



**Darwin Initiative Main/Post/D+ Project
Half Year Report
(due 31st October 2018)**

Project reference #25 -027

Project title: Sustaining Snow Leopard Conservation through strengthened local institutions and enterprises

Country(ies)/territory(ies): Nepal

Lead organisation: Snow Leopard Conservancy

Partner(s): The Mountain Institute; Mountain Spirit; Ennovent GmbH; Global Primate Network

Project leader: Brian Peniston

Report date and number (e.g., HYR3): October 31, 2018, HYR 1

Project website/blog/social media etc:

www.snowleopardconservancy.org

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

This “half yearly” report covers Quarter 2 of 2018/2019, the first quarter of operations for the project.

The project is designed with three programmatic and one administrative objective, outlined in the project Logframe and Implementation Timeline. There are no major changes to any component. As expected, most achievements this Quarter were in Output 4, Project Management, Evaluation and Reporting, normal during project start up. Collection of baseline field data was delayed however, explained below.

Output 4, Project Management, Evaluation and Reporting

In Quarter 2, the project management team was established, and terms of reference for partners developed, contracts with partners negotiated and signed, and implementation plans were developed. Detailed administrative and financial systems were developed and key partner project staff trained in use and implementation. Through on-going monitoring and evaluation, the systems are being improved as experience is gained. Solid working relationships and frequent coordination between Mountain Institute and Mountain Spirit staff has been established. For this year, most GPN staff work under funding provided by a match grant. Frequent coordination and planning meetings among all partners occurred (+/- 15-20 meetings).

Output 1: Local Governance Strengthening

Anticipating the shift from a centralized Government of Nepal structure to the newly created 3 level Government structure and expected confusion, limited local government strengthening activities were planned as per the Project log-frame.

Key personnel were identified and contracts prepared to develop two training manuals on conservation and environmental safeguarding. Draft manuals are expected in Quarter 3. The manuals will include a Training of Trainers section, aimed at NGO partner staff. No other activities on this Output are planned

until Quarter 4. A paper on Conservation Policy paper developed with The Asia Foundation support helps guide the topics that the manual will address, which is described below.

Output 2: Facilitate Biodiversity Stewardship by Local Institutions

The only planned activity under this Output this quarter was to establish baseline snow leopard and prey/habitats, which is on-going. Progress was limited this quarter however, due to changing Government of Nepal policies. Establishing a comprehensive baseline will require several quarters of inputs and the first steps have been initiated. Project staff especially GPN and Mountain Spirit staff are compiling and reviewing published and “grey literature” on snow leopard populations in both districts. Compilation and summarization of secondary data is expected in Quarter 3. From secondary sources and personal interviews, snow leopard populations in Solu Khumbu range from 2-6 individuals and the range for Manang sites ranges from 6 to over 30. Narrowing these ranges based on verifiable data will take longer than expected, and may only be finished in year 2., as it is dependent on biological sampling permissions.

Evolving Government of Nepal policies on scat collection, camera trapping and biological monitoring and research are the cause of these delays. This is a part of the overall Government of Nepal devolution process, beyond project control. In the interim, permission for all biological sampling has been put on hold nationwide. Recently the government has committed to establish national snow leopard baseline to meet its commitment made at the GSLEP (Global Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Protection) meeting. The Cabinet has approved a government plan to collar 5 snow leopards in the nation’s central complex, and also to carry out biological research and monitoring across all three snow leopard complexes in Nepal. The Manang program sites fall within this landscape complex. DNPWC (Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation) will take overall leadership for biological monitoring and research but it has delegated biological monitoring responsibility to NTNC in conservation areas that they manage. The funding situation to conduct nation wide snow leopard baseline research is not clear. Discussion for possible collaboration in snow leopard database establishment with DNPWC, NTNC and WWF Nepal is on-going. Such collaboration represents a possible unintended, positive consequence.

