

# Community-led approaches to tackling illegal wildlife trade

---

Case studies from Central and South Asia



## About the project

For more information about this report, or the People not Poaching project, visit [www.https://www.iied.org/learning-action-for-community-engagement-against-wildlife-crime](https://www.iied.org/learning-action-for-community-engagement-against-wildlife-crime), or contact:


Olivia Wilson-Holt, [Olivia.WilsonHolt@iied.org](mailto:Olivia.WilsonHolt@iied.org)

IIED is a policy and action research organisation. We promote sustainable development to improve livelihoods and protect the environments on which these livelihoods are built. We specialise in linking local priorities to global challenges. IIED is based in London and works in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific, with some of the world's most vulnerable people. We work with them to strengthen their voice in the decision-making arenas that affect them — from village councils to international conventions.

Published by IIED, March 2022

International Institute for Environment and Development  
Third Floor, 235 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DN, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399  
[www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)

 @iied

 [www.facebook.com/theIIED](http://www.facebook.com/theIIED)

Download more publications at <http://pubs.iied.org>



IIED publications may be shared and republished in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). Under the terms

of this licence, anyone can copy, distribute and display the material, providing that they credit the original source and don't use it for commercial purposes or make derivatives. Different licences may apply to some illustrative elements, in which instance the licence will be displayed alongside. IIED is happy to discuss any aspect of further usage. Get more information via [www.iied.org/Creative-Commons](http://www.iied.org/Creative-Commons)

IIED is a charity registered in England, Charity No.800066 and in Scotland, OSCR Reg No.SC039864 and a company limited by guarantee registered in England No.2188452.

## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Protecting snow leopards in the Wakhan Corridor, Afghanistan.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Vidiyal Vanapathukappu Sangam – Participatory Forest Management in India ...</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Friends of the Amur Falcon.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The Whale Shark Conservation Project.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Mapping of poaching communities, understanding customs and providing livelihood to buy conservation support .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Snow Leopard Enterprises .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Ban Ko Katha Bolchha Sarangi: Conservation through music in Nepal.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Crisis to biological management: Rhinoceros, grassland and public engagement in Nepal .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Community-Based Anti-Poaching Operation in Nepal.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Community-based Pangolin Conservation, Nepal.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>The Altai Project .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Community-Based Wildlife Conservation in Tajikistan.....</b>	<b>26</b>

## Acronyms

<b>ANCOT</b>	Association of Nature Conservation Organizations of Tajikistan
<b>BNP</b>	Bardia National Park
<b>CNP</b>	Chitwan National Park
<b>CBAPO</b>	Community-Based Anti-Poaching Operation
<b>CBAPU</b>	Community-Based Anti-Poaching Units
<b>HWC</b>	Human-Wildlife Conflict
<b>IIED</b>	International Institute for Environment and Development
<b>IUCN SULI</b>	International Union for Conservation of Nature Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group
<b>IWT</b>	Illegal Wildlife Trade
<b>NWBCT</b>	Nagaland Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Trust
<b>NTNC</b>	National Trust for Nature Conservation
<b>NTFP</b>	Non-Timber Forest Products
<b>SLE</b>	Snow Leopard Enterprises
<b>SWR</b>	Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve
<b>TAP</b>	The Altai Project
<b>VDC</b>	Village Development Committees
<b>WPA</b>	Wakhan-Pamir Association
<b>WCS</b>	Wildlife Conservation Society
<b>WTI</b>	Wildlife Trust of India
<b>ZSL</b>	Zoological Society of London

## Introduction

Illegal wildlife trade (IWT) is a global conservation issue causing declines of many species of fauna and flora and threatening the livelihoods of people who depend on wildlife. A common approach to tackling IWT is to increase law enforcement efforts. The sheer scale of IWT points to the need for these 'militarised' styles of conservation, however top-down anti-poaching efforts often ignore, or alienate, local communities who can be the 'first line of defence' against IWT.

Community-based anti-poaching initiatives can include a variety of approaches, including:

- Establishing community ranger or game guard programme
- Generating community benefits from tourism or trophy hunting
- Mitigating human-wildlife conflict (HWC)
- Supporting enterprise development
- Educating communities and raising awareness on conservation

There is no best practice approach to engaging communities in anti-poaching activities, with initiatives based on local contexts, taking time to implement. This is part of the reason they are overlooked – poaching is often seen as a crisis requiring an immediate response.

This compilation of case studies seeks to address this problem, by showcasing a wide range of initiatives that have engaged communities in tackling IWT using a variety of approaches in central and south Asia.

The case studies are drawn from a broader, global database called People not Poaching, hosted by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (IUCN-SULi). For more information, visit [www.peoplenotpoaching.org](http://www.peoplenotpoaching.org)

# Protecting snow leopards in the Wakhan Corridor, Afghanistan

## Summary

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has been working in the Wakhan Corridor since 2006 to help conserve the snow leopard. The initiative has adopted an integrated management approach, that includes local governance, ranger patrols, education, construction of predator-proof livestock corrals, a livestock insurance programme, tourism, and research activities. The project is building the capacity of local communities to develop sustainable natural resource management plans. It is hoped that community-led and adaptive management will allow snow leopards to increase in numbers, bring increased stability to local livelihoods and open doors to new opportunities through activities such as tourism.

<b>Country</b>	Afghanistan
<b>Location</b>	The Wakhan Corridor is a narrow strip of land in Badakhshan province, in the far northeast of Afghanistan.
<b>Species affected</b>	Snow Leopard

## The poaching problem

Snow leopards are valuable species and can be a key source of cash for impoverished communities, leading to poaching for furs and live animals for pets or zoos. Furthermore, retaliatory killings of snow leopards for livestock depredation is common among the poor and livestock-dependent communities of the Wakhan and has the potential to drive the species towards local extinction.

