

Third SLIMS Workshop Held in Mongolia

By Rodney Jackson

The Third Snow Leopard Information Management System Workshop and field techniques training session took place in Mongolia between October 28 and November 29, 1994, with the Trust launching an ambitious conservation program in this little known and remote part of Central Asia. The workshop was conducted under the auspices of Project Snow Leopard (PSL), the Trust's multifaceted, multinational program aimed at conserving the biodiversity of Central Asia's high mountains. PSL held the first training session in China in 1993, followed by another last year in herds (see *Snow Line* Vol. XIII No.2).

Workshop co-sponsors were the Mongolian Association for Conservation of Nature and Environment (MACNE), the Ministry of Nature and the Environment of Mongolia and the Biodiversity Project of the United Nations Development Programme. The Bosack/Kruger Foundation, with additional support from UNDP and MACNE, provided funding.

Rodney Jackson conducted the workshop with assistance from Tom McCarthy, who is researching snow leopards along the edge of the Gobi Desert. Twenty five people attended, representing a broad spectrum individual and institutional expertise focused at wildlife conservation and park management. The newly established National Park Service, the research arm of the Environment Ministry (Institute of Forestry and Wildlife), the National University, and the Institute of Experimental Biology (a research organization based in Ulaanbaatar) were all represented, along with MACNE and several journalists and newspaper correspondents. Dr. R. Shhrevdamba, the Vice-Minister of Nature and the Environment, gave the opening address. A 30-minute special, arranged by MACNE, aired on national television during the training, highlighting key issues related to snow leopard conservation as well as the activities of the workshop itself.

The workshop covered a wide range of topics: field census techniques, people-wildlife conflict resolution, protected area management, biodiversity as

assessment and trophy hunting program management and standards, as well as community involvement in wildlife and habitat protection. Managers from the various parks known or thought to contain snow leopards made presentations, describing various aspects of snow leopard status, distribution and conservation.

The group concluded that the major threats to snow leopards were illegal poaching of prey animals such as ibex and argali, over-utilization of supplementary species like marmots, and the killing of cats reputedly implicated in livestock predation - severe depletion of the prey populations have left many snow leopards with no alternative but to kill domestic stock in order to survive. Mongolian researcher, G. Amarsaana estimates there are about 1,700 cats

Taking field notes during workshop in Mongolia
(Photo by Rodney Jackson)

left in Mongolia, but others felt the number was less than a thousand. The status of the species in several newly declared parks is quite uncertain, emphasizing the need for country-wide surveys

such as those proposed under SLIMS. Most of Mongolia's snow leopards reside outside of its protected areas. For example, the vast Great Gobi National Park (encompassing an area in excess of 5,300 sqkm and designated as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO) supports some 45-70 snow leopards, nearly all of the cats under such protection status in Mongolia. Thus, it is critical to develop conservation initiatives along the corridors linking different parks, and will require concerted effort to resolve people-wildlife conflict arising from snow leopard or wolf predation.

After the four day classroom session, the workshop left for field training in the Altai Range along the northern edge of Gobi Desert, near Bayantoorai, park headquarters to the Great Gobi National Park (which straddles the border with China). It also provides critical habitat for other rare species, such as the Bactrian camel, Gobi bear and argali sheep. Using the survey forms developed by PSL, participants practiced standard census techniques for snow leopard and large ungulate species. They found abundant fresh and old snow leopard sign and came away well-versed in the survey techniques developed under SLIMS.

They Were There: Comments on the Mongolia Workshop

At the end of the training workshop held last fall in Mongolia, participants were asked for their comments and recommendations. Following are some of the remarks from the wildlife officials, national park managers and media personnel who attended:

- We need more discussion on what we do for herders who lose livestock to snow leopard.
 - Please let us have even more handbooks, games and practical exercises at the workshop. Is it possible to give a copy of the slides to attendees?
 - Future workshops should be organized directly on the survey site. The video and slide shows helped me to understand the items better.
- J. S. Tserendeleg, vice president of the Mongolian Association for the Conservation of Nature and the Environment and a member of ISLT's advisory board, reports that two radio broadcasts and one 30 minute television program were carried nationally while the workshop was being held. In addition, several central newspapers featured stories on the workshop and the problems of the snow leopard.
- The Snow Leopard Trust thanks the Bosack Foundation for its support in making this workshop possible.
- The explanation on the relationship between snow leopard, their wild prey and domestic livestock was very important.
 - I believe we should set up a data base now so that our biologists can record their information.
 - I recommend that we organize a workshop every two years to discuss our survey results and further programs.