Project and partner staff has used the time produced by this bureaucratic stalemate productively, to collect and review literature, collate relevant materials for manual development and develop sample survey protocols. Progress was made gathering secondary baseline data on livestock populations, especially in Manang District. Reconciling the data collated by obsolete administrative boundaries with the new administrative boundaries is next, to be done in Quarter 3. It will be validated during field interviews with local Livestock Development staff planned at the District level in November in the Quarter 3. GPN staff member Rinzin Lama also verbally shared his preliminary data on Manang and Mustang district snow leopards, preys and depredation data based on his unpublished thesis. Preliminary analysis shows these two data sets contain significant inconsistencies, requiring reconciliation. Due to the complexity of officially reporting livestock depredation, under reporting of depredation is expected in official data sets. Nevertheless the differences between Lama’s data and official statistics are too great to be explained by statistical variation. One task in Quarter 3 is to reconcile these two data sets, and present a baseline data set built on more validated information, while continuing to seek permission to collect fecal samples. In the meantime, some camera trap data is still being collected. Conclusive interpretation of camera trap data remains challenging unless images are ideal for comparison.

Delays on permission to collect fecal (scat) samples are expected until mid 2019. Regular meetings are being conducted to try to expedite this process. In the interim, project team members and partners are developing survey protocols and manuals to document best practices, attitude survey and perception surveys and procedures to monitor effectiveness corral protection measures. Project staff set the target of mid Quarter 4, 2019 to complete most protocol development.

Output 3: Private sector Generating Incentives for Snow Leopard Conservation

Progress on this output has been slightly delayed, mostly due to inaccessibility to project sites and scheduling issues with the Austrian Private sector partners. The Market Study of Manang will be conducted in early November, and trip planning is well underway. During the planned fieldwork, the team will develop a preliminary service design for the Fair Trails Snow Leopard Trail. During this field trip, SLC and partner team members plan to identify potential community members interested in developing and managing the trail, building on the contacts and relations under SLC’s Snow Leopard

Scouts programs. Dr Rodney Jackson and GPN staff member and local staff member Tashi Ghale will accompany the Ennovent and Trail Angels team on the field trip. GPN staff Rinzin Lama will likely to accompany the team. In addition to exploring Snow Leopard Trails, the SLC and GPN team will collect additional information on Output 2, especially updating livestock and depredation data from herders and the Local Livestock Department. They will also get information on any updated locally managed livestock depredation compensation schemes, which are mandated under new Government of Nepal policies.

In summary, despite severe weather, some landslide and access problems and the uncertainty of a rapidly changing central, provincial and local governance structure, project progress is on-target this reporting period. Now that project start up redesign is completed, more rapid achievement of targets is expected in coming quarters, assuming no further natural calamities or political upheaval. Issues within the control of project staff are proceeding on-target.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

This reporting period coincides with the annual monsoon cycle in Nepal. The 2018 monsoon was heavy, with severe rains during most of the reporting period. Weather and landslides restricted access to field areas, limiting road access to the Manang project sites, initially planned this quarter.

2018 has also been a year of political turbulence in Nepal. Local elections were completed in early 2018, establishing new Government structures at the Provincial and Local Government Levels. These new Government structures create layers of Government that have never existed in Nepal before. Combining these new government structures and the newly elected local government officials has resulted in confusion over jurisdiction and authority, provoking vigorous debates on the limits of powers at each level. Previously strong centralized decision-making and authority must now be passed down to these new government structures. Elected provincial and local level leaders are often highly motivated, and popularly elected, but frequently lack experience or expertise in governing. In addition, many Federal Government Officials are resisting this transfer of authority and decision-making, resulting in court cases as the powers of the respective Government layers are being resolved. These delays were expected this quarter, but they have had an impact on the pace of government decision-making and new government policies.

One positive consequence is that these changes will likely result in greater power and authority at local levels. The project is well positioned to influence lower level decision-making and hopefully steer local government officials to invest more annual of their budgets into conservation measures. No budgetary impacts to SLC-Darwin Project are expected at this time however.

