

Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	#25-027
Project title	Sustaining Snow Leopard Conservation.....
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead organisation	Snow Leopard Conservancy
Partner(s)	Mountain Spirit
Project leader	<i>Brian Peniston</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	<i>October 29, 2020 HYR 3</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<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).

National lockdown started March 31, 2020 and all domestic and international flights were cancelled. Travel within the country was restricted, hence, implementation of planned programs and activities in Year 3 was delayed or postponed.

As requested by Narpabhumi Rural Municipality, emergency food aid was provided to 100 low income households of Nar & Phu villages (Emergency aid was largely purchased with SLC matching funds). The food aid included rich, flour, lentils, oil, shops, tea, sugar, beaten rich, instant noodle, etc. Personal protection equipment such as sanitizer, gloves, masks, etc., were also provided as requested by the local community.

Based on feedback received from participants, the Conservation Governance and Environmental Safeguard training manuals were revised. New legislative and regulatory changes were incorporated in revised training manuals. (Manuals are in Nepali Language only) and are combined to produce a single manual with aim of using it as a resource aid for conducting more widespread conservation governance and environmental safeguard trainings in the future.

After a successful conclusion of cookery and bakery training provided to participants of Nar and Phu villages in Kathmandu, the Khumbu participants have requested similar training as an alternative income from tourism. Due to national lockdown followed by shutdown both of which restricted travels to the Khumbu region, this training was postponed. The project, hence, is planning a cookery and bakery training for the Khumbu participants in November, once travel for trainers is allowed.

The partnership with RESOLVE to use AI technologies to improve predator deterrence mechanisms is on-going. Images of domesticated dogs have been incorporated in the program algorithms. Deterrence devices and cameras have been developed in prototype and are ready for deployment and field testing. The first camera is being sent to SLC in California in mid October for in situ prototype testing in the US and will be deployed overseas when restrictions are lifted. Deployment has been delayed due to Covid restrictions.

Foxlight (deterrence devices) effectiveness assessment forms have been developed and a field based assistant employed to assess effectiveness of 10 foxlights distributed in the Khumbu (Mt Everest) region in the last year. Initial findings of fox light effectiveness in the Khumbu region indicate that it is proving effective against wolves. A more comprehensive assessment survey is scheduled in October and November. The project has obtained 30 more foxlights for distribution, but there were extensive delays clearing customs and once these issues had been resolved, unfortunately travel restrictions were enacted. Project staff have an additional 20 foxlights in the US, and are planning to get them to Nepal as soon as travel is permitted.

Permission to conduct the snow leopard camera trap survey was approved but delayed due to National travel bans, and local governments restricting access even to Nepali nationals coming from other districts. The survey team leader was unable to get into the field. The survey was rescheduled in early October but 3 survey team members tested positive so the survey is delayed until 14 days quarantine is completed. (p.s., NTNC informed on October 8th that the survey team now has been deployed and setting up camera traps in Manang is expected to be completed during the next two weeks, prior to the National Dashai holiday which culminates on October 27.)

Veterinary training for herders in Nar & Phu was postponed until spring/summer 2021, due to travel restrictions. Local officials in Manang have decided to close the entire region to outsiders for several additional months, until spring 2021.

Herder attitude and perception survey forms are under development and being refined. A team leader/survey manager has identified and contracted. The survey was postponed and alternative survey timelines were developed for implementation once lockdown restrictions are lifted by Local Government authorities, planned in November.

The final wolf study report is under preparation, awaiting information from Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. A powerpoint presentation summarizing study findings was shared and a short article on conducting biological field work was published in local press. The full final report is expected next quarter.

Program content for 29 radio programs highlighting 6 major themes related to snow leopard conservation have been finalized. The first episode is scheduled to air on 15 October via a network of 150 FM radio stations covering all mountain areas of Nepal. The programs target different sections of society, including Government workers, local government elected officials, NGO workers, local community members, herders, etc. The Khumbu FM station will rebroadcast the same programs, providing coverage for the main mountain regions of western and eastern Nepal and including Nepali speaking residents of Darjeling and Sikkim.

A draft paper on snow leopard livestock depredation rates in Nar & Phu valleys of Central Nepal was prepared and revised, in preparation for possible publication. (NOTE: Field work for this study was supported with Darwin funding. Time spent reviewing and revising the paper was provided as SLC matching funds to the Darwin project).

The first trip with paying high value tourist visitors to the Snow Leopard Trail was postponed twice and now has been postponed until late Spring 2021, pending lifting of international travel restrictions and lifting of local government travel restrictions to Nar & Phu valleys.

