



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects **Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus**

Half Year Report

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	DARCC035
Project title	Integrating local government and community conservation capacity of snow leopard
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead Organisation	Snow Leopard Conservancy
Partner(s)	Mountain Spirit (MS)
Project leader	Dr. Shailendra Thakali
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	April to September, 2024 HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	www.SnowLeopardConservancy.org

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

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

Project activities conducted from last six months April to September 2024

Corral Improvements

In collaboration with the Rural Municipalities and the Annapurna Conservation Area, the project distributed 12 improved corrals made of iron poles and gabion wire. These corrals can be easily disassembled and transported from site to site, allowing herders to set them up as they rotate their animals. All 12 corrals are designed to protect yak calves, which are particularly vulnerable to depredation by snow leopards.

The corrals offer enhanced protection by incorporating a gabion wire fence around the stone walls typical of traditional corrals, reinforced with iron poles. Each corral features two doors for animals to enter and exit, which are also secured with gabion wire. Since the gabion wires are

not easily visible to animals, strategically placed stones are important for guiding them toward the doors.

Fourteen herder groups have benefited from this improved corral support, which is expected to protect about 150 yak calves under 18 months of age. Traditionally, corrals for young calves are only 3 feet high, open, and narrow, with multiple entry and exit points. Herders often set up makeshift camps near the corrals and remain vigilant during the night to protect their calves from snow leopards and wolves. The improved corrals are anticipated to enhance the safety of the calves while allowing herders to get better rest at night, enabling them to care for their animals more effectively in the days that follow.

Two herder groups in Garabjhong Rural Municipality were supported by the project. The assistance provided to the herder group in Syang village involved supplying gabion wire netting, which was used to protect the open roof space of a corral built with the support of the Rural Municipality. This corral is located in a high pasture area and is used by 300 goats owned by seven households.

Additionally, support was provided to build an enclosure for keeping 50-60 goat kids during the day while the adult goats are taken out for grazing in the vicinity. This herder group is composed entirely of Dalit households, and it received US\$ 4,000 from the Rural Municipality to construct the main corral. Dalit caste members are among Nepal's most underserved groups.

Opaque Screen to Protect Livestock from Depredation

The project also held consultations with a herder group in Marpha to gauge their interest in piloting the use of opaque screening to protect herds from snow leopards. While some members expressed interest in the proposed technique, others were skeptical about its effectiveness for two reasons.

Firstly, pasture areas can be very windy at times, and the materials may not withstand the wind's force. Secondly, the materials available in the market (canvas and PVC sheets) are only 6 feet in height, which may not be sufficient to prevent snow leopards from leaping inside to depredate the livestock. The project will continue exploring new ideas, tools, and techniques to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

Fox Lights Use and Effectiveness

The project has acquired 26 units of Fox Lights (randomly blinking lights), which will be distributed to herders in Varagung Muktichhetra Rural Municipality (RM) to mitigate livestock depredation by snow leopards. This support was initiated in response to a request from Varagung Muktichhetra RM. Over the years, 100% of herders from Garabjhong, Manang, and Narpa Rural Municipalities have received Fox Lights, and this support is jointly funded by DI and SLC.

Although herders have given mixed responses regarding the effectiveness of Fox Lights, the fact that they are reluctant to return them—despite being asked to do so if they are not useful—suggests that, despite some reservations, they are considered helpful in reducing livestock depredation.

One ongoing issue regarding the use of Fox Lights is their proper placement. During a field visit by the Principal Investigator, it was observed that most herders do not move the lights, even after being repeatedly instructed by field monitors to change their positions every 10-15 days. Some Fox Lights were also not hoisted properly or positioned at the correct height. Field motivators are instructed to address these issues to improve the effectiveness of Fox Lights as a deterrent device.

Progress on Phu Jimbu Branding, Packaging and Marketing

The project supported the packaging and marketing of Jimbu from Phu as a pilot initiative. Despite its high potential as an alternative income source to enhance local livelihoods, the progress among local people in Phu, who are involved in Jimbu cultivation and wild harvesting, has been somewhat disappointing.

One major issue is that villagers are quite content selling Jimbu directly to traders who buy it in their village, rather than consolidating the products and bringing them to Kathmandu, which would require time for cleaning, refining, packaging, and marketing. However, the Rural Municipality is highly interested and committed to providing the necessary support to make this initiative successful as a key product of Phu village.

