



# SNOW LEOPARD CONSERVANCY

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## Nurturing the Next Generation of Environmental Stewards in the Heart of Nepal's Snow Leopard Country

### INTRODUCTION

The Junior Ranger Program uses a curriculum guide developed by the Snow Leopard Conservancy's Program Coordinator Nagendra Budhathoki. Nagendra received training in Environmental Education during a year with the Audubon Center of the North Woods, and a summer at Lassen Volcanic National Park sponsored by the US Park Service's VIP Program. Under a joint US-Nepalese initiative, ended in 2000, Nagendra adapted the Park Service's Junior Ranger curriculum for schools in his homeland of Dolpa in remote far western Nepal. The program is continuing under the Snow Leopard Conservancy's sponsorship and Nagendra's supervision.

Nagendra developed the guide to be, in his words, *"holistic and flexible rather than stratified, generic and rigid as is common in Nepal's schools. The curriculum guide is not an end in itself but is meant to evolve. I claim no authorship, so that teachers and students feel ownership in the guide—along with the power to change it if necessary instead of seeing it as something handed down to them by a more "educated and knowledgeable" higher entity."*



Phoksundo Lake is the jewel of the National Park

The guide covers Energy Flow in the Biosphere, Pollution, Population, Basic Needs for Life, Health and the Environment, Natural Resources, and Corrective Measures. The curriculum has sessions on what a national park is and why we need them, how to calculate the percentage of Nepal's total land that is officially protected, and what children themselves can do to protect their environment. Two classroom sessions are devoted entirely to learning about snow leopards and their place in the high-altitude ecosystem. The Snow Leopard Conservancy's *Good Livestock Management* poster, the Ramailo Kitaab books, and group activities are used to teach students about the animals found in the park.

Darla Hillard  
Education Director

*Promoting community-based stewardship of the endangered snow leopard, its prey and habitat*



Nagendra at left

**A Note from Nagendra:**

The Junior Ranger Program (JRP) is most fortunate to have the leadership of Binod Dhakal, Headmaster of Dunai Boarding School and dedicated conservationist. In 2004 we also brought Rabindra Shahi, a local youth, on board as Assistant Program Coordinator. As background to Binod's report below, I would like to say that parents are encouraged to participate and observe the classroom sessions and other activities so that the community has a better understanding of and involvement in what their kids are learning. Community support is key to the success of JRP and one reason it is still running despite the adverse political state.

The JRP instructors have been very careful to be as politically neutral as possible, but have not compromised on teaching that Shey-Phoksundo National Park is not just a government institution, but also a symbol of heritage and resource for the local people. The teachers are to be commended for working in a difficult conflict situation, where schools are in the hot zones of the conflict.

The teachers support each other by meeting to share their experiences at mid-term and year-end, and through inter-school visits and school exchanges. Knowledge acquired from the curriculum is put into action through small community based conservation and development activities within the village so that kids can learn about team work and put their classroom knowledge into play. This also gives them a sense of accomplishment and hope for the future (so necessary in conflict areas) — that they can make a change. It affects the entire community, which has adopted the environmental and conservation messages.

**Progress Report, 2004**

*By Binod Dhakal,  
Dolpa District JRP Coordinator*

The Junior Ranger Program has grown from ten schools at program inception, to twenty-one schools in the buffer zone of Shey Phoksundo National Park. Six of the schools were first-time participants in 2004. The school year runs June to June, with a long winter break. So this report actually covers just about half of the year's activities.



Junior Rangers restored the Park gate

**Overall Program Objectives**

- To provide opportunities for increased knowledge and appreciation of Shey Phoksundo National Park; to instill positive attitudes and foster stewardship and responsibility for national parks and natural resources they protect;
- To provide basic understanding of the interrelationships of components and factors of the environment. To explore, assess and identify environmental problems, and develop a sense of urgency and take action towards solution;
- To promote community-based stewardship of snow leopards and other wildlife in the eco-system.