The Ennovent team conducted a virtual 3 day training consisting of three training modules. It focused on identifying and developing model business plans for non-tourism businesses. There were 12 participants from local government and ngo partners staff. It used a "Training of Trainers" approach so that participants are capable to identify and develop business plans on their own in the future. Trained trainers will conduct follow up activities when travel restrictions are lifted.

Project management staff conducted extensive internet research to identify non-tourism business opportunities and explore finding capital funding for developing and incubating small community-based businesses once travel restrictions are lifted. Darwin funds are being used for the development stage. Any start-up capital for promising businesses is expected to come from SLC matching funds and from other donors.

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.

Nepal is currently trying to contain the spread of COVID-19. As of 15 October, 117,996 have been tested positive for COVID-19 with 675 death. There are currently 36,367 active cases, over 50% of these are in the Kathmandu valley. While there are no national level restrictions on in country travel but travel outside the Kathmandu valley has been severely affected. In addition, tourism operators of Manang have decided to close hotel operations until spring of 2021. The Khumbu region is prepared to welcome tourists but they need have corona negative test results and be prepared for possible quarantines.

Field travel is possible when accompanied with a letter from the municipality, but there are many uncertainties about quarantine requirements during arrivals in both ends. This situation has made planning for field travels and field activities very difficult. Cooperation with the rural municipality has proved very helpful during this period to get update on field situation as well as to identify local income households and distribute food and COVID -19 related health items to them. The municipality took the lead on this activity. The municipality has also made a number of suggestions for skill development trainings for local people so that they can engage in development projects and earn income and offset loss of tourism incomes. But again due to travel restrictions, trainers were restrained from traveling to field to deliver trainings. The project lost almost two working seasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is hoped that six month no cost extension will be helpful in making up losses.

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.

As mentioned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all planned activities for Y3Q1 and Y3Q2 were affected.

Camera trap survey was scheduled in Spring but due to national lock down it has to be postponed twice. During the second time, 3 survey members were tested covid-19 positive, hence, had the entire team were forced to quarantine for 14 days. The team members will be tested again before they are cleared to move to field for the survey. (As of today, all members have now tested negative and they are mobilizing to go to the field immediately before conditons change).

Field monitoring visits and in field training programs had to be postponed. Monitoring was mostly conducted through telephone contacts. Field monitors and key partners were regularly contacted to get updates on the field situation.

The launching of FM radio programs was postponed. The contract was signed in March just before the national lockdown. The Khumbu FM station now has delegated the Kathmandu based FM station to produce programs, to be aired using Kathmandu based FM networks as well as Khumbu FM networks. Although there were delays in producing the radio programs, it permitted us to convince two FM radio networks to get on board, increasing the geographical coverage as well as the number of potential listeners. Radio remains a significant portion of the way that remote mountain communities get information in Nepal.

The planned training and distribution of fox lights to herders of the Khumbu and Narphu region also was postponed. The project has purchased 40 unit of foxlights. It took almost three months to clear them through custom last year and this was followed by the winter season, and then by national lockdown/shutdown. Local stakeholders have been informed about foxlights, and they have shown a high interst on this device and are willing to organize training on use of foxlight and distribution programs as soon as possible.

In the Year 2 Annual Report, the wrong template was used and did not answer questions concerning the project's relationships with broader global conservation efforts. The reviewer

asked for clarification, provided here. The project remains focused on community based conservation efforts and impacting at the local government level. Project goals and targets remain closely aligned with Nepal's National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Nagoya Protocol and Nepal's National Snow Leopard Action Plan. In addition, project goals, objectives and activities remain consistent with the international Global Snow Leopard Environment Protection Plan (GSLEP). Project indicators on the logframe were adjusted to focus more on alternative livelihood improvements compared to the prior emphasis on tourism revenues. Finally, previous partner GPN's role in project implementation has been taken over by Mountain Spirit, and they are hiring temporary staff with appropriate skills to assume the more technically complex, biological survey functions.

Concerning spending rates, the project requested and received approval for a revision to the timeline for overall project completion including revising the original logframe. These changes were approved. Under the new project timeline, two additional quarters were granted to complete planned activities. As a result, estimated quarterly spending rates were revised downward to accommodate having 6 quarters remaining. Spending has been consistent with the revised and reduced quarterly spending plans. As effectiveness of Nepal's pandemic response continues to emerge, we are discussing whether additional changes to the logframe will be required. Any additional changes would likely be to reduce targets and change indicators, in response to the possibility of future travel restrictions that reduce face to face activities in the field.

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	Yes/No
Formal change request submitted:	YES	Yes/No
Received confirmation of change acceptance	YES	Yes/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: £

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?

Snow Leopard Conservancy remains grateful that the Darwin Initiative continues to provide support for global conservation activities, despite the many challenges presented by the current global pandemic.

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. 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**