In particular, the illegal trade in pelts is a major regional threat and Afghanistan has a long-standing history of involvement in the fur trade. In the past, the local communities in Wakhan have reported that the fur trade has stopped in the area, although it is not clear if this is the case and there continues to be an active demand for snow leopard furs.

## The approach

The project focuses on helping the community to use and develop their capacity for sustainable natural resource management in ways that achieve conservation.

With assistance from WCS, the community developed a governance structure enabling functionality across the geographical area and the two ethnic groups. To achieve this, the Wakhan-Pamir Association (WPA) was established as a legally recognised social organisation belonging to the people of Wakhan and managed by a Board elected by the community. The Board makes decisions on behalf of the community and is mandated to oversee sustainable natural resource management and socio-economic development in Wakhan. The WPA receives support and training in conservation management and livelihood development, working to link the communities across the region, enhancing their strength and ability to protect the snow leopard.

## The strategy

### Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour

- Paid in money community scouts
- Paid in-kind community scouts
- Raising community awareness about wildlife crime penalties and sanctions
- Strengthening and supporting traditional norms and sanctions against IWT

### Increasing incentives for wildlife stewardship

- Tourism

### Decreasing the costs of living with wildlife

- Preventive measures to deter wildlife
- Financial mitigation measures

### Increasing livelihoods that are not related to wildlife

- (Non-wildlife-based) enterprise development/support

### Improving education and awareness

## What has worked and why?

In 2014, WCS facilitated the process of creating the Wakhan National Park, which now protects roughly 70% of snow leopard habitat in the country. In addition, the government's National Environmental Protection Agency officially listed the snow leopard as a legally protected species in 2009, and in 2013, WCS helped draft the National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Plan.

Awareness raising amongst the Afghan military of their impact on endangered species resulted in very few prohibited wildlife furs found in follow up visits to military bases.

## Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/protecting-snow-leopards-wakhan-corridor-afghanistan>

# Vidiyal Vanapathukappu Sangam – Participatory Forest Management in India

## Summary

In 2004, the Forest Department of Kerala had succeeded in the arrest of 23 wildlife poachers. In an attempt to avoid the re-offense of these individuals they formed the Vidiyal Vanapathukappu Sangam, an eco-development committee comprised of reformed poachers, offering them training and an alternative livelihood option. The initiative has been so successful that the model is being replicated in other reserves and sanctuaries across the country.

<b>Country</b>	India
<b>Location</b>	Periyar National Park and the Marayoor district in Kerala, India
<b>Species affected</b>	Bengal Tiger, Sandalwood

## The approach

After the arrest of a gang of 23 wildlife poachers, officials from the Kerala Forest Department decided to start a rehabilitation initiative to stop these individuals from re-offending. After consultations between the forest departments and experts in the field they set up Vidiyal Vanapathukappu Sangam, which they described as an eco-development committee. The group was comprised of reformed poachers, all of whom went through a three-month training period. The group carries out patrols and anti-poaching activities as well as participating in the local tourism industry through safaris, bamboo-rafting and as tourist guides. If any of the individuals involved are found to be carrying out poaching activities, they are expelled from the group indefinitely.

### The strategy

#### Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour

- Paid in money community scouts
- Non-monetary, in-kind incentives for community intelligence

#### Increased incentives for wildlife stewardship

- Tourism

#### Improving education and awareness

## What has worked and why?

Of the 23 individuals involved at the start of the project, six have either left or been expelled. The remaining 17 have found stability through the project and many have been able to send their children on to further education as a result. The group has also facilitated the arrest of over 230 gangs engaged in poaching and smuggling in Periyar National Park and they have transformed the Marayoor Sandalwood reserve into a poaching free zone.

## Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/vidiyal-vanapathukappu-sangam-participatory-forest-management-india>



# Friends of the Amur Falcon

## Summary

In 2013 the Nagaland Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Trust (NWBCT) initiated their 'Friends of the Amur Falcon' campaign. The campaign aims to reduce hunting of the Amur Falcon through education, patrolling and enforcement and the creation of 'Amur Falcon EcoClubs' to involve children through education, crafts and photography.

<b>Country</b>	India
<b>Location</b>	Nagaland
<b>Species affected</b>	Amur Falcon

## The approach

At the core of the initiative is a focus on education. Volunteer locals with varied backgrounds such as teachers and church workers to hunters looking to reform will be trained to deliver educational programmes to children in the local villages about the plight of the Amur Falcon. In addition to this the formation of EcoClubs have further engaged children in Amur Falcon conservation through activities such as fieldwork and crafts. As part of the EcoClubs the children can receive an 'Amur Ambassador' passport which is a symbol of their commitment to Amur Falcon conservation and has proven to be particularly popular.

## The strategy

Improve education and awareness

Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/friends-amur-falcon>

# The Whale Shark Conservation Project

## Summary

The Whale Shark Conservation Project began in 2004, led by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) in a joint venture with the Gujarat Forest Department and Tata Chemicals Ltd. The aim was to encourage the conservation of the whale shark in an area where it had been historically hunted. The project combines awareness campaigns, data collection and conservation incentives to change long held attitudes towards the whale shark and involve local fishermen in their protection. The project has been really successful so far, with a new conservation ethic amongst communities and increased sightings in the area.

<b>Country</b>	India
<b>Location</b>	Gujarat, India with a focus on the areas of Veraval, Sutrapada, Dhamlej and Mangrol.
<b>Species affected</b>	Whale Shark

## The poaching problem

Demand in the 1980s and 90s from international markets for shark fins and meat led to huge declines in the species off the west Indian coast. It is thought that hundreds of whale sharks were killed each year prior to 2000, with fishermen earning between \$2,500-\$7,000 for each individual. Although the whale shark was listed in 2001 on Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, the species continued to be hunted, although at a lesser rate.