Prior to the start of the project, The Mountain Institute (TMI) had some staffing changes, including the resignation of the Global Executive Director (US/Global level) and The Director of Himalayan Programs. As a consequence, management structures were redesigned, redistributing partner workloads and responsibilities. The departure of the TMI's Executive Director was unexpected, but his role in the project was limited to technical oversight. These duties will be assumed by his replacement. With the departure of TMI's Himalayan Program Director, greater management responsibility is transferred to Mountain Spirit's Nepal based Team Leader, Dr. S. Thakali. This is an advantage, as it is easier for National NGOs to obtain necessary project permissions than it was for International NGOs. With the redesign of management authorities, Mountain Spirit will also take the lead on in-country finance management, and the Finance Officers of The Mountain Institute (TMI) and Mountain Spirit (MS) have established a strong, collaborative working relationship.

Within the Partner Organization Staffing line item, time allotted for Nepal based staff has been reallocated to accommodate redesigned management duties. TMI's acting Himalayan Director's coverage will be reduced, and reprogrammed to increase funding for The Mountain Institute Finance Officer, who will provide collaborate more with the Mountain Spirit (MS) Finance Officer to strengthen

MS Finance Management capabilities. The remainder of the TMI Principle Investigators time (previously Dr. Meeta Pradhan) will be reprogrammed to increase time for project Co PI, Dr Shailendra Thakali, who will now serve as In-Country Team Leader. This adjustment reduces and simplifies coordination workloads to one Principle Investigator (PI), an unexpected but positive consequence. Dr. Thakali has many years of large conservation project management experience, and has managed complex UN funded projects, served as DFID Livelihoods Advisor in Nepal and most recently, managed large-scale UN funded earthquake recovery and relief efforts. These readjustments do not result in increases in overall Nepal based staff time allocations, falling within the +/- 10% line item for Staffing (partner organizations) range, although amounts allocated to individuals will be adjusted.

Sorting out these readjustments increased staff expenditures for Quarter 2 as new roles and responsibilities were renegotiated along with contracts and new scopes of work. Staff time and expected inputs will stabilize over the next 2 quarters of 2018/2019. Since there are no budgetary impacts on the overall Project Staff Line Item, LTS approval was not sought. If our understanding is incorrect, please advise and justifications/explanations will be provided.

Under Output 2, there were delays in starting the collection of biological samples. One reason for the delay is evolving Government of Nepal policies on scat collection, camera trapping and biological monitoring and research. In the interim, permission for all biological sampling has been put on hold nationwide. Delays on permission to collect fecal (scat) samples are expected until mid 2019. Regular meetings are being conducted to expedite this process. In the interim, project team members and partners are developing survey protocols and manuals to document best practices, design attitude and perception surveys and monitoring procedures to assess effectiveness corral protection measures. Project staff set the target of mid Quarter 4, 2019 to complete most protocol development.

One positive unintended consequence occurred. Project Leader (PI) Brian Peniston and Project Partner (Co-PI) Shailendra Thakali co-led a project funded by The Asia Foundation resulting in an analysis of “Conservation and Prosperity in New Federal Nepal: Opportunities and Challenges” in July 2018, prior to the start of the Darwin project. Results of this policy study directly inform Darwin project activities especially Output 1. The authors met both key Government of Nepal authorities and influential Nepali lawyers working on devolution of powers, developing relationships and indirect communication channels allowing us to be well informed of evolving new policy directions. During Quarter 2, **The Asia Foundation released a publication featuring this work, which is attached as Annex 1.** Independent of the Darwin funding, Peniston and Thakali are planning to shorten the report to encourage wider distribution and readership.

2b. 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 **NO**

Formal change request submitted: Yes/No **NO**

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No **NO**

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: **£0, but some overspending this reporting period**

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.

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

All relevant issues described in sections above. Please advise if LTS approval is required for any of the minor adjustments that occurred. If necessary, justifications and explanations will be provided.

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. Additionally, if you were funded under R24 and asked to provide further information by your first half year report, please attach your response as a separate 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 send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at 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: 22-035 Darwin Half Year Report**