



## Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021)

<b>Project reference</b>	#25-027
<b>Project title</b>	Sustaining snow leopard conservation.....
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Nepal
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Snow Leopard Conservancy
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Mountain Spirit, Department of National Parks, National Trust for Nature Conservation
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>Brian Peniston</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>October 2021, HYR4</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<i>www.snowleopardconservancy.org</i>

**1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).**

Based on suggestions from the HYR Year 3, this report uses the updated log frame as the structure for this report. The reviewer also suggested that SLC reference the linkages with the SGDs for Nepal and describe monitoring and evaluation systems in greater detail. These issues are addressed below.

**Output 1: Training and Capacity Building of local government partners:**

Floods and erosion in Nar and Phu took out road access and fibre optics communications, making access difficult and dangerous and connectivity by telephone and internet very difficult.

Emergency medical and solar panel aid to Nar and Phu villages was provided (using non-DI funded) to respond to the flood and road damage.

Gaun Palika Officials (Local Government) committed to co funding the Jimbu (*Allium* species) cultivation study with funding to start the next Nepali fiscal year. A field reconnaissance team has been contracted, and field work is scheduled in Oct -Nov 2021.

A mass killing of livestock by a snow leopard event occurred in Phu village in April 2021. The herders' family received emergency compensation, but processing was delayed and the herder committed suicide in despair. He had a history of problems with alcohol. Through local partners we helped advocate with NTNC/ACA (the local organizations with jurisdiction for these areas) for urgent compensation, but processing was very slow. Funds were finally distributed to remaining family members but didn't fully cover the lost income.

There were continued discussions with Nepal Tele Com (NTC) to improve communication and connectivity to Nar and Phu villages, but this is progressing slowly. NTC states their commitment to action BUT progress is very slow due to low population density of the area and the recent flood and erosion damage.

## **Output 2: Local Communities protect and stabilize snow leopard and prey populations**

Field work on a Snow leopard prey tahr (*Hemitragus sp*) survey in Sagarmata National Park was completed, and the report is in preparation. The most significant finding is that two wolf packs were identified with two alpha wolves present.

The proposed camera trap survey for snow leopard population estimation in Sagarmata National Park was cancelled after almost 1 and half years of follow up. The Government of Nepal is planning to have a national snow leopard population survey in next fiscal year.

There were continued delays in processing and finalizing report on snow leopard population survey in Manang District, as analysis of > 2000 digital images is progressing very slowly.

The final draft of the snow leopard attitude and perception study was completed and edited for possible publication.

The completed blue sheep double count study was revised and was accepted for publication by Wildlife Biology.

Herder training materials and modules are in development (and remain in-progress).

A livestock depredation compensation study was commissioned but no report has been submitted yet.

A-3-day basic wildlife sign and field survey techniques training was completed. 8 field monitors and MS members participated in the training program.

## **Output 3: Snow Leopard Enterprises established and operating**

In person and Zoom Trainings for enterprise (plumbing etc) were conducted and reported in the annual report.

Person identified and contracted to conduct livestock linked livelihoods & enterprise (weaving centre) training and scheduled in Oct – Nov 2021 in Nar and Phu villages.

### **Other Topics:**

SLC Partner Rinzin Lama won the 2021 Rolex Award for Enterprise for his proposal to implement communist-based conservation initiatives in Humla, including taking lessons learned from SLC's program in Manang that he was a partner of.

Further technical improvements for the AI deterrence mechanism were refined, incorporating a better camera, and working to install noise alerts. It awaits deployment as this has been delayed due to international travel restrictions.

The 3 remaining FM radio broadcasts on snow leopard conservation were completed but impacts are hard to evaluate. The Nepal Based Program Manager is trying to link these materials with Dept of Education regional curriculum to strengthen sustainability. He also got COVID earlier this year and his recovery was slow for the first month of this reporting period.

### **SDG Links:**

The project continues to support SDG goals as described in the original application for Darwin support, particularly SDG target 15.4; conservation of mountain ecosystems including their biodiversity and enhancing their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development. The project also continues to contribute to targets 15.1, 15.3, 15.5, 15.6, 15.7 and 15.9. The project also less directly contributes to SDG's 1,3, 5, 6, 8, 10-13 and 16.

**2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for COVID-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

Flooding damaged road access and took out the fibre optic cable that provided connectivity to the national and regional grids for residents of Nar & Phu villages. Instead of 1.5 - 2 day road trip, it now requires about 7-9 days walk. Many villagers in Nar and Phu were stranded in the high pastures and had to be helicoptered out to return to their villages. With assistance from non-Darwin Initiative sources, Snow Leopard Conservancy provided emergency assistance to the villages, sending a combination of solar panels to restore access to power to run the ward office, and medical supplies to restock clinics in Nar and Phu villages. The Local Government authorities co-financed this relief effort and paid for the helicopter transport fees (the most expensive component of the relief efforts).

COVID cases continued to be high throughout the spring and early summer and local officials in Nar and Phu villages and as well in the Khumbu region and the whole of mountain districts. All kinds of travels were restricted for almost 6 months to Manang district and the Khumbu region by non-locals, international as well as Nepali. Travel restrictions for locals (eg Nepali Nationals) were lifted first and then in mid-September, foreigners were also allowed.

**2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of COVID-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

The travel restrictions mentioned above due to high numbers of Covid cases was the most important impact of the pandemic. Several planned activities and field reconnaissance trips had to be postponed and are rescheduled for this quarter (Oct-December 2021). Field travel must be balanced between the Nepali festival season (mid Sept – mid October this year) , the arrival of the first snows on the high passes and the timing of the seasonal migration of many villagers to lower elevations.

Between the COVID travel restrictions and the National Nepal lockdowns, the Snow Leopard Trails enterprise was unable to bring the first group of paying customers. It is now rescheduled for spring 2022.

As a result, Snow Leopard Conservancy has requested and received approval for a change request to extend the life of the project until March 31, 2022.

**2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with LTS:	Yes/No	YES
Formal change request submitted:	Yes/No	YES
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes/No	YES, change request approved

**3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £

**3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully.** Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

**If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to**

make appropriate changes if necessary. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were described above. This reporting period we also faced unexpected disturbances from the extreme floods and the landslides that hampered road access and disabled internet and telephone connectivity in the Nar and Phu valley worksites. Last reporting period, all of Nepal experienced a Constitutional Crisis where the legitimacy of all Government bodies was questioned.

Throughout these unexpected developments, the Darwin management, monitoring and finance teams have been very helpful and supportive, promptly responding to questions, Change Requests, etc and providing the necessary guidance that allow us to continue our field work.

**If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.**

**Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to [Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk](mailto:Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk). The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**