## The approach

In 2004 the WTI conducted a survey in the coastal town of Veraval and the inland city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat, places known to have high levels of whale shark hunting. The survey revealed low levels of awareness about the protected status of the whale shark amongst local communities. In response, the WTI launched a campaign to create awareness of threats to the species. The project worked alongside a popular local religious leader named Morari Bapu who depicted the whale shark as an incarnate of God and correlated the whale shark with the Indian tradition of 'Atithi Devo Bhavo' in which guests are likened to gods and deserve equal respect. This was successful in creating a widespread awareness and fishermen began to release and cut free any whale sharks accidentally caught in their nets.

To incentivise this new behaviour the project began to provide compensation to fishermen whose nets were damaged by whale sharks. To help the fishermen verify damage and claim compensation, the project also distributed over 1000 cameras to document these releases. Plus, to increase local involvement 10-15 fishermen were trained initially in the camera use, after which they went on to train others.

The project reinforces the work done each year with two community events: International Whale Shark Day on August 30th and Gujarat Whale Shark Day, on which the fishermen do not go out to sea. Additional community actions such as a street play devised by volunteers have been undertaken.

## The strategy

### Increasing incentives for wildlife stewardship

- Tourism

### Decreasing the costs of living with wildlife

- Financial mitigation measures

### Build and/or support sense of community ownership or stewardship

### Improving education and awareness

## What has worked and why?

Since the implementation of the project there have been 710 documented whale shark rescues from fishing nets. Eight whale sharks have been satellite tagged and there have been recordings of whale shark pups in the area showing that the whale sharks are breeding. Importantly, attitudes have completely changed towards whale sharks, with fishermen turning from hunters to protectors. In addition, the communities have two days a year which are dedicated to the celebration of the species. Finally, the success of the project so far has resulted in plans to extend the project along India's west coast.

The project leaders acknowledge that the involvement of the local religious leader as well as community leaders played an important role in the initial interest shown by the local communities. Additionally, handing responsibility over to the fishermen to document the releases made the compensation process more efficient and resulted in less stress on the whale sharks.

## Factors for success

- Supportive, multi-stakeholder partnerships with a shared vision
- Sufficient time investment in building relationships and trust between the initiative and local communities
- Effective and trusted community leaders
- Transparent and accountable distribution of benefits to local communities

Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/whale-shark-conservation-project>

# Mapping of poaching communities, understanding customs and providing livelihood to buy conservation support

## Summary

The project was implemented by WWF India to work specifically with people from the Mogiya caste, who are involved in hunting and collection of ethnobotanical plants from forest areas. The Mogiya community have traditionally depended on the forest for their food requirements and have a rich knowledge of wildlife, traditional medicines from the forest and animal behaviour. As a result they have been frequently approached by villagers living in nearby forests for their assistance in retaliatory killings of tiger, leopard and ungulates, and by traffickers for the demand of skins and bones and other derivatives. As earnings in the villages are low, people are often attracted to poaching of wildlife and its trade.

The aim of the project is to map all the poaching communities in the landscape and work with them to support alternative livelihoods through vocational training. So far, the project has helped to provide water resources (since water scarcity is high in the area) and solar based lighting systems, as well as work with the government to ensure that all the villagers have a recognised identity including voting ID cards and ration cards. For young children, the project supports admissions to school.

<b>Country</b>	India
<b>Location</b>	The project targets villages located in a corridor connecting two tiger population areas, Sheopur Territorial forests and Kuno Palpur wildlife sanctuary, in Madhya Pradesh.
<b>Species affected</b>	Indian Pangolin, Leopard, Sloth Bear, Tiger

## The poaching problem

Poaching is carried out by a number of different groups including: individuals from local communities, gangs from local communities and gangs from outside the area.

## The approach

The project aims to provide community members with livelihood alternatives in lieu of wildlife use. This includes skills development as well as community infrastructure development (water facilities, solar lights), and government recognition.

### The strategy

#### Increasing livelihoods that are not related to wildlife

- (Non-wildlife-based) enterprise development/support
- Provision of community-level benefits

## What has worked and why?

As an NGO, WWF India has limitations on what they can provide, meaning support and recognition from the government is therefore important for success.

Although WWF India have in-depth knowledge regarding the villages involved in poaching, they do not have a tracking and monitoring system in place to manage this knowledge.

## Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/mapping-poaching-communities-understanding-customs-and-providing-livelihood-buy-conservation>

# Snow Leopard Enterprises

## Summary

In 1998, the Snow Leopard Trust initiated Snow Leopard Enterprises (SLE), which aimed to create sustainable economic opportunities for communities living in snow leopard ranges in order to reduce the motivation to poach. Recognising that people and wildlife will continue to live together, the programme was designed to help local communities prosper in exchange for a conservation commitment. This has been achieved through the development of local handicraft enterprises. All profits from SLE are invested back into conservation initiatives that continue to encourage communities to safeguard the species by improving their livelihoods.

<b>Country</b>	Mongolia (primary), Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and India
<b>Location</b>	The initiative began in Mongolia where snow leopards can be found over a vast area of around 100,000 km <sup>2</sup> ; ranging from the Altai Mountains, the Khangai Mountains, the Hanhoohy Uul and Harkhyra ranges, as well as isolated mountainous sections of the Trans-Altai Gobi.
<b>Species affected</b>	Snow Leopard

## The poaching problem

Nearly one-third of the population in Mongolia practice a semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyle, with livestock constituting the wealth of most herding families. In particular, the sale of wool from livestock is one of the most important sources of cash income in their subsistence economy.

Snow leopards usually hunt wild prey species, but the cats will occasionally target livestock too. Livestock losses from large predators are common in Mongolia and economically serious for the communities, leading to retaliatory killings or the setting of traps. This remains one of the most widespread and direct threats to the species. Hunting mountain ungulates for meat has also resulted in prey declines, which is also depressing snow leopard populations.

## The approach

Snow Leopard Enterprises (SLE) was initiated in 1998 in Mongolia in response to an expressed need for herders to gain improved access to markets in exchange for a conservation commitment aimed at protecting the species from persecution. The programme focusses on value addition, through hand-crafted products that herders are encouraged to sell and are provided training to make, as these are 15-20 times more profitable than raw wool.

