



# Conservation Watch - Nepal

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## Snow leopard action plan kicks off

Government has started a ten-year action plan for the conservation of endangered snow leopards. Laxmi Prasad Manandhar, conservation education officer of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) said the present action plan will help preserve the number of the snow leopards and promote healthy habitats for these endangered species. "The action plan will also help carry out scientific study of the snow leopard population inside the country," he said.

According to Manandhar, the population of snow leopards inside the country is threatened due to livestock diminution and retaliatory killings, poaching, and loss of habitat resulting from over-grazing of livestock in grazing areas. It is estimated that the number of snow leopards is around 300-350 in Nepal at present.

The conservation action plan realizes that limitation are manifold including scant information on snow leopard distribution within Nepal, 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 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, as estimated on 2004.

The objectives include knowing the status of snow leopards and their habitats within and outside protected areas along with in-depth study of the ecology of snow leopard on a long term basis. The plan attempts to identify and maintain priority areas for snow leopard at landscape level, aided by a nationwide population and habitats monitoring system.

Plan envisages to reduce people-snow leopard conflicts due to livestock depredation and by implementing measures to control retaliatory killing of snow leopards. Similarly, it 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. As per the planning, undesirable activities connected with the conservation of snow leopard will be curbed with a greater support through education, media and tourism. In likely manner, poaching activities that include hunting and sale of snow leopard body parts for the fur trade and for use in traditional Chinese medicine, will be reduced. 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.

A collaborative effort of 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 conservation action plan attempts to meet the dual challenges by protecting a flagship species and by alleviating communities from livestock depredation through grass-root measures and initiatives.

Snow leopards make their habitat in various protected areas including Sagarmatha National Park, Langtang National Park, Annapurna Conservation Area, Shey Phuksundo National Park, Kangchenjunga Conservation Area, Manaslu Conservation Area, Makalu Barun National Park and Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve of the country. All villages near snow leopard range are food-deficit. They subsist on animal husbandry and peripheral agriculture.



## Supreme Court upholds poachers

### Police nabbed three wildlife traders

On 8th June, the Supreme Court upheld the Hetauda Appellate Court and the Chitwan National Park decision to detain rhino poaching kingpin Tasi Gurung. Gurung was facing the charge of involvement in poaching nine rhinos and has been in detention for four years.

The Supreme Court bench has directed the authorities to keep Gurung in detention and precede the case because there is no ground to reverse the order as Gurung had already admitted that he had committed the crime before the investigation authority (police).

The Chitwan National Park had issued the detention order, which the Hetauda Appellate Court had upheld. Gurung's accomplices Hari Bahadur Bishwokarma, Hari Babu Silwal and ex-pilot Ramesh Chandra Pokhrel have been facing the charges.

Although Gurung denied the charges in front of the court, he admitted to the crimes before the police during interrogation and a co-accused Bishwokarma had said Gurung was the kingpin of the poaching racket, deputy government attorney Ramesh Sharma Paudel said. As per Gurung and Bishwokarma's statements, there is no need for the apex court to intervene in the case, Poudel said.

Meanwhile, Metropolitan Police Crime Division nabbed Gopal Gurung, 34, an illegal trader as he was searching clients to sell skins of endangered tiger and leopard in the capital on 13th June.

According to police the man hails from Bhulbhule of Lamjung district. Gurung was arrested from a guest house in Gongabu, where he was waiting for his prospective customer. He confessed during interrogation that he brought the illegal skins from a man in Gorkha district in order to be traded in Kathmandu. The going price of a skin is said to be around Rs 50,000.

Police in another incident has arrested two people, Sun Bahadur Ghale of Kafalpani and Gyaldo Lama of Lapa with illegal wild animal parts at Furkhekhola, near Malekhu of Dhading district. According to Kuber Chand, police inspector at Area Police Post in Gajuri, Lama and Ghale were arrested along with four leopard skins and about two kilograms of leopard bones based on tip off provided by locals. According to police, both the accused were involved in trade of illegal animal parts.

### Security beefed up in CNP

The number of Nepal Army soldiers are increased in Chitwan National Park in a bid to combat poaching. One company of the army force comprising 250 soldiers are added in Purano Gorakh Battalion. The additional army strength are reinforced at the Amaltari post in Nawalparasi. The new forces will be distributed along 10 security post.

