

The Snow Leopard Conservation Action Plan for Nepal (Executive Summary)

Executive Summary

As snow leopards are distributed along Nepal's northern frontier, a habitat suitability Index model suggests a hypothetical population of 350 - 500 animals in Nepal, which constitutes one-tenth of the world's snow leopard population. Realizing long-term initiatives are required to conserve the snow leopard, His Majesty's Government of Nepal has legally protected the snow leopard and ascribed penalties up to NRs.100,000 or five to fifteen years in prison, or both for poaching snow leopards and buying and selling its pelt and bones. In addition, snow leopards are fully protected in eight protected areas. Despite Nepal's continual efforts to save snow leopards, its long-term viability is threatened by: 1) retaliatory killing and conflict from livestock depredation; 2) poaching; and 3) loss of habitat because of high density of livestock in grazing areas.

Reasons for livestock depredation are several including problem individual predator because of old age or injury, females with cubs, large number of sheep in poorly-constructed pens, untended herds of sheep and other livestock, loss of natural prey and high density of livestock in snow leopard habitat.

Degradation of snow leopard habitats continues due to year-round grazing pressure following the closure of the Tibetan border and increased livestock population. All villages near snow leopard range, are food-deficit. They subsist on animal husbandry, and peripheral agriculture and small trading. Therefore, livestock loss is devastating for poorer households. Recent data on livestock depredation, suggests that snow leopards are covertly killed in retaliation until now. In addition, poaching has become too lucrative.

The conservation action plan realizes that limitation are many including scant information on snow leopard distribution within Nepal, our limited knowledge in understanding its complex ecology in a harsh mountain environment, incremental loss for poorer households through livestock depredation and the illicit trans-border trade on endangered wildlife products.

The foundation of the conservation action plan is a synthesis of literature, on-going monitoring activities, information through field reports and a close consultation with natives concerned with livestock development and conservation of the snow leopard in Nepal. The goal of the action plan is to continue Nepal's credible effort to maintain viable populations of the snow leopard throughout its range, minimize habitat fragmentation, resolve conflict with resident communities and thus, maintain ecosystem integrity of the Nepal-Himalaya.

To implement a science-based, conservation action plan with societal understanding of mountain communities, it is focused on eight objectives that carry significant values in cross-sectoral approaches. These objectives are supported with 44 program activities that may require \$ 2.92 million over a period of 10 years.

- Objective 1 includes knowing the status of snow leopards and their habitats within and outside protected areas because they are little known throughout its range. A country-wide preliminary survey is warranted including all PAs where they are expected to occur.
- Through Objective 2, the plan attempts to identify and maintain priority areas for snow leopard at landscape level, aided by a nationwide population and habitats monitoring system.

- Through Objective 3, efforts are made to reduce people - snow leopard conflicts due to livestock depredation and by implementing measures to control retaliatory killing of snow leopards.
- Objective 4 underscores pasture improvement that will come through, only when optimal benefit accrue to households through their participation, which will also improve snow leopard habitats to enhance its prey base.
- In Objective 5, in-depth study of the ecology of snow leopard on a long-term basis, will be conducted for their effective management.
- Through Objective 6, undesirable activities connected with the conservation of snow leopard, will be arrested with a greater support through education, media and tourism.
- Objective 7 is aimed at reducing poaching activities that include hunting and sale of snow leopard body parts for the fur trade and for use in traditional Chinese medicine.
- In Objective 8, a collaborative effort of His Majesty's Government of Nepal with the national, international organizations and agencies connected with rural development and livelihood, is envisaged, to conserve the snow leopard at landscape-level.

The survival of snow leopards in the Nepal Himalaya will be largely decided by the well-being of the high mountain communities. Also, it is important to note that protecting the snow leopard means a number of other species are ensured as they reside within the large snow leopard range. Given these, the conservation action plan attempts to meet the dual challenges: 1) by protecting a flagship species; and 2) by alleviating communities from livestock depredation through grass-root measures and initiatives.

DNPWC. 2004. The Snow Leopard Conservation Action Plan for Nepal. Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation/Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Kathmandu, Nepal.