The structure of the incentive programme was developed through discussions with herders. Essentially, a conservation contract is drawn up in which each party commits to specific actions. SLE guarantees that it will purchase a number of handicrafts produced by local women and in return herders commit to stop poaching snow leopards and their prey. SLE purchases the products at an agreed price and if herders honour their conservation commitment they receive an additional 20% bonus. Any violation results in a loss of bonus for all participants and if the individual involved is a member of the conservation programme, the whole family loses their membership. This is designed as an incentive to get communities to work together to stop poaching and protect wildlife.

Compliance is monitored by the protected area administration in areas where the project falls within a buffer zone and elsewhere by environmental officers of the local government. These agencies play a policing role and also provide logistical support. They are visibly associated with a programme that is valued by the local community, allowing wildlife managers and administrators to communicate a positive image. Agencies are incentivised as they receive 10% of sales from the income of the project site.

## The strategy

Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour

Decreasing the costs of living with wildlife

Increasing livelihoods that are not related to wildlife

- (Non-wildlife-based) enterprise development/support

Improving education and awareness

## What has worked and why?

By 2003, the programme had grown in popularity throughout the snow leopard's range in Mongolia, with over 200 families participating. Herders began to organise themselves into collective groups, facilitating logistics and increasing the conservation impact. By 2003, sales of handicrafts had increased the per capita income for families by 25%. The programme was expected to continue to grow as marketing opportunities opened up and families can now increase their income by 40%. This money is used to buy food, medicine, clothing, and other necessities.

Herders have increased awareness of the value of protecting snow leopards and their prey. Between 1998 and 2003, there were no reports of snow leopards being killed in any of the project sites. At one site, two ibex were poached leading to local participants not receiving a bonus. These participants expressed a determination not to allow this to happen again and peer pressure has risen as a result. Conservation commitments declared in the contract have created a positive incentive and the programme has improved relations between local authorities, the protected areas, and local people.

By 2003, SLE was active in all Mongolian provinces with snow leopards but had only touched only a fraction of the people affecting wildlife. Expanding the spatial coverage of these programmes while internalising their costs remained a crucial step forward to conserving the species. Today, SLE has expanded to work with more than 400 women from 40 communities in Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and India. By 2014, the programme reached the milestone of \$1 million in total revenue created.

## Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/snow-leopard-enterprises>

# Ban Ko Katha Bolchha Sarangi: Conservation through music in Nepal

## Summary

Across 2016-17, Kumar Paudel, co-founder of Greenhood Nepal, spent time interviewing individuals in Nepal who were in prison for IWT offences. He discovered that many of the people he spoke to were unaware of the potential consequences of engaging in wildlife crime and expressed regret at their actions. Hearing the hardship these people faced, particularly the impact it had on their families, motivated Greenhood Nepal to create a series of songs telling the stories of those arrested for IWT. The songs have been performed in communities as well as broadcast on community radio stations and via social media, reaching around 10 million people.

<b>Country</b>	Nepal
<b>Location</b>	Central Nepal, focusing on communities that border important wildlife habitats.
<b>Species affected</b>	Asian Elephant, Asiatic Black Bear, Bengal Tiger, Chinese Pangolin, Greater One-Horned Rhino, Himalayan Black Bear, Leopard, Musk Deer, Red Panda, Snow Leopard

## The poaching problem

Interviews with individuals in prison in Nepal for engaging in IWT showed that the majority of poaching is being carried out by poor, rural and largely marginalised indigenous communities. The primary motive of those engaging in IWT is the desire to earn extra money, with some also seeing it as a less tiring job to alternative income sources.

## The approach

Greenhood Nepal developed the project as a response to interviews they carried out with over 100 people who had been arrested for wildlife crimes in Nepal, mainly those involved in rhino, tiger and red panda poaching. During these interviews they discovered that the majority of the respondents had very little understanding of the punishments and sanctions of the crimes that they committed and expressed regret at their actions. Many were serving lengthy sentences or had been given fines they couldn't afford to pay, resulting in hardship for them and their families.

As a result, Greenhood set out to share stories about the difficulties faced by those arrested for wildlife crime in Nepal, and to highlight the consequences of illegal wildlife trade for both humans and wildlife. This collection of stories, called Ban Ko Katha (stories of forest), are performed as songs using the traditional music of the Gandharva indigenous people.

### The strategy

#### Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour

- Raising community awareness about wildlife crime penalties and sanctions

#### Improving education and awareness

## Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/pokok-using-anthropology-mitigate-orangutan-killing-and-human-orangutan-conflict-borneo>



# Crisis to biological management: Rhinoceros, grassland and public engagement in Nepal

## Summary

In 2007 Zoological Society of London (ZSL) initiated a project to help conserve the greater one-horned rhino and Terai grassland habitat in Nepal. Included in the main objectives was strengthening and increasing the capacity of communities in monitoring and surveillance of both the rhino and anti-poaching. The project also aimed to implement more effective HWC resolution measures as well as improve public engagement with and integrate local communities in conservation efforts. Project achievements include better awareness and engagement of communities, reduced human-wildlife conflict and improved livelihoods.

<b>Country</b>	Nepal
<b>Location</b>	The project took place across three national parks, each of which is home to varying numbers of greater one-horned rhino. These were Chitwan National Park (CNP), Bardia National Park (BNP) and Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (SWR).
<b>Species affected</b>	Greater One-Horned Rhino

## The poaching problem

In 2006, ZSL carried out an initial scoping exercise and poaching was found to be the main cause of decline of the rhino population. This had been heightened due to political trouble at the time in Nepal which had led to a lack of law enforcement and weakened anti-poaching activities. The project also found that poverty was not a major cause of poaching in the region, which was largely carried out by external agents. They did however identify some community support for poaching in the poorest villages.