Before, five companies of army were securing the park under the Gorakh Battalion which covers parts of Chitwan and Nawalparasi districts.

Until 2001, there were 34 security posts in the park. But along with the armed Maoist movement, the number of posts was decreased to seven. Chitwan National Park has planned to keep 49 army security posts.

### Dolphins in Mohana delight locals

With the onset of rainy season and rise in water levels, dolphins have started to be seen in Mohana River and its tributaries Pathraiya and Kanda rivers in Kailali district. Mohana is a tributary of Karnali River and Karnali is in turn a tributary of the Ganges.

It is believed that there are around 103 dolphins in Mohana River. The rare and strange animal is a protected animal in Nepal and it is considered most conscious and intelligent mammal after human beings. Besides locals, foreign tourists also come to Kailali to watch dolphins. Two towers have been build in Narayanpur VDC to attract tourists to observe dolphins, while boat riding also offers an excellent opportunity to observe dolphins.

Bhojraj Dhungana of a local dolphin conservation group said dolphins were seen on 21st June in Mohana River. There are 14 different groups in Kailali involved in dolphin conservation. The conservation efforts are supported by UNDP, WWF and other organizations. The finding of dolphins in Mohana was first revealed by local conservation activist Bhojraj Shrestha. Locals said dolphins can be promoted to draw more tourists in the district.

Meanwhile, a Gangetic dolphin was killed by local fishermen at Koshi river in Morang district. The locals killed the dolphin assuming it as a big fish. Police has noticed dolphin while it was kept for selling. The dolphin was 6 feet 9 inches long and weighed 83 kg. The Gangetic dolphin has been enlisted as a critically endangered species by IUCN.



### **Red panda protection program in LNP**

The National Park and Wildlife Department and Buffer Zone Assistance Project at Langtang National Park (LNP) have launched special program to protect the endangered red panda.

Although LNP spreads over 1710 square kilometers in three districts of Nuwakot, Rasuwa and Dhading, red panda sighting was very rare, thus compelling conservationists to conclude that its number could have shrunk drastically. Conservationists have reassessed their earlier assertion that the species was on the verge of extinction, after an endangered red panda was spotted at Ghyangphedi of Nuwakot district a few weeks ago.

According to LNP, it will introduce the program through cowherds and shepherds in the first phase. "First, we will target them in our programs, so that shepherds will not take cattle to areas where red pandas are believed to be living," said Kishor Kumar Shrestha, senior scientist at LNP. "Then, various programs will be launched to boost the locals' income, which will help protect its sanctuary."

Pandas are so sensitive that even the tinkling sound of the cowbell and the sound of yaks disturb pandas. Its babies are also eaten by other carnivores.

### **Thirty seven bison in PWR**

A recent census in the Parsa Wildlife Reserve (PWR) has confirmed the presence of 37 Indian bison, the biggest species of endangered wild animal belonging to cattle family.

The Parsa Wildlife Reserve conducted the census on May 24-27 with the help of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, WWF-Nepal, Nepal Army and the Buffer Zone Management Committee. Altogether 12 persons and nine elephants were deployed to count the animal in the reserve.

Gaurs, as they are called in Nepali, are on the verge of extinction due to poaching. Collaborative efforts have been seek to protect this endangered animal from being poached.

Gaur is listed as a protected animal in Nepal, as vulnerable in International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) Red Data Book and is listed in Appendix I of CITES. It is estimated that only around 1,000 gaurs exist in the wild and its number is declining due to hunting, habitat destruction and exposure to domestic diseases.



### **Peace brings poachers in droves !**

Peace does not come for free and sometimes even the animals have to pay the price for peace. With the end to armed conflict poaching has flourished in the hilly regions in the eastern development region including Khotang, Okhaldhunga and Solukhumbu.

Poachers have set up camps in the Lekali jungle of Khotang district for months and are hunting down musk deer, bears, wild boars, leopards and several species of deer, locals said.

Poaching has soared in Tyamke, Rupakot, Sungdel, Khidima, Dipsung, Nirmalidanda, Nerpa, Fedi, Mauhure, Chyandanda, Chisapani, Patheka, Locha, Kharmi, Khartamchha and Chipring of Khotang district; Ragandip, Bhakunde, Patle, Khijiflot, Rawadolu, Jantarkhani, Srichadar of Okhaldhunga and Nelechhering, Dudhkunda, Nunthlaha Bhakanje, Gyasa, Mapung, Kaku, Khoriya and Shergabam of Solukhumbu district.