**Teacher Training Objectives**

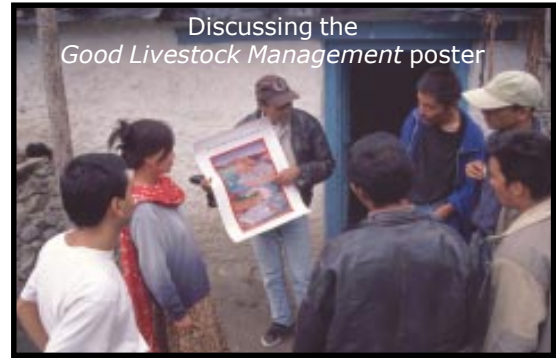
- To make teachers able and confident to teach the Junior Ranger sessions effectively;
- To raise awareness of the increasing environmental imbalance and its effect;
- To introduce basic principles and tools of Appreciative, Participatory Planning and Action (APPA) and Appreciative Inquiry (IA) among teachers, so they can use those skills and tools to run Junior Ranger sessions;
- To introduce Junior Ranger curriculum to instructors of the newly selected schools and share stories of success and difficulties during the program by experienced instructors.

## Contribution from Program Partner

Mr. Bhupendra Mukhia, Program Director of the Dolpa Educational, Social and Environmental Reservation Team (DESERT), provided logistical and resource assistance during the training. DESERT also provided the training hall and use of a camera. DESERT works with teachers to bring conservation education into the schools.

## Other Participants

Ms. Ganesh Kumari Hamal, Chairperson-DESERT; Mr. Angad Hamal, Founder DESERT; Mr. Gopal Bom, Director-Rural Community Development Center and coordinator of Mugu Junior Ranger Program; Mr. Nagendra Budhathoki, Snow Leopard Conservancy, Kathmandu.



## Teacher Training Methodology - Aimed at Making Learning More Participatory

The training was held in Dunai, the district headquarters of Dolpa, from 7-8 August 2004. It was led by Binod Dhakal, Bhupendra Mukhia, and Rabindra Shahi (SLC's Assistant Program Coordinator) with support by Nagendra Budhathoki. Each school was represented by a teacher participating in the training. Methods included group discussion, group presentation, observation of a Junior Ranger class being taught by experienced instructor, experience sharing (experienced instructor to newly selected), story-telling/games/role playing, and poster competition of snow leopard among the instructors.

## Training Schedule

### Day 1

- Welcome to the participants, and ice-breaker introduction among the participants;
- Concept of Appreciative Inquiry;
- Discovery – Personal. Participants explore the good things about each other, about each school, and about themselves;
- Discovery – Environmental education. Participants explore good things about non formal education, Formal education, and informal education;
- Break for tea and snacks;
- Brief introduction of Snow Leopard Conservancy, Shey-Phoksundo National Park, and the connection among schools and their natural gift Shey Phoksundo National Park;
- Briefing on APPA and Appreciative Inquiry;
- Initiative game requiring communication, cooperation, teamwork, trust and respect;
- Group discussion about the program, share ideas among experienced and new instructors about session and program;
- Prepare annual plan of activities to be carried out;
- Beginning discussions on Junior Ranger curriculum.

### Day 2

- Review of Day 1;
- Continuation of curriculum session;
- Tea break and informal talk;
- Introduction to what is a snow leopard, its importance, habitat and life cycle;
- Game: "Manab Gatho";
- Nagendra Budhathoki answers questions about the program and describes his contribution to the program by designing it and finding sponsorship;
- Break for tea and snacks;
- Class observation of new and experienced instructors, held at Dunai School;
- Discuss, design and finalize seasonal calendar, school mapping and resource mapping;
- Discuss timeline of JRP session, reporting, certificate distribution, park visit, payment system, logistic support, postal service, communication and other related logistics regarding smooth flow of program in respective schools;
- Explanation of the materials; accountability and responsibility for the materials.

## School Activity Profiles

In the 21 participating schools there are 351 students, of whom 230 are boys, and 121 are girls. Along with the environmental education curriculum, schools carried out the following activities:

### *Bhagawati Lower Secondary*

In this area a different Maoist "in-charge" put a restriction on the program, thus it has been postponed

### *Mahadev Primary*

Same problem facing as Bhagawati Lower Secondary School

### *Janak Primary*

Drawing competition, to keep kids familiar about animals and plants

### *Kasturi Lower Secondary*

Essay competition, to make able to express their view about their environment

### *Mahakavi Devkota Primary*

Village cleanup. The village needed cleaning and they wanted the program to be liked by villagers

### *Tripurakot Lower Secondary*

Inter-school visit, to share ideas and experience



### *Jyoti Primary*

Inter-school visit

### *Balbhadra Primary*

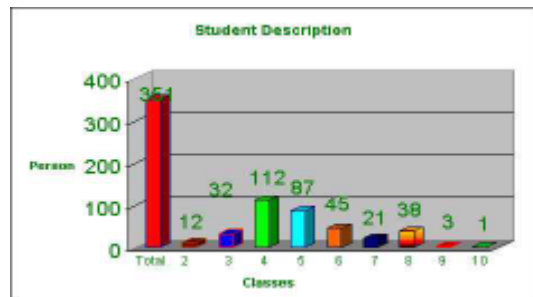
Art and craft work, to reuse waste material

