



The newsletter of **Snow Leopard Trust** | Fall 2015

# Snow Leopard Tracks

## Breathing New Life into Old Crafts

Our Snow Leopard Enterprises handicraft program has reached some impressive milestones, surpassing \$1 million in sales last year, but this is no time to rest on our laurels. We want to reach more herders and protect more snow leopards. And one of the best ways to do that is to develop new designs and sell more crafts. That's why this June we brought together 26 participants from three villages in rural Kyrgyzstan for a 4-day design workshop that, we hope, will accelerate handicraft sales, as well as conservation in key snow leopard regions.



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A workshop participant shows off her finished product: a pet toy made with a technique called needle felting. We hope these toys will be as popular with consumers as they are with their makers, translating into strong sales, more income for herders and more protection for snow leopards.

Snow Leopard Enterprises (SLE) was introduced in Kyrgyzstan in 2002. The program enables rural herders to generate much-needed income for their families while aiding efforts to protect the snow leopard and other wildlife. This is important in Kyrgyzstan, where trophy hunting is one of the most pressing threats to wildlife. Thanks to the steady income from handicraft sales, SLE participants in Kyrgyzstan agree not

to hunt or poach snow leopards. They also decided to refuse lodging or guiding services to people coming into their area to hunt illegally.

However, Kyrgyzstan's handicraft line sat stagnant for 10 years and a few years ago we started seeing eroding sales. We worried this could decrease income for families and in turn decrease their incentive to continue participating.

Women came to the workshop from the villages of Uch-Koshkon, Ak-Shyirak and Enylchek (get an inside look from workshop attendees on page two). They collaborated with professionals and experts in design, embroidery, wool crafting, and U.S. marketing. The result is a stunning new line of products including four new rug designs, pet toys and pet mats, and felted and embroidered wallets and coasters.

"In the evenings, after long days of training, many people just kept working on their new creations," says Gina Cantara, SLE Manager of Sales and Marketing. "They were so excited about completing them." SLE participants are now continuing to hone their new skills back home, and some of them have generously offered to train other participants who couldn't make it to the workshop.

The next step is to test-market new products at several trade shows around the U.S. this fall. "I am really excited to see how buyers respond to our new Kyrgyz line," Gina says. Stay tuned to find out when the new products become available to order, and you can help us strengthen the Kyrgyzstan program for wildlife and people alike.

This workshop made possible through a grant from Rufford Foundation to Snow Leopard Foundation in Kyrgyzstan, a donation from Punta Verde Zoo, and the support of readers like you.



Photo courtesy of Peter Bollinger



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# Inside the Kyrgyzstan Handicraft Workshop

## *Women share their inspiration*

**Elza** (pictured at right) lives in Ak-Shyirak and has been involved with SLE since 2006. She teaches English at the local school and told us that she passes on what she has learned about snow leopards to the children at her school. “Although the children have never seen a snow leopard, they know all about snow leopards and are really proud to share their home with them,” she says. Elza was thrilled to learn how to make the needle felted pet toys designed by U.S. wool craft expert Sharon Costello. “I can’t wait to teach all 50 children at school how to make them.”



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**Raya and Suyunbek** live in Enylchek. Raya has been the local SLE coordinator for three years and has four children. Her son Suyunbek, age 21, is her eldest and was the only male participant in the design workshop. He has been helping his mother make handicrafts for two years, and loves the work so much he aspires to be a handicraft designer one day. Raya told us that a few months ago a snow leopard killed a herder’s yak near the village. “We were upset but we didn’t retaliate,” she says. “We kept our promise not to harm snow leopards.”

## India field staff gets up-close view of human-predator conflicts

In April, India field coordinator Karma Sonam traveled to the mountain village of Kyungyam, high in the Indian Himalayas. Kyungyam is excellent snow leopard habitat but it’s also an area where human-snow leopard conflicts are high. Karma was hoping to secure the village’s commitment to begin a new insurance program to help herders better cope with livestock predation. He was returning only expecting to hold more discussions. But instead he witnessed a dramatic event. A snow leopard that had killed an incredible 12 cows and calves during the previous week had—the very hour Karma and his team arrived—killed another cow.

A young boy led them to the kill site where they found a snow leopard about 30 feet away from the dead cow. The cow’s owner was in the process of removing most of the cow’s hide and flesh. “The woman had gotten close to the cat and had waved it away by the time we arrived,” Karma says. “The cat wanted to return to its prey, but the woman just wouldn’t leave!”

Understandably, the woman wanted to chase the snow leopard away from



Photo courtesy of Nature Conservation Foundation, India

Field staff took this photo of a snow leopard, which had just been chased away from a cow it killed, during a surprisingly eventful visit to the Indian village of Kyungyam.

its livestock kill. But that evening, Karma explained to the villagers that snow leopards can feast on large prey for many days, and that driving them away may unwittingly encourage hungry snow leopards to hunt more frequently and to kill more livestock. This was important information that the villagers received well, and agreed to incorporate into their future conservation efforts.

In the end, Karma and his team were able to get back to their original plans, and finalized arrangements for a new insurance program in Kyungyam.

All 27 families that own livestock joined and insured their cows, yaks, and horses. As the program matures, families will be able to file claims for livestock losses to snow leopards and receive insurance payments to ease their financial burdens. They signed conservation contracts to protect snow leopards and—thanks to the knowledge of snow leopard behavior conveyed by Karma and his team—wisely agreed not to remove prey from a kill site. We hope the program, and the community’s new understanding of snow leopards, will help them live in peace with the predators in their area.



# ECO-CAMPS CREATE SNOW LEOPARD PROTECTORS OF THE FUTURE

During the summer, the Snow Leopard Trust holds eco-camps in India and Mongolia to inspire the next generation of conservationists. This year 121 students and 9 teachers attended 3-day nature camps in the Spiti Valley of Himachal Pradesh, India. In Mongolia, we had a total of 38 children and 2 teachers at camps in the Tost Mountains of South Gobi Province.

Students learned about snow leopards, their environment, and their local biodiversity. They tried their hand at scientific research techniques like spotting wild prey, using GPS units, and learning about research cameras. And they came away with a heightened appreciation for the importance of snow leopards and what they can do to protect these wonderful cats. But don't take our word on the success of the camps—see for yourself with these photos!



Mongolia



India



India



Mongolia





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### Snow Leopard Trust

4649 Sunnyside Ave N, Suite 325  
Seattle, WA 98103-6955 USA

206-632-2421  
info@snowleopard.org  
www.snowleopard.org

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# Lucky Snap!

Thanks to your generosity, we're putting out more research cameras than ever. In Mongolia's South Gobi, for example, we have now expanded from one area—the Tost Mountains—to other neighboring regions where we have seen GPS collared snow leopards migrate. One of these regions is Nemegt, to the north of Tost. We have surveyed Nemegt for the last three years and counted 16 individual snow leopards.

Counting snow leopards is painstaking work. Every year, with the aid of volunteers, our scientists sift through tens of thousands of photos to identify images of snow leopards. They spend hours cataloguing the several



Photo courtesy of Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation and Snow Leopard Trust

hundred cat pictures they find each year—many of them blurry and barely recognizable.

But every now and then we come across an amazing photograph, like

this one from Nemegt, most likely showing two siblings at play. Thanks to the help of donors like you, we're partnering with the local community to keep this playful pair, and the rest of Nemegt's cats, safe and sound.