## The approach

The overarching aim of the project was to develop a sustainable and long-term conservation plan for rhinos in Nepal. In order to achieve this, the project was intended to improve governance, integration and opportunities for local communities.

Specific community-based activities included:

- Supporting multi-stakeholder monitoring and anti-poaching systems
- Developing practical solutions to reduce crop and physical damage by wild animals
- Developing a long-term buffer zone community development strategy
- Building capacity for sustainable livelihood skills
- Promoting public engagement at all levels
- Initiating community theatre to education and raise awareness amongst the local communities

At the start of the project, certain marginalised communities were not receiving adequate benefits from the park and were thus more likely to engage in poaching activities due to a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities. The project intended to provide these communities with training in income-generating (non-wildlife based) programmes, such as mushroom farming and hand-loom weaving.

To help reduce dependence on the parks, the project intended to initiate more community participatory activities, including sustainable management of community forests for non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and job creation. It was hoped that the effective conservation of rhinos would lead to increased ecotourism opportunities too.

## The strategy

### Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour

- Paid in-kind community scouts
- Monetary incentives for community intelligence
- Raising community awareness about wildlife crime penalties and sanctions
- Strengthening and supporting traditional norms and sanctions against IWT

### Increasing incentives for wildlife stewardship

- Tourism

### Decreasing the costs of living with wildlife

- Preventive measures to deter wildlife
- Financial mitigation measures

### Increasing livelihoods that are not related to wildlife

- Non-wildlife-based enterprise development/support

### Improving education and awareness

## What has worked and why?

Although the impact of the project was still being assessed when the final report was written there were some clear results highlighted:

- The project was successful in incentivising communities through sustainable livelihood opportunities and improved public awareness
- Particular progress was made in in community engagement in meaningful rhino conservation

Instrumental to information gathering on poaching was the integration of community youth anti-poaching groups into the forest corridor connecting Nepalese and Indian national parks.

A census of the rhino population was used to monitor the population of rhino in Nepal. In BNP there was no rhino poaching from 2008, primarily through community engagement and their subsequent role in anti-poaching. In BNP there were also significant benefits from human-wildlife conflict resolution measures. Community surveys and discussions were used to indicate the trend in HWC incidents. Fencing led to fewer reports of crop raiding and the use of alternative non-palatable cash crops led to higher commercial benefits, providing economic resilience. Farmers were motivated to learn new crop management and processing techniques as a result.

In BNP the main poaching group was identified and exposed by the community, which led to a number of local men joining a community-based anti-poaching unit. Consistent messaging through education and community liaison officers reinforced this message and helped to influence the generally positive attitude in dealing with poaching and poachers.

The successes in BNP were primarily down to remarkable community support, which was helped by extensive education and awareness raising programmes.

## Factors for success

- Devolved decision-making power so local communities have a voice in creating or co-creating solutions
- Clear and tangible benefits to local communities from wildlife

## Challenges

Nepal was still highly politically charged whilst the project was being carried out and poor governance meant certain situations couldn't not be resolved. Tense politics within partner organisations and frequent changing of key staff made engagement difficult in some areas.

### Factors limiting success

- Lack of supportive national policy/legislation for devolved governance of natural resources
- Lack of coordinated and coherent sectoral policies/legislation
- Lack of supportive, multi-stakeholder partnerships with a shared vision

Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/crisis-biological-management-rhinoceros-grassland-and-public-engagement-nepal>

# Community-Based Anti-Poaching Operation in Nepal

## Summary

Poaching of wildlife for illegal international markets was widespread in Nepal in 2002. In response, the government initiated anti-poaching measures that involved local communities. Named 'Community-Based Anti-Poaching Operation' (CBAPO), the idea was to involve local people in patrolling and awareness raising to reduce illegal activities in wildlife reserves and national parks. Since implementation communities are actively participating in anti-poaching operations, with poaching greatly reduced. In 2014 Nepal achieved a zero poaching year for rhinos, tigers and elephants.

<b>Country</b>	Nepal
<b>Location</b>	CBAPO has been implemented throughout Nepal in wildlife reserves and national parks.
<b>Species affected</b>	Greater One-Horned Rhino

## The poaching problem

Certain high value species, such as rhinos, tigers and pangolins are at particular risk from poaching, driven by demand from international markets. Usually, middlemen target poor local residents to carry out poaching and other illegal activities. The primary factors contributing to poaching are unemployment, a lack of awareness, poverty and volatile politics.

## The approach

The idea behind CBAPO was to involve local people in wildlife conservation by allowing them to manage their own natural resources. CBAPO first came about because the youth residing near protected areas were keen to involve themselves in anti-poaching activities, organising themselves into groups to mitigate poaching. CBAPO started in the Nawalparasi district in 2002/2003, which the youths soon declared as a poaching free area. Community-based anti-poaching units (CBAPUs) were subsequently set up. Local poachers are included in the CBAPUs and forest monitoring teams, with the aim of self-motivating them to stop carrying out illegal activities.

### The strategy

#### Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour

- Un-paid (voluntary) community scouts
- Non-monetary, in-kind incentives for community intelligence
- Raising community awareness about wildlife crime penalties and sanctions
- Strengthening and supporting traditional norms and sanctions against IWT

#### Increasing livelihoods that are not related to wildlife

#### Improving education and awareness

## What has worked and why?

A survey carried out in Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve found that CBAPO are effective, particularly in raising awareness and seizing traps placed for wild animals and birds, as well as the rescue of wildlife. For example, poacher groups have been chased away and tiger traps destroyed. Similarly, the CBAPO of Khata Corridor apprehended four poachers from India and also seized a number of weapons and traps as a result of local community intelligence.

Patrolling, surveillance, information gathering, rescuing wildlife and raising awareness were the main activities of CBAPO which significantly contributed to achieving zero poaching at SWR. In particular, increased levels of awareness in the communities was the major achievement of CBAPO, as there has been a high level of participation of local people in conservation activities.

