



# Spring Panda Quarterly 2014



**WWF Bhutan Program**



*A tiger that was caught on camera in Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park*

## Conserving a globally threatened species

WWF Bhutan teams up Govt. to launch the first-of-its-kind tiger survey

On 27th February, Bhutan embarked on a milestone in its history of conservation as the Royal Government launched the first-ever nation-wide Tiger (*Panthera tigris*) survey done using camera traps.

In an effort to conserve this globally revered, yet threatened species, the survey aims to understand the distribution and habitat status of Bhutan's tigers. The

survey is a part of the National Tiger Recovery Program that aims to double the number of tiger.

The survey also comes at a critical time when the world has lost 97 percent of its Tiger population in just over a century. Tigers, all over the world, face several threats from poaching, habitat fragmentation and degradation, and

depletion of prey population.

Before, over 100,000 Tigers used to roam as wide as Turkey, Russia and South East Asia then while today, there are just 3,200 tigers left in existence in only 13 Tiger Range Countries including Bhutan.

Bhutan is one of the prime tiger habitats

in the world today where the tiger is a nationally protected species under the country's Forest and Nature Conservation Act, 2005.

The survey will play a major role in Bhutan's commitment to double the global tiger population to at least 6400 by the next year of the tiger – 2022.



*Left: WWF Bhutan Program Director with a student dressed as a tiger during the launch. Right: The survey was kicked off by setting up a camera trap at the southern block.*



*Left: community members trying out using biomass fuel; Right: A Snow Leopard footage from Wangchuck Centennial Park (WCP).*

## Finding better means to co-exist

### Nomads get trained on biomass fuel to reduce dependence on natural resources

The nomad community in Wangchuck Centennial Park (WCP) use Rhododendron and Juniper shrubs, amongst others, as firewood for daily cooking purposes. Since households are not connected to the electricity grid and have no access to Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG), the community's dependence on available vegetation as cooking fuel has been high.

This has impacted severely on the habitat of the Snow Leopard, Blue sheep, Tibetan Wolf and other species and the Alpine ecosystem through mud-slides, loss of

watershed, and local desertification.

To change this trend, while also keeping in mind the needs of the community, WCP, with funding from WWF conducted a training on biomass fuel production and use of biomass-based cooking stoves for 35 nomad households in Chhokhor, Bumthang.

The training was conducted in collaboration with the Watershed Management Division (WMD) of the Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS).

During the training, nomads learnt how to produce biomass cakes and use cooking stoves and charcoal grinding machines. The training also explored ways of helping nomads generate income by selling bio-briquette to hikers, trekkers and tourists in future.

There are a total of 35 nomad households in the Central Range of WCP that live in altitudes of over 3500m. The community predominantly depends on yak herding

for livelihood. However, most of the herders have recently given up rearing livestock such as goats and sheep due to the predation by the wild animals.

Additionally, around 1000 people congregate in the habitat areas of the snow leopard during April, May and June every year to collect the Cordyceps . Consequently, Cordyceps collection has now become one of the most lucrative economic enterprise in the area.



*According to a Snow Leopard Survey done in WCP, the park has a healthy Blue Sheep which is the main prey for Snow Leopards.*



## Seeing through the Human-Black Bear Conflict

WWF and DoFPS researchers study the population size and distribution of Bears in WCP.

Human-bear conflicts have been known to locals in Bumthang ever since human settlements started in the valley. Recent numbers suggest an increasing trend of conflicts which include Bears invading villages and killing calves in front of farmers resulting in community resentment towards the bears. “I encountered a bear while patrolling the forest when it attacked a colleague of mine”, recalls a field ranger in

Wangchuck Centennial Park (WCP).

One of the villagers said that at least 9 individual bears could be living around his village as he once saw three bears – a mother and two cubs – in just one day.

The increase in complaints about the damage done by bears lead a team of researchers from WWF and the Department of Forest and Park services (DoFPS) to conduct a study on



*Research team setting up camera traps for Bears.*

the population size and distribution of the Asiatic Black Bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) in Bumthang.

Given that no standardized method to estimate bears populations exists, the research team developed an experimental design after consulting a research team from Japan. From the end of September 2013 until mid November 2013, the team set up 14 cameras in the central range of the Wangchuck Centennial Park (WCP).

The researchers were also able to collect information on the attitude and the impression of the locals on the bears. In

response to a questionnaire survey, locals estimated that the density of bears in the area could be high.

The traps setup in the various plots proved to be successful at capturing individual bears, suggesting that a higher density of cameras could lead to the successful estimation of bear population. Researchers now emphasize the need for a second study to help find solutions to human-bear conflicts before the community starts retaliating. Such a study would help successfully collect information on the ecology and behavior of bears.



## WWF observes the 1<sup>st</sup> World Wildlife Day in Bhutan

This year, WWF Bhutan Program joined hands with the Department of Forest and Park Services to commemorate the first World Wildlife Day to celebrate the beauty and variety of the millions of plants and animals that we share our planet with.

Addressing the gathering at the Clock Tower Square in Thimphu, Vijay Moktan, the Conservation Director of WWF Bhutan, said that the goal of such an event is to raise awareness on world's wild fauna and flora, and to inform people on global conservation crisis that the world faces today.

One of the main goals of the day was to bring this illegal wildlife trade to an end for a future where people and wildlife coexist in harmony.