

SOS CENTRAL ASIA IMPACT REPORT

IUCN SAVE OUR SPECIES
DECEMBER 2022





© Prof. Shi Kun

WHAT IS IUCN SAVE OUR SPECIES?

IUCN Save Our Species supports science-based conservation action on the ground that saves animals, plants and fungi from extinction. We focus our efforts where they will have the biggest impact by funding frontline conservation organisations across the world who have unique knowledge of their region and their local biodiversity.

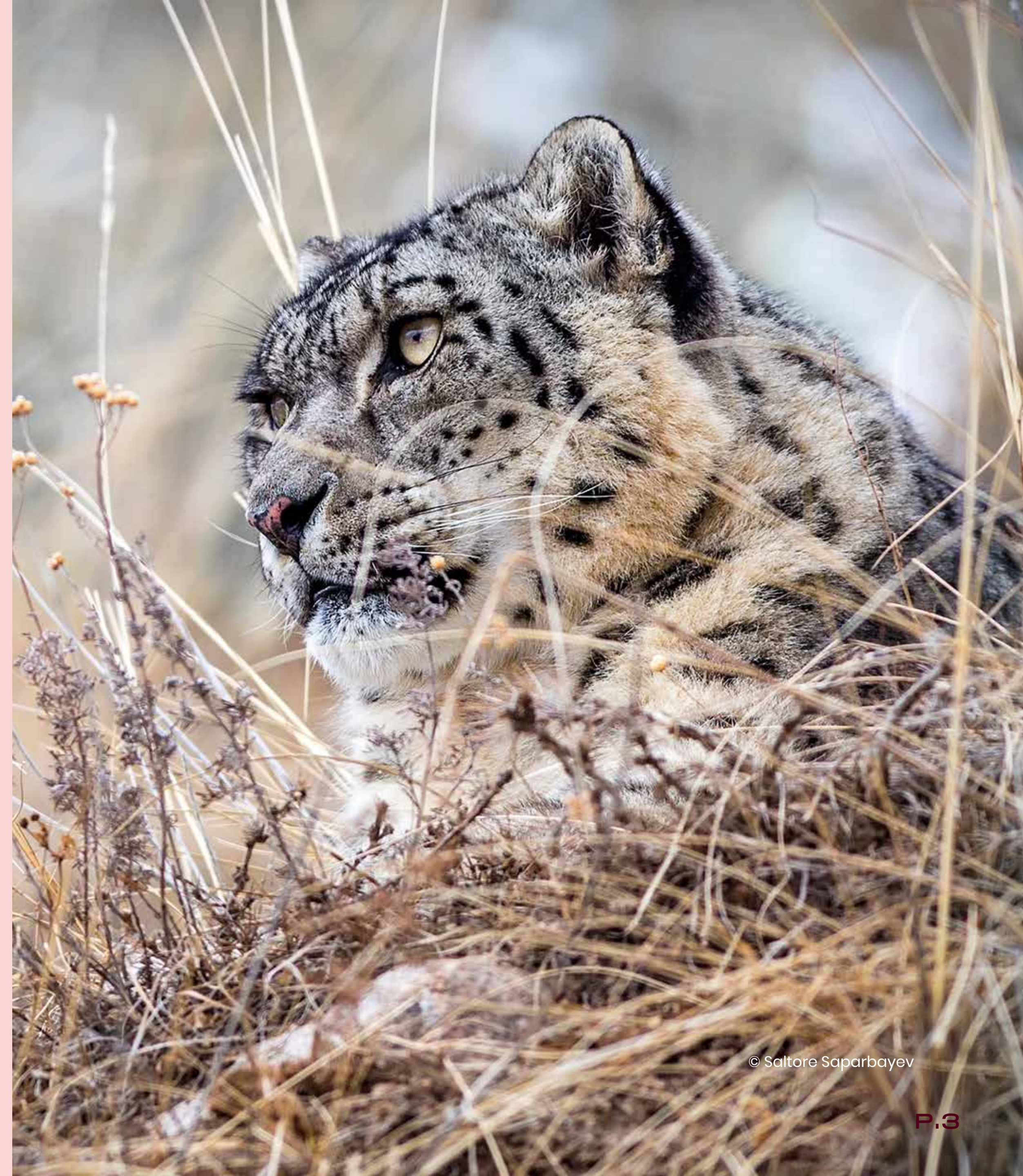
The alarm has been raised repeatedly about the decline in biodiversity across the planet. As one species falls, it takes with it the whole chain of species that depend on it. Be it tigers or bees, these act as dominos falling one after the other, ultimately leading back to us and putting all of mankind at risk. This is why we must do all we can to Keep Nature Standing.