### *Tapricha Lower Secondary*

Tour to amchi (traditional medicine) hospital to learn about herbs and herbal medicine

### *Subhakamana Primary*

Village campaign against setting fire in the jungle, to make villagers aware of destruction after fire



### *Balmandir Primary*

Street drama, to show interrelationship among schools in protecting the environment

### *Ladies Feeder Hostel*

Bazaar cleanup, to bring change — showing by doing

### *Saraswati Higher Secondary*

Bazaar cleanup

### *Manma Primary*

Village cleanup campaign, to show villagers we have to keep our village clean ourselves

### *Bhanubhakta Primary*

Pit toilet, to keep school premises clean and healthy

### *Bhakti Thapa Primary*

Wildlife and vegetation-related folk song created by the kids. In most villages the easiest way to gather people is folk song and dance competition

### *Sundresherpa Primary*

Plantation to keep their school environment green

### *Araniko Lower Secondary*

Quiz contest to show villagers and students about the importance of snow leopard

### *Sagarmatha Primary*

Dug a rubbish pit, to keep their school premises neat and clean. School is near campsite of Upper Dolpo trekking route

### *Tansa Gumba Primary*

Quiz contest, to make students familiar with wildlife

### *Dunai Boarding School*

Drawing/skit/street drama, to make aware of drawing art, to teach learning by doing, and to show our creative work to the community

Rabindra Shahi visited seven schools, including Bhagawati Lower Secondary and Mahadev Primary in Rimi and Kaigaun VDC. Unfortunately, we had to postpone the program in both schools due to restrictions by local Maoist "in-charge." Mahadev Primary was new this year, and Bhagawati Lower Secondary had been running the program for two years.

Except for these two schools, the program is conducting smoothly in the other nineteen schools. Junior Ranger instructors themselves request frequent session observation and school visits by the Coordinator. This indicates the willingness of the teachers to improve their teaching skill. It also shows their concern about teaching Junior Ranger sessions correctly.

Junior Rangers have taken part in different mini projects in their schools and communities, as mentioned above, which helps them to develop skills. Also, now days we can see the students talking and discussing about snow leopard.

## Conclusions

In spite of adverse political situation in Nepal, the Junior Ranger Program is running well. Where the program has been established, we see properly used rubbish pit, students talking about snow leopard, trying to keep clean school environment. They pride themselves being Junior Rangers.

Some far away schools need proper guidance, yet most of the schools are on the way to reaching the goals of the program.

Not only students, but teachers and villagers also discuss about their natural gift wildlife and plants. They have made gardens on open fields in the village and school premises too.

Some teachers reported to the Coordinator that Maoists asked them what sort of program is this but they are not against the program.

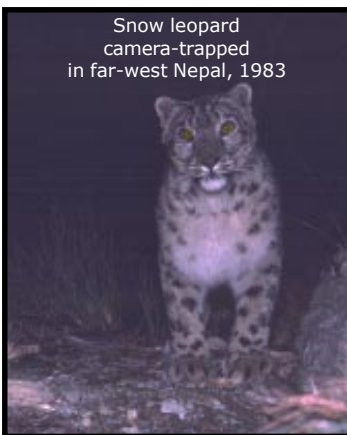
This year we finished our scheduled program on time. I think it is quite difficult to visit some schools far away from Dunai due to the safety concern.

Other government schools are making application to join the program.

I think program should be in small scale for coming few years. Big publicity may harm our program and us. We should call a meeting of teachers here in Dunai within 4-month period to coach them and hear any complaints from their side.



students on a field trip to learn about herbs



*"The Junior Ranger program teaches us about our natural treasure, Shey-Phoksundo National Park. Junior Rangers brought change in teaching and learning methodology "Learning By Doing." It is the only conservation education program conducted in Dolpa, existing in the hearts and minds of Dolpa people. We could bring remarkable change from school to communities by using student mind and effort without big project and heavy donation. In the future program should think about small-scale hardware project like school building renovation, furniture, and black boards."*

- Instructor Man Bahadur

## Conclusions (cont'd)

Wider training of Junior Ranger teachers will help avoid gaps when instructors transfer or leave the school.