The project held several meetings with the Jimbu group and representatives from the Rural Municipality to address issues related to branding, packaging, and marketing. As a result, a new committee has been formed, and the process of registering Phu Jimbu as a brand will be explored this year. Additionally, a revolving fund will be established to support Jimbu packaging, branding, and marketing beyond the project period. The Rural Municipality is also developing a proposal to scale up the Jimbu enterprise by expanding Jimbu cultivation in the future. Draft branding and marketing materials have been designed.

Snow Leopard Awareness and Ecotourism Initiative

The project produced three 6x4-foot snow leopard signs with the support of Wellington Zoo, NZ. It also sought permission from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, the National Trust for Nature Conservation, and the Annapurna Conservation Area to use their logos on the signboards. These signboards have been placed in strategic locations in Mustang and Manang districts, recognized as snow leopard hotspots.

The signs were made using aluminum composite panels with UV-resistant prints. The Narpa Bhumi Rural Municipality has approached the project to upgrade their signs using the same technology at their own cost.

Additionally, the project hired two experts to map out new trekking trails and develop content for a QR storyboard to promote a 2-4 day side trek that will pass through a major snow leopard habitat, including the world's highest lake (Tilicho), which shares a border with Manang. This stunning landscape features small lakes, glaciers, forests, and alpine vegetation. The trail also provides an excellent opportunity to experience herding practices, local history, culture, folklore, and legends.

To advance this initiative, the project designed and delivered a 3-day training program on Snow Leopard Tracking and Guiding Service. There were 15 participants, two of whom were women. Five participants will be selected to undergo guide or porter training in Kathmandu during the winter. The project hopes that these trained guides will play an important role in establishing local guiding services, generating jobs for local people—particularly youth—and enhancing the trekking experience through QR storyboards. The training and QR storyboard programs were financed by Wellington Zoo, N.Z. and SLC, complementing the project activities perfectly.

Strengthening Local Cooperatives

The project has signed an agreement with the Vongmor Small Farmers Agriculture Cooperative, which has its main office in Marpha village, Garabjhong Rural Municipality. The cooperative has nearly 550 members, all of whom are women, from various villages within the municipality. It also employs two full-time staff members and is the largest and most active cooperative in Mustang.

Under the agreement, the project will provide US\$ 3,700 (80%), while the cooperative will contribute US\$ 746 (20%) to establish a fund that will support the packaging, branding, and marketing of local products produced by women farmers. The cooperative will use the snow

leopard as a trademark logo to promote its products and will produce and install various signs to promote ecotourism, organic farm products, and snow leopard conservation through catchy phrases and slogans.

At the request of the cooperative, the project will also support the development of a five-year plan for the cooperative, enhancing labels for different agricultural products and messaging. In the future, the snow leopard image will be used to endorse products produced by the cooperative.

2. 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.

The production of improved corrals and their transportation to project sites were major challenges faced during this project period. The corrals were designed and developed in consultation with herder groups. Despite the project's intention to use local materials as much as possible, this was not achieved for several reasons. Most importantly, all pasture areas are located above the tree line, so the use of wood poles was avoided, and iron poles were used instead. Transporting iron poles and gabion wire faced significant challenges, which were further aggravated by the difficulty in finding porters willing to carry the loads. The technicians also had trouble understanding the design concept and required intermittent coaching. All of these issues were time-consuming and made the undertaking more expensive, forcing the project to review its planned activities.

In Manang, there are no active cooperatives; only a few exist on paper. The project supported the development of cooperative regulations for rural municipalities in Manang, but there has not been much interest among local groups to form cooperatives. The local population also showed limited interest in learning about cooperatives. As a result, the project's plan to take local people from Manang on exchange visits to learn about cooperatives could not be implemented due to their lackluster interest.

Replicating successful activities developed under the Darwin Initiative project, Mountain Spirit developed a successful project proposal for conducting similar activities in Mugu district of Mid West Nepal. This district contains much prime snow leopard habitat and was the location where the first snow leopards in the world were radio collared in 1982-5 by Dr Jackson, founder of Snow Leopard Conservancy. Funding was provided under a grants program supported by USAID.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS:

Yes/ No

Formal Change Request submitted:

Yes/ No

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

Yes/ No

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)

Actual spend:

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2025)?

Yes ☐ No ☒

4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should 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 re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes to your project if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

No

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report. If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)

Have you **responded to any additional feedback** (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.

If not already submitted, have you attached your **risk register**?

For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com .	
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	

Improved Corals



Improved Coral Below Ice Lake



Improved Coral in Use

Electric fencing



Information Board in Gaharapjhong Rural Municipality



Snow Leopard Tracking and Guiding Service Training



First Day



Second Day



Field Work



Field Work



Participants with Certificates