Poachers from different parts of the country have manage to freely engage in the illegal activity here, said Manu Budhathoki from Nirmalidanda of Khotang. "Poachers earn a lot of money by selling animal hides," he said adding that the activity had

completely stopped during the insurgency period because the government had prohibited the people from keeping any weapon and the erstwhile Maoist rebellion had seized whatever of them were left with the villagers.

President of the Community Forest Users' Federation Khotang Surya Bahadur Rai said the government should pay attention to conserve the animals in the forests in the hills here. Acting head of the Khotang district forest office Chandra Dil Khatiwada said poaching could not be curbed due to severe shortage of staffers.

### Wildlife poaching looms following food crisis

People of Olangchungola VDC in Taplejung district are hunting wild animals to avert starvation. This remote village has been facing a food crisis ever since the Chinese government closed its Tibet border in November, citing protests by Tibetans. On top of it, the Nepal government has not been able to supply enough food grain to this village.

It is quite difficult to bring food grain to Olangchungola from Phungling bazaar because of a rugged terrain. These villagers said they have no option except to poach wild animals, including snow leopard, red panda, musk deer and deer in the Kanchajunga Conservation Area for food.

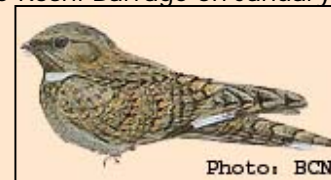
"We cannot go to Tibet to purchase food stuff. We have been facing a food shortage," a local Chhambe Sherpa said. Taplejung chief district officer Bhawanath Bhattarai said the villagers can be provided food grain if they come to district headquarters. "It is very difficult to supply food grain in the region due to the rugged terrain and lack of food depots."

### New species of Nightjar declared

Along with the Sykes's Nightjar, the number of bird species spotted in Nepal has risen to 863. Sykes's Nightjar, locally known as Apurbas Chaite Chara, was spotted at Koshi Tappu, Suchit Basnet, chairman of the Nepal Rare Birds Committee (NRBC), said.

"Ornithologists Badri Chaudhary, Anis Timalisina and Barry McCarthy identified the new bird as Sykes's Nightjar *Caprimulgus mahrattensis*. The bird was first spotted on the banks of the Koshi River three kilometres south of the Koshi Barrage on January 1, 2008. Experts said it took five months to have it verified.

The newly-spotted bird belongs to the *Caprimulgidae* family. Nightjars are small to medium-sized birds with long, pointed wings and gaping mouth with long bristles that help catch insects in flight. Nightjars are nocturnal, with soft, owl-like patterned plumage. They eat flying insects that are caught on their wings. Typically, they fly erratically to and fro over and among vegetation, occasionally wheeling, gliding and hovering to pick insects from foliage. This bird is most easily located by their calls.



Now Nepal has five species of nightjars and Koshi is the only place where all five have been recorded. The most convincing feature of a male Sykes's Nightjar is the finely streaked crown, black 'inverted anchor-shaped' marks on scapulars, large white patches on side of throat and irregular buff spotting on nape forming indistinct collar. Nepalese ornithologists believe that this species to be an erratic visitor to Nepal in low numbers. This nightjar breeds in Pakistan and North West India and winters in south of centre China. Nepal is regarded as exceptionally rich country in terms of birds and is home to nearly 9 percent of the worlds' birds.

Prior to this, Nepalese scientists have announced the finding of new subspecies of bird in the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve on February 2008. The bird has been named "Rufous-vented Prinia" (Ghanse Fisto in Nepali) and the scientific name is *Prinia burnesii nepalensis*.

### Wildlife parts inside Royal Palace!

As Hemanta Niwas, the main building inside Nagarjun Palace premises was opened to journalists on 9th June; following the abolition of monarchy, many banned items derived from endangered species came to their notice.

There were carpets of leopard and tiger skin in the bed rooms. Similarly, the meeting hall, which lies on the ground floor of the two storied building, contained the horns of rhinos, deer and wild buffalos. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and national laws ban the possession of rhino, deer and wild buffalo's parts. Such possession is subject to punishment. In the journalist's queries about these parts, the home minister Krishna Sitaula replied that he would consult with the forest minister about this matter and decide.