We never look at species in isolation. All IUCN Save Our Species projects not only aim to protect threatened species, but also to preserve their habitats, and improve the livelihoods of the people who depend on them. To protect threatened species with sustainable, long-term results, all our projects are structured around a three-legged approach to conservation that focuses on Species, Habitat and People. By implementing conservation action, IUCN Save Our Species projects are helping to deliver the Global Biodiversity Framework, as well as regional and national biodiversity policies. Our projects also tackle urgent issues such as climate change, poverty, and food and water security, contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. Our objectives and commitments to each of the pillars are:

Species – We are working to achieve a decline in target threatened species from illegal killing and human wildlife conflict by 2030; and see it halted by 2050.

Habitat – We aim to ensure the loss, fragmentation and degradation of threatened species' habitats is reduced by 2030 and halted by 2050.

People – We are working to reduce human pressures on target threatened species by improving local communities' living conditions and providing them with alternative economic activities by 2030.



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THE SOS CENTRAL ASIA INITIATIVE

SOS Central Asia, launched in 2019, is a three-year conservation action initiative that supports the Central Asian Mammals Initiative (CAMI) of the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS) across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

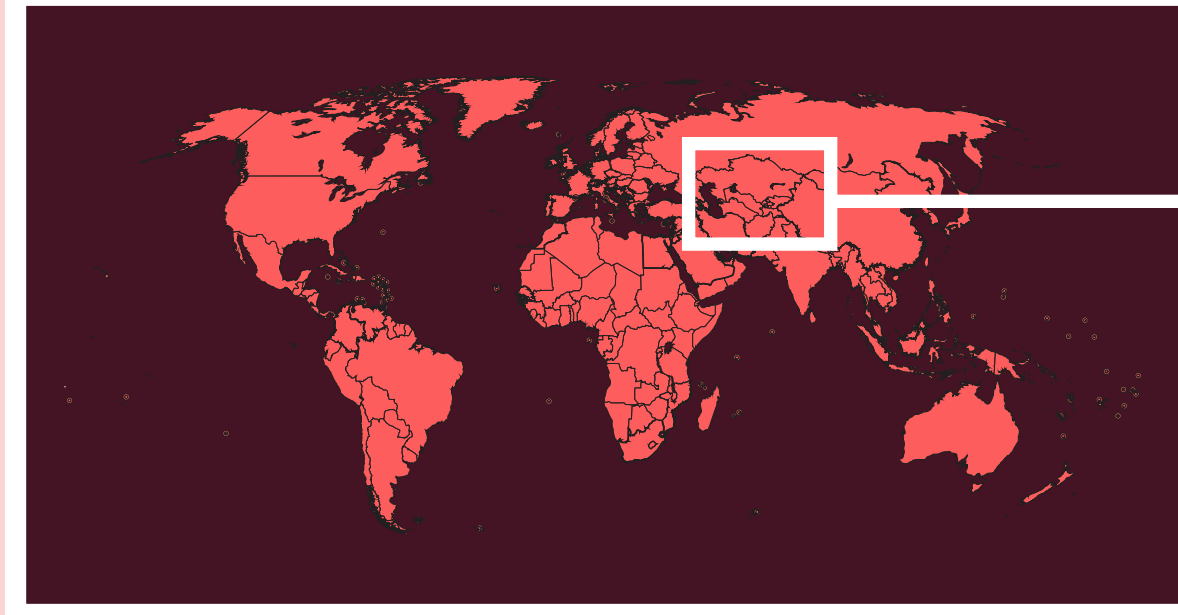
Following a Call for Proposals in 2019, seven civil society projects were selected and 494,431 CHF invested in conservation of the Snow Leopard (*Uncia uncia*) and Goitered Gazelle (*Gazella subgutterosa*), classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™.

