

Project Update: October 2018

With regard to the progress of my project, I would like to provide, in chronological order, a brief update of the various activities I undertook, and my accomplishments in the recent past.

- Between the last week of April 2018 and the last week of August 2018, a field visit was planned to my project site located in Sikkim, India. In order to undertake this visit, I obtained Research Permits from the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department, Gangtok, Sikkim in May 2018.
- In June and July 2018, social surveys were conducted to understand the changes in the pastoral system and resource management of the local herders. Several discussions were held with local community members and members of Khanchendzonga Conservation Committee (the local NGO collaborators) based on which the sites for vegetation surveys were finalised.
- On 7 July 2018, a brief power point presentation explaining research objectives and research design was presented at the Forests, Environment and Wildlife Management Department, Gangtok, Sikkim (Figure 1). This presentation was in partial fulfilment of stipulated norms for Research to be carried out in the protected areas of Sikkim.



Figure 1. Presentation of research objectives and research design at the Forests, Environment and Wildlife Management Department, Gangtok, Sikkim by the Lead Researcher.

- In order to understand the influence of grazing, vegetation sampling was done in July and August 2018. A total of 46 grass species were documented, out of which 41 have been identified so far. For the collection of this data, the lead researcher was accompanied by a team (Figure 2) of five members (two field assistants - Mr. Chatur Singh Limboo and Mr. Ramesh Chettri; one volunteer – masters student in botany, Sikkim University, Madhusudhan Khanal; and two local Guides – Mr. Ram Kumar and Mr. Suman Bhutia).



Figure 2. Research Team

Challenges

- Since the flowering season in high altitude coincides with peak monsoon in the lower Himalayas, there were severe rain events and several landslides which restricted access to the sites of vegetation survey. Also, one of my field assistants got injured, which caused a slight delay in project timelines.
- A field visit was also made between October and December 2017. Research permits were applied for, and a pilot survey was carried out during that period. However, during the same time, I met with an accident in Gangtok. I ended up sustaining several injuries because of which I was unable to carry out any substantial field work. Data pertaining to the social and ecological objectives of my Research was therefore collected during my second trip (2018).

Present Status

- I am currently working on data analysis and will be hopefully submitting the full report by the end of November 2018. Sometime soon, I am also hoping to communicate a research paper from the finding of this research.