At last we have completed our 2003 session better than we thought and started 2004 with out any political violence and other calamities except two school (Bhagawati Lower Secondary School Rimi and Mahadev Primary School Kaigon) of faraway village. WWF-Nepal eco-clubs are not active so we are the only conservation education program being conducted in Dolpa.



## Indicators of Success

Former Junior Ranger Suraj Upadhyia won a scholarship from WWF-Nepal to study at the Institute of Forestry in Pokhara, Nepal. Suraj, whose experiences in the Junior Ranger program helped him win the scholarship, recently wrote to the SLC, *"I am really interested in environment after becomming Junior Ranger. Now I continue my study in forestry because forestry is also related with environment."*

WWF Dolpa and other local eco-clubs elected Dunai Boarding School and its Principal as coordinators of Eco-clubs in 34 Dolpa schools. This also indicates that they know how we work with small budget effectively in the school and community too.

An environmental conservation contest, organized by WWF-Nepal for World Environment Day (June 5), drew participants from all of Nepal's 75 districts. The Dolpa team was entirely comprised of Junior Ranger students. Activities included drawing, project work, environmental song, report writing on visits to Godavari Royal Botanical Garden and the Central Zoo (both in Kathmandu Valley). The Dolpa kids told true stories about some of the wild animals they rescued (see below). Despite Dolpa's remoteness, relative government neglect and difficult political circumstances, our team took second place!

During lunchtime at Dunai Boarding school, the students learned that a Siberian crane had fallen almost helplessly on the play ground of the Dunai Bazaar. A local merchant had found it and he was going to kill it. When the Junior Rangers heard about this, they immediately persuaded him not to kill it. Later they gave it to the park authorities and after two days treatment it was set free.



Chhewang Gurung   Akhanda Upadhyia   Chand Hamal   Jun Kumari Hirachan

Junior Ranger Team



Akhanda Upadhyia (blue shirt at right) accepting the Dolpa Team prize at Kathmandu City Hall



Field trip to Phoksundo Lake

The story of the crane, and the one below, also serve as indicators that the Junior Ranger program is changing attitudes.

*Once a ghoral (native ungulate) was about to sink in the river Bheri after poachers chased it. The police guards could not save or put the flowing-away frightened deer out of its misery. Some expert swimmers, who were also Junior Rangers, dived in and took out the poor live deer. They handed it over to the Shey-Phuksundo National Park authorities, and after some essential treatments it was successfully transferred back to the jungle.*

### Teachers Participating in the Training

Mr. Siddiman Bohora  
Bhagawati Lower Secondary  
Rimi-Jhynkot

Mr. Bed Prasad Thapa  
Mahadev Primary  
Kaingoun, Thapagon

Mr. Brisha Lal Rawat  
Janak Primary  
Pahada, Dagina

Mr. Man Bahadur K.C  
Kasturi Lower Secondary  
Pahada-VDC

Mr. Narbhupal Sharma  
Mahakavi Devkota Primary  
Tripurakot, Ralli

Mr. Pashupati Dhakal  
Tripurakot Lower Secondary  
Tripurakot, Maddu

Mr. Bishnu Budha  
Jyoti Primary  
Tripurakot, Ruma

Mr. Jaya Bahadur Budha  
Balbhadra Primary  
Tripurakot, Rasi



Mr. Laxman Karki  
Manma Primary  
Kumli

Mr. Narahari Sharma  
Bhanubhakta Primary  
Thala

Mr. Tek Nath Rijal  
Bhakti Thapa Primary  
Lawan, Banthada

Mr. Rama Mohon Pokhrel  
Sundresherpa Primary  
Sahartara, Atukpatara

Mr. Lavi Narayan Chaudhari  
Tansa Gumba Primary  
Gumbatara, Sahartara

Mr. Ravindra Shahi  
Dunai Boarding School  
Dunai

Mr. Nar Bahadur Ranabhat  
Araniko Lower Secondary  
Sahartara

Mr. Bishnu Prasad Gautam  
Sagarmatha Primary  
Tarakot, Sahartara

Mr. Ghynasyam Sharma  
Tapricha Lower Secondary  
Phoksundo, Saijal

Mr. Nandi Lal Chaudhari  
Subhakamana Primary  
Raha

Ms. Himali Shah  
Blmandir Primary  
Dunai

Ms. Ptsang Rana  
Ladies Feeder Hostel  
Dunai

Mr. Gorkha Bahadur Budha  
Saraswati Higher Secondary  
Dunai