

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	IWTEX002
Project title	Empowering communities and rangers for protection of Asia's mountain wildlife
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Mongolia
Lead Organisation	The International Snow Leopard Trust
Partner(s)	Snow Leopard Foundation – Kyrgyzstan, Snow Leopard Foundation – Pakistan, Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation
Project leader	<i>Dr. Charudutt Mishra</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>October 31, 2024; HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<i>www.snowleopard.org</i>

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).

We continued to make good progress on project initiatives in the first half of the project year. This report will describe the work completed, organized by country.

Kyrgyzstan

Respondent to community selected initiatives for sustainable economic programs, our team conducted trainings in three rural communities in Kyrgyzstan on the use of fruit and vegetable drying cabinets that allows the preservation of their locally-grown produce for processing and market sale. We also delivered the requisite equipment at the time of training. In Koshoi village, the training was held on June 6, 2024 and was attended by 12 people (2 men and 10 women). At the Baiboosun microreserve (community-managed nature reserve), the training was held on July 10, 2024 and was attended by 24 people (2 men and 22 women). At the Kara-Suu

community, the training was held on July 11, 2024 and was attended by 18 people (3 men and 15 women).

The team also continues to progress with respect to wildlife ranger trainings. On July 23, 2024, we held a training with 5 rangers from Aksu, Kochkor and Shamschy-Tuyuk on the use of camera traps as a tool against IWT. Additionally, our team is in the process of coordinating a “refresher” training in November for the wildlife rangers who received training from international wildlife ranger training consultant Brian Petrar in spring 2024. Mr. Petrar will conduct this “refresher” training to reinstill the principles and curriculum of his previously training to ensure that the selected trainees are prepared to conduct their own trainings beginning in late 2024 and ultimately through and beyond the project lifecycle.

We conducted several community engagement meetings in October.

In Kara-Suu, our team interacted with local leaders on October 9. Apricot, apple, and black currant saplings planted in the spring are in good condition and had an estimated survival rate of 85%. In the spring of 2025, we will follow-up with trainings on management of the budding orchards, e.g. pruning, application of organic fertilizers, planting new plants using cuttings, and harvesting best-practices. The community also reported that apicultural initiatives were successful and yielded proceeds from market that have been reinvested in the planting of ash and juniper trees at a local school. Additional beehives were also delivered at this time. The community has expressed interest in learning how to raise new queen bees, which will be facilitated in spring or summer 2025 depending on scheduling availability of a specialized trainer. The community will also work with our team on trainings related to ecotourism opportunities later in the year, including English language and hospitality trainings.

In Shamschy, a similar meeting was held on October 11. The community reported that over 85% of their apple saplings have survived. We will also deliver the same follow-up trainings as described for Kara-Suu above in spring 2025. The community reported less success in their apicultural initiatives than Kara-Suu, but although they were not able to bring honey to market this year, their beehives survived and expect to produce in the coming year.

Also on October 11, our team met with community leaders in Koshoi. The community planted two plum plantations last year. The success rate was relatively poor, with 50% of the saplings in one plantation not surviving, presumably due to stony soils, which they plan to repurpose for more appropriate planting, such as raspberry and black currant. The second plantation was lost due to an internal dispute over the use of land on which the plums were planted, and the plants were lost to livestock grazing. The community worked to resolve the dispute and the plantation will be replanted this year, likely at a new undisputed location. The community is also working towards readiness for ecotourism programs, and will receive English language, hospitality, and marketing trainings by the end of the year. The community plans to hold a tulip festival in the spring to attract tourists to the area. The community also reported that its corral built under the project for veterinary care and livestock vaccination administration was helpful through the year, which we will continue to monitor.

Mongolia

In Mongolia, our team developed additional brochures providing information regarding the Citizen Ranger Wildlife Protection Program (CRWPP) launched in the first year of this project. Five hundred copies were printed for distribution throughout the country through various channels. Our team convened a meeting of the CRWPP committee on September 13, whose members included Officer G. Erdenechimeg (head of the Protected Areas Department of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism), A. Bayarjargal (former Director for Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation and current Executive Director of the Snow Leopard Network), L. Purevjav (current Director of SLCF), Dr. Bayarkhuu (Mongolian Rangers Association), J. Tomorsukh (head of the Ulaantaiga Strictly Protected Area), and B. Usukhbayar (head of Mongolia’s Ecology Police). Together the committee agreed to schedule a “refresher” training for the ranger trainees that worked with Mr. Petrar earlier in the year. This training will be held

in early November to prepare the trainees to begin holding their own trainings by the end of the year.

Our team hosted the UK ambassador to Mongolia on a visit to the Tost Nature Reserve in Umnugobi province to meet the local governments there, visit snow leopard habitat, and share project progress.

On August 21-23, the team held a training with the Ulziit community for making felt products from sheep's wool. Nine people (all women) attended the three day training and learned to make flat felt and felt stuffed animals for the domestic market. This included best practices on preparing the wool, methods for felting (including safe and proper operation of the equipment), techniques for shaping the products, and sewing.