In addition to conservation action implemented via the grants, SOS Central Asia offered direct support to civil society organisations including project management, financial management, capacity building and multi-stakeholder engagement and networking. This included engaging with other grantee organisations, experts from the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), and regional and international partners to raise awareness on the urgent needs for increased conservation of biodiversity in Central Asia.



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PROJECT LOCATIONS



WHY IS MIGRATION IMPORTANT?

Central Asia is known by many for its vast open landscapes, with some of the world's largest intact grasslands and semi-deserts found in this region. It also harbours some of the largest and highest mountain ranges. Due to sparse vegetation and water scarcity, many of the resident animal species have adapted to a migratory lifestyle: crossing large distances to find fertile feeding and breeding grounds. However, railways, fences, pipelines and other infrastructure bisect migration routes and prevent animals from

reaching feeding grounds for example. Simultaneously, poaching, overhunting and illegal wildlife trade continue to threaten migrating species populations, driven by demand for meat, horns and other animal parts. In addition, increasing livestock density causes competition with wildlife over scarce food resources, while land conversion for agricultural purposes has reduced the quality and availability of suitable habitat. Climate change is now exacerbating all these threats.



PROJECTS



ENSURING THE GOITERED GAZELLE'S MIGRATION AND POPULATION DEVELOPMENT IN A RECENTLY ESTABLISHED ECO-CORRIDOR

Project location:
Kazakhstan

Duration:
2020–2021

Target species:
Goitered gazelle – *Gazella subguterosa*

Grant budget:
25,000 CHF

This project focused on ensuring the migration and safety of Goitered Gazelle populations by improving habitat conditions in the Ile-Balkhash Reserve, as well as the recently established ecological migration corridor between Altyn-Emel National Park and Ile-Balkhash Reserve, by aiding local rangers to reduce poaching activities, raising awareness and improving water availability in the habitat.

Camara trap footage provided by Ecobioproject

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Species monitoring

- A two-fold increase of gazelles present in the study area – from the baseline of 123 to 248 counted in the project's final survey.

Improving law enforcement

- 70 patrol raids took place, averaging 500 km of coverage per patrol and a watchtower constructed to additionally aid monitoring of the area.

Improving habitat conditions

- To improve water security, 10 potential water wells were identified and four made operational. Work continues to operationalize remaining wells with 14,000 EUR of new funding leveraged.

Improving local livelihoods

- Co-funding from WWF supported 16 income generation initiatives to encourage alternatives to poaching.

Raising awareness

- 10 informative billboards installed, two videos aired on “Outdoor Kazakhstan” TV series, meetings with local communities in Karoy and Koktal to raise awareness on poaching.



Camara trap footage provided by Ecobioproject

This project was implemented by the public fund “Ecobioproject”.



FACILITATING HABITAT CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESS TO KEY RESOURCES FOR GOITERED GAZELLE POPULATIONS IN SOUTHERN KAZAKHSTAN

Project location:
Kazakhstan

Duration:
2020–2021

Target species:
Goitered gazelle – *Gazella subguterosa*

Grant budget:
99,937 CHF

This project generated knowledge that will help researchers understand ungulate migrations in Kazakhstan. The focus of this project was on Goitered Gazelles in the Barsa-kelmes and Ustyurt reserves, but the obtained results and proposed mitigation measures are applicable for the whole country. Ultimately, they will benefit other iconic species such as the Khulan and Saiga.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Species monitoring

- First assessment of the presence and condition of Goitered Gazelle populations along the 1,400 km of the state border of Kazakhstan with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Increasing habitat connectivity

- Assessment on migration barriers of border wire fences and recommendations on securing transboundary migrations in accordance with commitments under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

Improving habitat conditions

- Current and potential water sources were identified in South Ustyurt and Kyzylkum desert.

Raising awareness

- Scientific article with project results presented at the International Conference on Cold Winter Deserts hold in Tashkent.
- National Action Plan developed and presented to the Institute of Zoology, and the Committee of Forestry and Wildlife.
- Secured coverage on national TV and 13 articles about the project in the national press, in addition to social media.
- Directly engaged stakeholders, including 80 representatives of border guards and staff of the Ustyurt Nature Reserve and Barsakelmes Nature Reserve.



© Zh. Nurmuhambetov

This project was implemented by the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan.



