## Project Updates: May 2023

I got research permission from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023. The research permission granted by the department was forwarded to the office of the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) and other local authorities in the study area on the 10<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

## Fieldwork

Our team headed to the study area on the 16<sup>th</sup> February and conducted the winter field survey of the habitat from the 22<sup>nd</sup> February to 15<sup>th</sup> March around Ghunsa and Tseram of the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA). According to the local people, rangers, and other conservation authorities, these areas are supposed to be the main hotspots for musk deer habitat. We encountered frequent signs throughout the region however we were unable to see them. Also, due to the harsh winter, collecting enough samples of the plant species that musk deer feed upon was challenging. The work was disturbed for a couple of days due to the heavy snowfall. Fieldwork for the second phase will begin in July 2023.



Figure 1: Local expert and guide collecting the sample of pellets.



Figure 2: Snowfall during fieldwork.



Figure 3: Pellets.



Figure 4: Pellets. Figure 5: Musk deer fur.

## Laboratory Work

20 pellet and five plant samples have been sent for laboratory examination. The grass samples which we collected in the fields were greatly affected by the harsh winter. We could not collect more grass samples as most of them were dry and difficult to recognise. Different unidentifiable plant particles were found in the pellets during the laboratory experiment. Hopefully, we will be able to match them with the plant sample which is supposed to be collected in summer fieldwork.



Figure 6: Samples collected in the field.



Figure 7: Samples collected from the field.



Figure 8: Performing lab test of the samples.

## Awareness

School teaching programmes, community teaching, and herder's education programme are ongoing. Workshops with local leaders, conservation partners, local authorities, and other focal persons have been halted for now due to the unavailability of the key personnel in the village. We were not permitted to form a separate antipoaching group, so we decided to collaborate with the local snow leopard conservation committee and activate the anti-poaching committee which is inactive for a long. A social survey regarding the initial perception of the local people towards musk deer has been conducted during the fieldwork and before conducting the awareness programs.



Figure 9: Banner for the awareness program.