In implementing CBAPO, Nepal has proved to the world that zero poaching can be achieved through the participation of local people, achieving 365 days of zero poaching twice: in 2011 for rhinos, and for 12 months ending February 2014, for rhinos, tiger and elephants.

### Factors for success

- Supportive, multi-stakeholder partnerships with a shared vision

### Challenges

A survey revealed that a lack of financial resource was seen as the greatest hindrance for carrying out tasks in a more organised and effective way. In addition, more skills development training should be provided to the people of buffer zone. The morale of the CBAPO members also needs to be boosted through incentives, rewards, anti-poaching training and security assurance.

### Factors limiting success

- Lack of long-term donor support that is flexible, adaptive and/or based on realistic time goals

Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/community-based-anti-poaching-operation-nepal>

# Community-based Pangolin Conservation, Nepal

## Summary

The need to raise public awareness about the threatened status of the Chinese pangolin and the laws that exist to protect the animal in Nepal has put community-engagement at the heart of a conservation programme in the east of the country. The project is led by National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) with support from the ZSL EDGE Fellowship scheme. Set up in 2012, the project aims to collect baseline information on ecology, status, distribution and specific threats facing the Chinese pangolin, and to generate support for their conservation.

There has been a genuine interest and support for the conservation programme, which helps to stigmatise and discourage local poachers. There is a virtuous circle driven by social cohesion and community values, backed by the threat of enforcement.

<b>Country</b>	Nepal
<b>Location</b>	The project focuses on two villages (Nangkholyang and Dokhu) in the Taplejung municipality in the east of Nepal — a transit point for the illegal trade in pangolin into Tibet and India.
<b>Species affected</b>	Chinese Pangolin

## The poaching problem

Chinese pangolins are one of two pangolin species that occur in Nepal. They are widely distributed in non-protected areas, but local communities — often unaware that the pangolin is endangered — have been increasingly involved in the illegal trade.

The price that illegal traders pay for scales varies at local level, depending on the bargaining experience of local individuals and their knowledge of the trade. In the project area, the value can reach US\$700 per kg; a 350 per cent increase in local value over the past eight years. Most of the scales are fed into the international market, and their value at their final destination is unknown.

## The approach

Local villagers are engaged through conservation sub-committees, set up within the existing local administration network. Through training workshops, these individuals learn about the Chinese pangolin and the consequences of illegal trade, which they then in turn share with their communities. The goal is to tackle widespread ignorance about these increasingly rare animals, and to strengthen community commitment to stop illegal trade.

The project was designed on the basis of existing local governance. In Nepal, districts are divided into administrative units run by Village Development Committees (VDCs). These VDCs are each subdivided into nine wards. Working with two VDCs, the project has established a pangolin conservation subcommittee in each ward.

A representative from each sub-committee was then appointed to a VDC level conservation committee, tasked with launching and supporting conservation activities to raise awareness and control illegal trade in the village's jurisdiction.

## The strategy

### Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour

- Non-monetary, in-kind incentives for community intelligence
- Raising community awareness about wildlife crime penalties and sanctions

### Build and/or support a sense of community ownership or stewardship

### Improving education and awareness

## What has worked and why?

The sub-committees form the front line of support and endorsement for the project's aims. Through them, a total of 263 local people have been affiliated in conservation work, including surveys, community meetings, workshops and school teaching programmes. Local leaders were involved in project design from the outset, and the main Nepalese project implementor was himself a resident of one of the villages, which boosted interest.

Before the project began, villagers who came across a pangolin by chance would more likely than not have killed it to have its meat as a delicacy and the scales to sell. Now, however, there is evidence of a change in attitudes.

The role of the sub-committees in reducing illegal trade in pangolins works on various levels. They are educating those locals who did not realise that killing pangolins was illegal, and exerting their influence and authority over neighbours, relatives and friends who may have been knowingly engaged in illegal activities. Finally, they discourage outsiders from coming into the villages in search of scales because they are ready to inform the authorities and security services.

Local press interest in the conservation project has helped to build stronger community self-esteem, and there is a sense among villagers that their efforts could help them to develop local tourism and gain government support.

Overall, there has been a genuine interest and support for the conservation programme, which helps to stigmatise and discourage local poachers. There is a virtuous circle driven by social cohesion and community values, backed by the threat of enforcement.

- Communication and raising awareness about the threatened status of local animals influences attitudes and wins support for conservation.
- Conservation programmes need to bring benefits, directly or indirectly, to local communities if their support and engagement is to last.
- Illegal trade at a local level is not always intentional.

## Challenges

- There is little direct benefit to the communities from participating in pangolin conservation.
- The initial high levels of interest and curiosity during the start-up phase of the project could be difficult to maintain.
- Illegal trade is more widespread and more sophisticated than initially thought realised.
- Illegal traders who used to operate openly — for example coming into villages to buy scales - are now setting up underground networks.

## Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/community-based-pangolin-conservation-nepal>

# The Altai Project

## Summary

The Altai Project (TAP) aims to link the protection of nature with sustainable livelihoods in the Greater Altai region. Between 2009 and 2015, TAP focussed its efforts on both snow leopard and raptor conservation and research. This included supporting campaigns to reroute a proposed pipeline, promote transparency and rule-of-law in mining projects, and providing small grants to long-term partners in the region to support conservation and Altaian indigenous lifestyles and practices.

<b>Country</b>	Russia
<b>Location</b>	The Russian Altai region covers an area of around 93,239 km <sup>2</sup> and is home to over 200,000 people.  Local indigenous peoples have managed to retain much of their traditional culture and lifestyles, with many practicing semi-nomadic livestock agriculture as well as subsistence hunting and fishing.
<b>Species affected</b>	Eastern Imperial Eagle, Saker Falcon, Snow Leopard, Steppe Eagle

## The poaching problem

Live saker falcons are usually sold for tens of thousands of dollars to wealthy Middle Easterners who use them for falconry (hunting). Snow leopards are poached for their skins, and their prey species are poached for trophies (e.g. argali).