ADVOCACY FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE GOITERED GAZELLE AMONG STUDENTS IN THE MANGISTAU REGION OF KAZAKHSTAN

Project location:
Kazakhstan

Duration:
2020–2021

Target species:
Goitered gazelle – *Gazella subguterosa*

Grant budget:
32,635 CHF

This project engaged a variety of regional stakeholders to raise awareness on the poaching pressures Goitered Gazelles face in the semi-deserts of the Mangystau oblast. The number of Goitered Gazelles in the wild has dramatically decreased over the past two decades and poaching is still not under control. As most poachers come from neighbouring cities, regional level cooperation and education were especially highlighted.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Raising awareness and education

- “Friends of the gazelle” clubs were formed in seven schools in the Mangystau region, Beineu district and the city of Aktau, with a total of 110 members.
- A regional “Eco-Leader” competition dedicated to gazelles was organised jointly with the Nazarbayev Intellectual School of Chemistry and Biology in Aktau and the Mangistau Oblast Department of Education – 162 participants in total.
- Multiple regional stakeholder engagements included relevant government departments, chambers of entrepreneurs, protected area managers and regional territorial inspection of forestry and wildlife.
- Engagement of local communities in five villages (Tushykudyk, Shebir, Akshymyrau, Kyzan in Mangystau district and Tolep in Beineu district) included meetings with heads of rural administrations, local elders, heads of farms and local activists.
- Educational materials produced, including a comic book about gazelles (2,500 copies), leaflets (300 copies), digital and printed banners as well as a video to promote the “Friends of gazelles” clubs.



© Tabigi Orta

This project was implemented by Tabigi orta.



CONNECTING ARID STEPPE AND MOUNTAIN ECOSYSTEMS FOR GOITERED GAZELLE CONSERVATION IN SOUTHEAST KAZAKHSTAN

Project location:
Kazakhstan

Duration:
2020–2022

Target species:
Goitered gazelle – *Gazella subgutterosa*

Grant budget:
60,886 CHF

This project's goal was to understand the threats to the gazelles outside protected areas in the catchment region of the Ili River, as well as within the Altyn Emel and Charyn Canyon national parks. The focus area contains the core of the species population hence results contributed greatly to the overall knowledge on status and distribution of gazelle populations in the wild. The project provided important findings on threats and recommendations on the needed interventions, while enhancing capacity of key actors for further monitoring and conservation.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Species monitoring

- Research conducted for the region produced new population data, in particular discovery of approximately 1,000 previously unaccounted gazelles living outside of protected areas, which highlighted the need for multi-use landscape management.
- Analysis demonstrated how gazelle numbers are largely determined by human influences – including numbers of people, land use and infrastructure.

Increasing habitat connectivity

- Developed landscape resistance maps that reveal obstacles to movement of animals, and areas for priority habitat restoration vital to maintaining connectivity – presented to local and national government and protected area manager.

Improving management of protected and conserved areas

- 73 personnel from Altyn-Emel and Charyn National Parks were trained in monitoring of gazelle and habitats.
- Theory of Change model developed to provide a more robust means of assisting policy support and development.

Raising awareness

- The project was featured on BBC South television, with viewing figures of approximately 720,000 people.



© Wildlife Without Borders

This project was implemented by the Marwel Wildlife.



CREATING CO-MANAGED PROTECTED AREAS AND CONSERVATION-LINKED LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES TO SAVE SNOW LEOPARDS AND THEIR PREY SPECIES IN KYRGYZSTAN

Project location:
Kyrgyzstan

Duration:
2020–2022

Target species:
Snow leopard – *Uncia uncia*

Grant budget:
142,747 CHF

This project implemented a community-based conservation approach in the Ala-too Mountains to increase the amount of Snow Leopard habitat under protection and reduce threats to the species. A co-management concept was applied by building partnerships between the government and local communities, and expanding community engagement in conservation along with incentive programmes.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Species monitoring

- A total of 26 working camera traps provided information on Snow Leopards present in the area (14 adults, eight cubs) while prey species survey provided a baseline estimate for the area.

Establishing new protected and conserved areas

- New community co-managed conserved areas established in Aksu Sanctuary (around 76 km²) and in Kochkor (approximately 2,317 km²).

