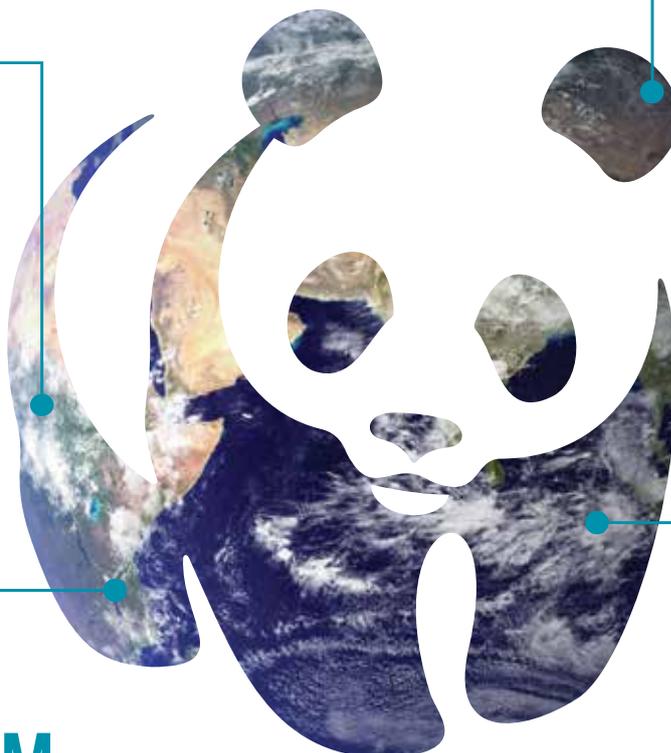
The team that collared Yalung in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area. This capable national team consists of members from the government, communities, and partners, including WWF Nepal.

1961

WWF was founded in 1961

+ 100

WWF is in over 100 countries,
on 5 continents



+ 5M

WWF has over 5 million
supporters

+ 5,000

WWF has over 5,000 staff
worldwide



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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and
to build a future in which humans live in harmony and nature.

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