Live capture by poachers of saker falcons has decimated the bird's population in Altai and much of its Central Asian range. Poaching with snares and other means is the biggest threat – even in the most inaccessible areas - to the remaining small, but critical populations of snow leopards in the region.

Community members are involved along with other groups and snare poaching is entirely community initiated. In remote regions such as Altai, snaring may be the only source of income for a local family and given demand for animal parts trade can be quite profitable.

## The approach

The initiative is supporting scientific studies into these species as well as engaging with local communities to incentivise and improve their circumstances so they are less motivated to poach.

### Raptors

Since 2011, TAP has collaborated with and supported local researchers on raptor conservation. Local researchers also collaborate closely with relevant local NGOs and other organisations, to share data and explore trends. If electrocuted birds are found, the evidence is collected and complaints filed with the local authorities who collect fines from the responsible utility.

### Snow leopards

As of 2014, fewer than 100 snow leopards remained in Russia. TAP collaborates with other local NGOs to provide financial support, technical and scientific expertise, and equipment, providing many camera-traps, developing and installing anti-poaching monitoring devices, designing data recording technology, and financially supporting numerous surveying and anti-poaching expeditions.

Since 1998, conservation and enforcement efforts in Altai have supported anti-poaching initiatives, including inter-agency anti-poaching brigades and Game Management Committee patrol teams. However, the vast area, limited staff, and other resources limit the effectiveness of patrols. In addition, the snow leopards' range is largely outside of protected areas, leaving the animals vulnerable to poaching.



Several projects have been initiated to develop alternative income sources for local communities, however, residents living in remote areas often miss this opportunity. A large ecotourism development is aimed at increasing local economic benefits through wildlife conservation.

In particular, TAP supports snow leopard conservation by:

- Fundraising for local conservation, research, and enforcement activities
- Facilitating the development and testing of poacher detection systems
- Supporting ecotourism infrastructure development and marketing efforts

## The strategy

### Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour

- Paid in money community scouts
- Performance-based payments/incentives for patrolling or guarding
- Un-paid (voluntary) community scouts
- Monetary incentives for community intelligence
- Raising community awareness about wildlife crime penalties and sanctions
- Strengthening and supporting traditional norms and sanctions against IWT

### Increasing incentives for wildlife stewardship

- Tourism

### Increasing livelihoods that are not related to wildlife

- (Non-wildlife-based) enterprise development/support
- Provision of community-level benefits

### Improving education and awareness

## What has worked and why?

In 2010, when surveys began, only 4 snow leopards were detected in the entire region. In 2018, 36 individuals were identified. Sightings were not only by the camera-traps but also by communities and tourists. The snow leopard population is becoming healthier, has extended to new areas, and the number of poaching incidents has dramatically decreased. In particular, the camera traps have made people fearful of acting illegally and snare issues have significantly decreased. However, incidents of poaching are probably increasing for the saker falcon.

Community buy-in, engagement, and participation are absolutely critical to conservation successes. Local residents have expert knowledge of the landscape and animals within it. In addition, their cultural and spiritual practices also strongly value the presence of and connection to wild animals and sacred spaces - a critical factor in community-led conservation successes.

The importance of working and communicating as much as possible in the larger network of groups was crucial to early success. The key was working in partnership with both big and very small NGOs, and establishing a very trusting two-way communication channel.

## Factors for success

- Supportive national policy/legislation on sustainable use of natural resources
- Supportive, multi-stakeholder partnerships with a shared vision
- Sufficient time investment in building relationships and trust between the initiative and local communities

## Challenges

With the Russian government's repression of civil society and difficult international geopolitical relations, it has become very difficult to work in the region and Russia as a whole. Although Russia's framework for conservation was quite strong in the 1990s and 2000s, there has always been inadequate funding and mechanisms for implementation, leading to short-term, project-based funding that was limited and sporadic.

Since 2012, the "Foreign Agent" law established by Putin's administration has led to very strong repression of civil society and NGOs across Russia, and especially in the Altai region. As a result, conservation NGOs become activists or small initiative groups, with no organisational infrastructure or compensation, taking greater risks, and sometimes ending up in dangerous situations, often discredited by the media.

TAP continues to support work in the region, but it's more difficult to get money to the ground. In the US and Europe, funders are nervous about working in Russia, because they either don't understand the situation or are worried about their own risks or the risks facing activists on the ground.

In the 2010s, the high degree of government-sponsored corruption and intentional destruction of environmental law, illegal activities proliferated within the vulnerable protected area network, including unsustainable mining, logging, other extractive industry practices, and poaching. Government-supported corruption is a real barrier to success and is probably the single biggest challenge in term of long-term outcomes.

## Factors limiting success

- Lack of coordinated and coherent sectoral policies/legislation
- Lack of long-term donor support that is flexible, adaptive and/or based on realistic time goals
- Lack of devolved decision-making power so local communities have a voice in creating or co-creating solutions

Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/altai-project>

# Community-Based Wildlife Conservation in Tajikistan

## Summary

In the past, unregulated hunting and poaching of Tajikistan's wildlife not only threatened species such as the argali, Tajik markhor, urial sheep, Asiatic ibex, and snow leopard, it also compromised local peoples ability to draw sustenance from the land. Local people recognised that these wildlife declines would not only deprive them of their own hunting opportunities but would also cause the loss of related income opportunities and cultural heritage.

Since 2008, with the support of wildlife conservation and development organisations conservancies - land that is owned and managed by families or associations of local village hunters - have been established. Revenues generated from guided hiking, game-viewing, wildlife photography, and hunting support the work of local rangers and nature guides, and any surpluses are invested in local development projects. This approach provides revenues to local families and motivates them to refrain from unsustainable practices and protects wildlife populations and the habitat they rely on.