The team also organized meetings with three communities (Ulziit, Bayanbor, and Dul) for new 2024 enrollment in their livestock insurance program. Total enrollment included coverage for 3,111 livestock. This provides crucial economic protection for livestock in the event of predation by snow leopards, wolves, or other predators and pre-empts retaliatory action by herders against such predators. The communities reported only one such loss in the last year (to wolves).

Pakistan

The Pakistani CRWPP held its Pakistan Wildlife Protection Awards ceremony in Islamabad on July 31, 2024. More than 300 people including senior officials of the federal and provincial governments, diplomats, academia, media, and the conservation community attended the event. Ms. Romina Khursheed Alam, Coordinator to Prime Minister on Climate Change and Environmental Coordinator presided over the event while guests of honor included H.E. Mr. Per Albert Ilsaas, Ambassador of Norway to Pakistan, Sardar Jamal Khan Leghari, Senator and Wildlife Ambassador, Mr. Melis Moldaliev - Deputy Head of mission & counselor, Kyrgyz Republic, H.E Dr. Ihab Abdel Hamid - Ambassador of Egypt, Mr. Ian Winborne - Director Office of Climate and Sustainable Growth, USAID/Pakistan, Mr. Anssi Kullberg - Charge d Affairs, Embassy of Finland, Mr. Abdulraheem Y.Hasan - Deputy Head of mission & counselor Embassy of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Mr. Nadeem Ahmad - Resilience and Climate Change Advisor, British High Commission. The event awarded distinguished rangers for their work in combating IWT in Pakistan in the year prior. The national award winner received a cash prize of PKR 150,000 while each regional award winner received PKR 100,000. Additionally, each awardee was presented with a kit for wildlife surveillance, award memento and appreciation certificate. The national awardee was Sarmad Shafa, Range Forest Officer from the Parks and Wildlife Department of Gilgit-Baltistan. Additionally, awardees from the Gilgit-Baltistan region were Faizan Dukhi, Sub-Divisional Forest Officer and Kamal ud Din, Game Inspector. From Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Syed Mussadiq, Wildlife Ranger, and Zaid Ahmad, Deputy Ranger Wildlife. From Azad Jammu and Kashmir Jan Muhammad Nasir, Game Watcher. The event was published in multitude of media outlets.

The team also continued to advance the CRWPP by development and digital distribution of informational brochures to over 600 individuals. Follow-up "refresher" trainings for the trainees who worked with Mr. Petrar earlier in the year are scheduled for November 2024, and the trainees will begin administering their own trainings by the end of the year.

We also finished construction of five large greenhouses in Bagrote Valley for offseason vegetable production. These greenhouses will yield food for the benefit communities in the Valley, extending the productive season beyond what is otherwise possible.

Additionally, handicraft production training was held in the Ghamot community in July 2024. Fifteen women attended the training and produced some initial crafts, including dresses. Additional trainings will be held in the coming year. The team also recently established a training center in Bagrote, which will hold a training for 30 women from the local communities.

An apicultural training was held for the communities of Gurez and the Surgan-Ghamot Valleys (attended by 25 people) from June 27-29, 2024. The training was conducted by expert consultant Muhammad Khalid Rafique, Scientific Officer (Apiculture), Honeybee Research Institute, NARC PARC Islamabad. Training included both theoretical as well as practical sessions where participants were trained about the nature of honeybees, their biological characteristics, their food, diseases, predators, honey extraction, honey storage, branding, marketing, etc. Each participant was provided with two honeybee hives/boxes, a bee suit, bee veil, a manual, and complete toolkit along with a bag. Participants were given different assignments to prepare on charts and perform practically and at the end an exam was conducted to evaluate their learning. All the participants appreciated the method of teaching, training arrangements and the quantity and quality of material provided for them.

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.

There were no major problems or complications in the last 6 months.

In Mongolia, there were changes in personnel at the Ministry of the Environment and Tourism after the elections, Our team has been conducting meetings with the new ministers and personnel, and we don't expect any significant interruption to the project goals and timeline.

As described briefly above, there was a land dispute in one of the Kyrgyz communities that affected our fruit orchard plantation. It seems that this dispute is resolved moving forward and it will not frustrate the timeframe of the project or incur significant cost in remedying.

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

Discussed with NIRAS:

No

Formal Change Request submitted:

No

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

N/A

Change Request reference if known: n/a

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

Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]

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 Estimated underspend: n/a

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.

n/a

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

SLT has not yet received claimed funds for Q3 of the project year, but we have not identified any other issues at this time.

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.

Our most recent annual report included mention of outstanding points of feedback, however, it is not clear specifically which points of feedback remain unaddressed. If NIRAS and/or Defra specifies such specific points, we are happy and eager to address specifically, thoroughly, and completely.

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 BCFs-Report@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.	