

First SLIMS Workshop Held in China

ISLT recently helped sponsor the first Snow Leopard Information Management System (SLIMS) workshop, in Gansu Province, China. The workshop was held at the Qilian Mountain National Nature Reserve, located along the northern edge of the Tibetan Plateau. One of China's newest reserves, it spans almost the entire length of the range that forms the northern limit to the Tibetan Plateau along the boundary between Qinghai and Gansu provinces.

Nine biologists from throughout China attended the 12-day workshop which was led by Don Hunter and Rodney Jackson. Don is an ecologist with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Ecology Research Center and an expert in remote sensing and related technologies for applied resource management. Rodney, a member of ISLT's advisory board, is one of the world's leading experts on the snow leopard. Both have worked in China before and are sensitive to opportunities and constraints affecting nature reserve administration and conservation in the snow leopard's remote habitat. The workshop was conducted through a joint agreement on nature conservation between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Ministry of Forestry in Beijing.

The workshop consisted of two portions: classroom lectures and "hands-on" training in the field. The classroom sessions covered the basics of using snow leopard sign as a means for detecting and measuring snow leopard relative abundance. The instructors offered specific guidelines on ways to reduce and control illegal trade in endangered species, which presents a major threat to snow leopards and many other of China's rare wildlife.

Additional sections covered ways to minimize people-wildlife conflicts, improve nature reserve management and locate new reserve sites. Each student received a comprehensive

Rodney Jackson (3rd from right) demonstrates a global positioning indicator to workshop students. Photo: Don Hunter.

SLIMS handbook and course diploma prepared by the Trust.

In the field, students practiced each technique and completed a data form on the survey area. Inclement weather and logistical difficulties made it impossible to conduct this portion of the workshop in good snow leopard habitat, so exercises were devised to help the students study the key management issues confronting the Qilian Shan Nature Reserve. These issues included poaching, livestock grazing, and reestablishment of viable populations of blue sheep and other large ungulates.

Hunter and Jackson were especially impressed with the quality and motivation of the Chinese students. This workshop was the first time Chinese biologists had received formal training in scientifically valid census techniques for snow leopard and ungulates. Each student hopes to conduct surveys in their province over the next few years, providing baseline information that will go into the SLIMS database.

As economic and political relations improve with China, so must ecological relations. Exchange of this type are crucial to furthering China's ability to adequately protect wild treasures such as the snow leopard and other endangered animals.

Second SLIMS Workshop Held

The second Snow Leopard Information Management System (SLIMS) Training Workshop was held this past summer in Chitral Gol National Park, Pakistan. The first SLIMS workshop was held 1993 in the Gansu Province of China. Major funding for both workshops was provided by the Bosack/Kruger Foundation, with additional support from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The training workshops were conducted under the auspices of *Project Snow Leopard*, a multi-national program of the International Snow Leopard Trust.

The project is aimed at conserving biodiversity of Central Asia's high mountains. This workshop was a joint venture of the Snow Leopard Trust, WWF Pakistan, and the Wildlife Department of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). It was supervised by Rodney Jackson, ISLT, and Don Hunter, of the National Ecology Research Center, with input from Mumtaz Malik, chief wildlife conservator of NWFP, and Ashiq Ahmad, conservation director of WWF Pakistan.

"I wish to place on record my gratitude and appreciation for the assistance rendered by the International Snow Leopard Trust for making this workshop a reality," Mumtaz Malik wrote in a letter to ISLT president Helen Freeman. "Had it not been for your personal foresightedness and dedication for the conservation of snow leopards the world over, it would have been just a dream. Both Don Hunter and Rodney Jackson worked hard and did their best to inculcate maximum knowledge and skill among the participants. The trainees have also felt the usefulness of the workshop and realize that now they are equipped with enough knowledge and skill to undertake snow leopard and ungulate surveys on scientific lines."

Participants in the workshop came from snow leopard regions throughout Pakistan, representing a variety of professions and disciplines related to wildlife conservation, protected areas management, and village leadership. Training included field census techniques, people-wildlife conflict resolution, biodiversity assessment, trophy hunting programs, and community involvement in wildlife habitat management. Ashiq Ahmad provided an over

view of conflict resolution, offering the experiences of WWF -Pakistan projects in the Northern Areas as successful examples of villager participation. Students then visited a village on the edge of Chitral Gol National Park to conduct their own household interviews.

A trainee in the Pakistan workshop searches for markhor in the hills of Chitral Gol National Park. (Photo by Roo Jackson)

The results of the village interviews clearly indicated that residents depend almost entirely upon Chitral Gol for their fuelwood supplies. However, the villagers expressed their willingness to protect the park in exchange for alternative fuelwood sources, such as a fuelwood plantation in the park buffer zone, or assistance with community development projects, such as an improved water supply, health care, etc. The workshop participants agreed

that the field exercise clearly demonstrated the need for community support and participation if Chitral Gol is to survive.

In the final class exercise, the group was asked to identify the six highest priority areas for status surveys and to indicate when these should be undertaken and by whom. It was recommended that the following sites be surveyed and a report made at the 1995 symposium in Pakistan.

<u>Name of Protected Area</u>	<u>Responsible Agencies</u>
Chitral Gol & 10 km buffer	NWFP /WWF
Goleen Gol & 7 km buffer	NWFP /WWF
Gol & 5 km buffer	NWFP /WWF
Khunjerab National Park	Northern Areas/WWF
Bar Valley	WWF
Machara National Park	Kashmir Wildlife/WWF

Following the workshop a four-day "hands-on" field survey of one of the two main Kalash valleys was conducted. This area is under consideration as a candidate for a World Heritage Site and has considerable cultural significance and tourism potential. Until the mid-1980's the region was very inaccessible, being secluded within a deep gorge guarded by precipitous cliffs. Now a very narrow jeep trail is hewn into the cliff.

The survey indicated that poaching, which results in a severe depletion of prey species, is the primary threat to snow leopards. In addition habitats are being degraded by livestock, which now constitute the only available prey for snow leopards, wolves, and other species. Actions to reduce poaching and limit grazing are urgently needed if the snow leopard and much of the other wildlife are to survive in this rugged, beautiful land.

Crossing turbulent streams on slippery logs was a common occurrence during the field portion of the workshop. (Photo by Rod Jackson)

Challenge Grant Met Ahead of Schedule

As we go to press on this *Snow Line* there is great news to report to the Trust's membership. Thanks to your support and commitment, we were able to meet our goal of raising \$10,000 to meet a challenge grant from a generous donor. And your prompt response enabled us to meet it ahead of the deadline. A heartfelt thank you!