

Snow Leopard Conservation Grants Program
GUIDELINES FOR MID-YEAR PROGRESS REPORTS

DUE: 1 AUGUST 2009

Maximum 2 pages please, unless your circumstances require a more lengthy report!

1. Using your original Proposal as a guide, briefly describe your progress on all the activities you had intended to complete.

Field surveys were carried out in and around the Taxkurgan Nature Reserve in west Xinjiang during February and March 2009. The survey team was comprised of Dr Philip Riordan, Dr Shi Kun, Mr Wang Jun (MSc student), Ms Yi Fang (undergraduate student), Mr Arimujiang Deyimbaye (deputy-Director Taxkurgan Nature Reserve), Mr Khometti Taklashur (local herdsman, Mariang). Further assistance for the survey in Shaksgam was provided by Mr Dai Zhigong (deputy-Director Taxkurgan Nature Reserve) and local herders from the Kude communities.

In relation to each of our specified aims:

a) *To establish the presence of snow leopard, other carnivores and key prey species in south Taxkurgan Reserve, Xinjiang Province, China*

We established 12 new transects in the Shaksgam area and four new transects in the Mariang area. We carried out further surveys on eight transects in Mariang that had been previously sampled by our team in July 2008^[1]. Twenty-two Reconyx RM45 remote cameras were set in pairs at suitable sites in Mariang.

Analysis of all data is continuing. Initial results show active and current presence of snow leopard in Mariang, further corroborated by photographs of snow leopard taken by camera traps. Fewer sign of snow leopard were encountered in the Shaksgam area, with little sign of recent activity.

Prey species, principally wild ungulates, were surveyed along walking and vehicle transects.

b) *To derive initial estimates of snow leopard relative population abundance and that of key prey species in Mariang during winter*

Transects in Mariang and Shaksgam were sampled systematically, and sign encounter rates are to be used as primary estimators of snow leopard and other predator abundances. Continuing analyses will estimate ungulate prey species abundance using distance sampling techniques.

c) *To determine winter habitat and physical conditions predicting species presence (and abundance where possible) and the position of territorial marking by snow leopard and other carnivores in this region*

Habitat data were collected along transects, and further landscape scale data are being collated from sources such as remote sensed images. Analyses of these data are continuing.

d) To provide training to local wildlife support teams in survey techniques, data collection and storage, and basic practical data analyses for effective reserve management

Classroom and field-based tuition were provided to Xinjiang Forestry Administration staff in Taxkurgan Nature Reserve by Dr Philip Riordan & Dr Shi Kun. Classroom training covered basic principles of wildlife monitoring and management, including data collection, storage and basic analysis. Field-based training covered more detailed field craft, sampling strategies and the deployment of monitoring approaches on the ground.

e) To initiate a monitoring network for snow leopard and other wildlife in Taxkurgan using people we will train from within local communities (“parabiologists”)

Within Mariang the reserve team has employed Mr Khometti Taklashur to collect samples and record information about snow leopard activity in the area. The deputy Director of Taxkurgan Nature Reserve, Mr Arimujiang Deyimbaye, is also developing similar links within other communities in the reserve.

2. Please describe problems that may prevent you from reaching the goals of your proposal. Describe what methods you may have considered to overcome those problems.

Surveys in the Shaksgam area in the south of Taxkurgan Nature Reserve were limited by Chinese military activities. In our progress west towards the national border, we were required to pass a number of military check points. Checks at each of these became successively more stringent and our level of permission finally became insufficient within approximately 40km of the border, 20km from the Shaksgam valley. Despite not being able to survey the precise location indicated in our proposal we were able to undertake surveys in the vicinity, and provide valuable information about the hitherto unsurveyed areas both within and outside the southeast of the reserve.

3. List any activities that you expect to undertake that were NOT in the proposal we funded. (Please do not try to think up new activities! Only answer this question if opportunities or needs demand that additional activities be undertaken.)

We took the opportunity to supervise an undergraduate student from Beijing Forestry University, Ms Yi Fang, whose interest was the social and economic conditions in remote mountain communities in Xinjiang. We provided assistance with her survey design and she was pleased to also address attitudinal aspects with respect to snow leopard and other predators. This study provides unique insights and we anticipate publishing a short communication from this work. We are looking at options to continue socio-economic research in this and other areas.

1. Shi, K., et al., *Reconfirmation of snow leopards in Taxkurgan Nature Reserve, Xinjiang, China*. *Oryx*, 2009. **43**(2): p. 169-170.