<b>Country</b>	Tajikistan
<b>Location</b>	The following Tajikistan conservancies are included in this initiative: Parcham, Yoquti Darshay, Yuz Palang, Burgut, Guldara, Obi Safed, Rohi Abreshim, Sarsarak, M-Sayod, Saidi Tagnob, Morkhur, Kuhistoni Mastchoh Travel, and M-Bukhori.
<b>Species affected</b>	Argali Sheep, Markhor, Severtsov Argali, Siberian Ibex, Snow Leopard, Urial

## The poaching problem

The people living in the remote areas of Tajikistan live an almost subsistence existence, relying almost exclusively upon livestock for food and income generation. Food was supplemented by illegal and unsustainable subsistence hunting of ungulates, as well as for sport - which was exacerbated by the availability of guns.

In-depth interviews with the traditional hunters of remote valleys revealed that major motives for unsustainable hunting mainly has root in a lack of alternative income-generating and employment opportunities which made irresponsible hunting bloom and in some remote places even become livelihood approach. This long-lasting unsustainable hunting impacted negatively upon numerous wild species and threatened their viability.

For the snow leopard, livestock provide a source of food, and increasingly so as populations of its natural prey – wild goats, argali and other wild sheep, and ibex – are being depleted as habitat is lost to livestock that overgrazes the vegetation (leaving little for these wild mountain ungulates), from unsustainable hunting for meat by locals, and illegal trophy hunting. This problem was exacerbated by prohibiting hunting to local people, which disenfranchised them and made their compliance with laws minimal.

When a snow leopard kills livestock the results can be catastrophic for the herders whose entire livelihoods depend on their herd, and farmers may retaliate by killing snow leopards. It has been estimated that up to half of all snow leopard deaths are a consequence of human-wildlife conflict.

## The approach

Community-based wildlife management is a recent development in Tajikistan. In some areas, local traditional hunters increasingly realised that the declines of wildlife were a direct effect of unregulated and intensive hunting and that such declines would ultimately not only deprive them of their own hunting opportunities but also cause the loss of related income opportunities and cultural heritage.

Since 2008 wildlife management areas - or conservancies - that are protected by families or associations of local hunters have been established with the support of wildlife conservation and development organisations such as the Association of Nature Conservation Organizations of Tajikistan (ANCOT). Local ex-hunters help to prevent community members and outsiders from poaching. With wildlife numbers on the rise legal and regulated trophy hunting, and other revenue-generating activities such as guided hiking, game-viewing, wildlife photography, was introduced.

Revenues generated from these enterprises support the work of local rangers and nature guides, and any surpluses are invested in local development projects. This approach provides revenues to local families and motivates them to refrain from poaching and to protect wildlife populations and the habitats they rely on.

ANCOT and its partners address the conservation of the entire ecosystem and its biodiversity, including carnivores like the snow leopard, and the development of the local community in a way that is sustainable and does not harm their environment and wildlife. The initiative specifically seeks to address the motivation for communities' involvement with poaching and the IWT. The central tenet of the project is that without community support and engagement, the poaching problem will not be resolved.

## The strategy

### Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour

- Paid in money community scouts
- Performance-based payments/incentives for patrolling or guarding
- Un-paid (voluntary) community scouts
- Paid in-kind community scouts
- Raising community awareness about wildlife crime penalties and sanctions

### Increasing incentives for wildlife stewardship

- Tourism
- Trophy hunting

### Decreasing the costs of living with wildlife

- Preventive measures to deter wildlife

### Increasing livelihoods that are not related to wildlife

- (Non-wildlife-based) enterprise development/support
- Provision of community-level benefits

## What has worked and why?

Poaching and IWT have decreased and communities are benefiting from the implementation of the initiative. Populations of wildlife have recovered (or are recovering), and the livelihoods of local communities have improved.

Today, community-based conservancies cover almost 300,000 ha of wildlife habitat, which is protected by community rangers and provides excellent opportunities for observation of animals and for responsible and sustainable hunting tourism. In summary, some of the positive outcomes include:

- Around 300 jobs in Tajikistan have been created.
- Around 20,000 people benefit indirectly.
- Around 2500 ibex, 1500 argali, 2000 markhor, and 70 snow leopards are protected.

Traditional poachers now have effective economic incentives not to poach, have changed their 'poaching mentality' and are now genuine protectors of wildlife. Trophy hunting of wild ungulates and nature tourism generally has proven to be a powerful incentive for local communities to conserve the snow leopard and their prey.

### Factors for success

- Supportive national policy/legislation on sustainable use of natural resources
- Sufficient time investment in building relationships and trust between the initiative and local communities
- Clear and tangible benefits to local communities from wildlife

### Challenges

#### Factors limiting success

- Lack of long-term donor support that is flexible, adaptive and/or based on realistic time goals
- Lack of supportive, multi-stakeholder partnerships with a shared vision
- Lack of clearly defined tenure or resource use rights

Find out more:

<https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/community-based-wildlife-conservation-tajikistan>

The scale of illegal wildlife trade (IWT) internationally is a conservation crisis and tackling it is seen as a race against time. As a quarter of the world's land is owned or managed by communities, they must be central to conservation efforts – and community engagement is already internationally recognised as important to the global effort to tackle IWT. But because community engagement strategies are complex and take time to implement, not enough initiatives are being supported.

This compilation of case studies seeks to address this problem by showcasing a wide range of successful initiatives from Central and South Asia that have engaged communities in tackling IWT in different ways. However, these need to be scaled up and scaled out, learning from experience and adapting approaches to fit specific contexts and to meet specific challenges.



International Institute for Environment and Development  
Third Floor, 235 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DN, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399  
[www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)

Funded by:



This compilation was funded as part of the 'Learning and Action Platform for Community Engagement against IWT' (LeAP) project, funded by the UK Government's Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund. The project is coordinated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the UK Government.



## Project Materials

---

**Biodiversity, Natural Resource  
Management**

---

*Keywords:*

Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT), Community  
conservation