Improving management of protected and conserved areas

- Creation of a community conservation management plan for approximately 200 km² in Shamsky Conservancy.
- Signed Memorandum of Understanding on conservation between project partners, the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas and three local governments in these districts.
- Community conservation programmes were conducted in six villages with various incentive programmes (fruit planting, beekeeping, livestock vaccination, making and selling wool handicrafts) – a total of 3,031 beneficiary households.



© SLT

Improving law enforcement

- 66 rangers in total given recognitions for protecting wildlife, six rangers directly supported in patrolling for illegal wildlife activity – zero poaching cases reported during project implementation.

Raising awareness and education

- Eco-education involved 190 students during in-person excursions and 470 students through online programmes.
- Principles training developed for frontline conservation practitioners (21 participant) on best practices in working with local communities and other stakeholders – materials made available to a wider audience. – 12 people trained directly and materials made available to a wider audience online.



© SLT

This project was implemented by the Snow Leopard Trust.



SUSTAINING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN SNOW LEOPARD CONSERVATION

Project location:
Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Duration:
2020–2022

Target species:
Snow leopard – *Uncia uncia*

Grant budget:
66,614 CHF

This project supported the work of the Land of Snow Leopard (LOSL) Network in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. LOSL seeks to revive traditional conservation practices and create pathways for Indigenous Cultural Practitioners to be equal partners in research and planning for the conservation of Snow Leopards. The project implemented the Elders & Youth and Nature Trunks programmes: aimed at educating and reducing conflicts with wildlife by reviving traditional knowledge and practices that inherently protect nature.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Raising awareness and education

- “Nature trunk” programme manual for teachers was translated into Kyrgyz and Tajik languages along with subtitles for 17 educational videos. Nine teachers from four mountain village schools in the regions of Chui, Talas, Issyk-Kul and Naryn participated – 46 lessons carried out in total.
- Four teachers and 18 students from four regions of Kyrgyzstan took part in the educational eco-camp, held in Chon Kenin National Park.
- The State Education Department endorsed school-based “Friends of the Snow Leopard” environmental and cultural programme.
- Local partner Rural Development Fund developed a documentary film on the conservation project and submitted it to international film competitions and festivals.
- Zhaparkul Raimbekov, a respected Indigenous Elder and knowledge-keeper and a founding member of the LOSL network, engaged over 2,000 people throughout the project, including indigenous Spiritual Practitioners, journalists, activists and government representatives, as well as in schools and cultural institutions.



© SLC

This project was implemented by the Snow Leopard Conservancy.



PRESERVATION OF THE SNOW LEOPARD AS A LIVING SYMBOL OF ALMATY AND KAZAKHSTAN

Project location:
Kazakhstan

Duration:
2020–2021

Target species:
Snow leopard – *Uncia uncia*

Grant budget:
28,250 CHF

This project helped to understand how the growing urbanization of Almaty, Kazakhstan's second largest city, impacts the lifestyle of Snow Leopards, in order to enable consideration for the threatened species' needs in the expansion of human-dominated land use. A multi-faced awareness raising campaign successfully secured support from the city's residents, an essential component in making new urban developments safe for Snow Leopards.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Species monitoring

- Conducted assessment of the Almaty Snow Leopard population viability based on the study of the group of leopards living in the mountains around the city. Assessment demonstrated that five Snow Leopards live within the administrative boundaries of Almaty and 21 in the surrounding area.

Reducing human-wildlife conflict

- Significant overlap between human activity and Snow Leopards recognized among the identified threats – model showing land use effects on the Snow Leopards' presence and survival.

Improving habitat management

- Results and recommendations submitted to contribute to the Northern Tien-Shan Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme (GSLEP) landscape for Snow Leopards management plan, and the national Snow Leopard conservation strategy.
- A tourism developer has adopted the local recommendations resulting from the project.

Raising awareness

- Campaign for pro-active public support included more than 2000 people participating in events including Snow Leopard Week and March for Parks, and a wider audience was reached through extensive media coverage including features on “Outdoor Kazakhstan” TV series, and in the documentary “Lake Kaindy, Wonder Of Nature” that aired in France.
- Additional funds of 19,832 USD leveraged for project follow-up.



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This project was implemented by the Wildlife Without Borders.

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