

Chhomrong Report

23.05. – 06.06.2014



AIMS/OBJECTIVES

The aim of this field trip was to assess the viability of the area around the village of Chhomrong as the potential release site for a common leopard. In order to accurately assess the viability of this area we needed to take into consideration the habitat and topography of Chhomrong, the local community and the current wildlife that inhabit the area. As Chhomrong is populated by humans and livestock we also had to assess the risk of human/wildlife conflict as well the potential threat of poaching in this area.

The main objective of Projects Abroad was to conduct a presence/absence survey of the local wildlife with particular focus on local reports that a common leopard already inhabited the area, thus making it an unviable site for release.

Working in parallel with the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) the needs and concerns of the local community were also surveyed.

STUDY AREA

The Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) was established in 1986 by the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC). ACA is located in North West Nepal and includes one of the most infamous mountain circuits in the world. It covers an area of 7,629 km² (ACAP, 2006). The ACA is comprised of 55 VDCs that are divided into the Kaski, Lamjung, Manang districts of the Ghandruk zone and the Myagdi and Mustang districts of the Dhawalagiri zone. ACA lies between 28 32' Latitude and 84 00' Longitude (Baral & Inskipp, 2005).

Elevation of the ACA ranges from 790m-8091m. The major peaks within the ACA include Annapurna I (8091m), one of the highest mountains in the world, and Dhaulagiri (8167m) which is located to the west of the region (Baral & Inskipp, 2005).

The total population of the ACA is approximately 120,000 and is host to a diverse range of multi-ethnic communities comprised of 10 ethnic groups (Baral & Inskipp, 2005). The Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) works within these communities to promote their flagship integrated conservation and development program (IDCP) whose focus is on the importance of community lead conservation. Agriculture and livestock generates the main source of livelihood for the people living within the ACA. Seasonal trading and tourism along the trekking routes also plays a large part in the communities' annual revenues (ACAP, 2006).

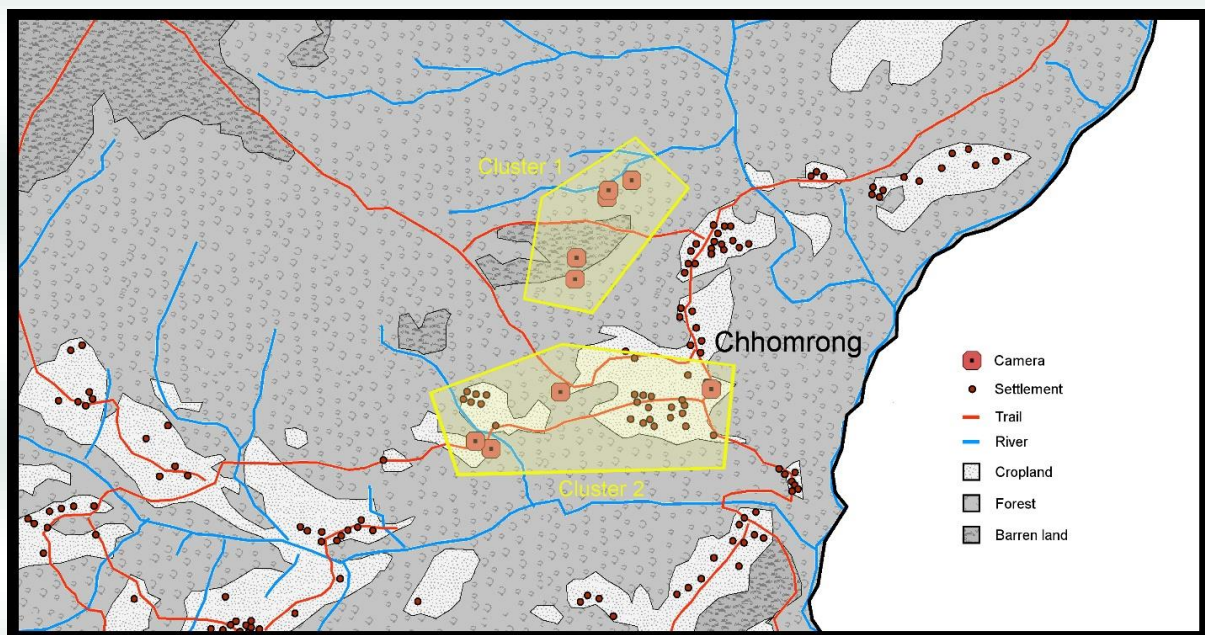
There are 102 species of mammals recorded as living in ACA, 488 species of birds, 40 species of reptiles, 23 species of amphibians, 20 species of fish and over 18 species of butterfly. Due to the diverse nature of the bio-climatic zones many of the types of fauna found in the ACA have rare and endangered species status (NTNC, 2012, ACAP Database, 2008).

The focus of this study is Ghandruk VDC in the Kaski District. Ghandruk sector has an area of 807 sq.km and covers Kaski and Myagdi Districts of the western development region of ACA. There is a migration rate of roughly 13 percent within the local population. The population of Ghandruk sector is mainly dominated by the Gurung caste, with this group making up 54.71 percent of the population (ACAP, 2006). Chhomrong village is located in the center of Ghandruk VDC and is mostly consisting of herders, farmers and tourist guest houses.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this survey follows the suggestions of locals frequently working in the target area to establish presence and absence data through camera traps on the local wildlife in and around Chhomrong. In total nine photos and videos taking camera traps were employed in two separate clusters for 14 days from the 23th of May to the 6th of June of 2014.

- Cameras in cluster 1 were set up in a natural dense vegetation above Chhomrong village while camera traps of cluster 2 were placed in open to semi-dense vegetation in the east of Chhomrong VDC.
- Cameras were set on a natural occurring trails through the dense vegetation and natural transitions from one into another habitat type i.e. forest to open grassland.
- Cameras were placed in areas that would be likely to attract leopards i.e. sources of water.
- Care was taken to position each camera at the height range of 40cm to 60cm facing the expected route of animals.
- All coordinates, altitudes and their corresponding camera numbers were recorded.



RESULTS

The photos were taken within a 14 day timeframe between the 23th of May and the 6th of June 2014.

Mammals:



Sumatran Serow (Capricornis sumatraensis)



Barking Deer (Muntiacus muntjak)



Large Indian Civet (Viverra zibetha)



Yellow-throated Marten (Martes flavigula)



Assam Macaque (Macaca assamensis)



Common Goral (Naemorhedus goral)

Birds



Kalij Pheasant (Lophura leucomelanos)



Hill Partridge (Arborophila torqueola)



Blue Whistling Thrush (Myophonus caeruleus)



*Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush
(Garrulax erythrocephalus)*

POTENTIAL RISKS

There are various risks that need to be taking into consideration before the release of a leopard in Chhomrong. Human-wildlife conflict is an acknowledged problem within ACA. We also need to consider the risk of territorial dispute between existing species in the area.

- Even if the proposed release site is a considerable distance from the village the effect on livestock of local farmers and herders the leopard could still be negative .The threat of killed goats, cows etc. or frightened livestock resulting in dispersed herds are aspects that need to be considered.
- The potential situation that the leopard gets closer or enters the village could result in attacks on humans and have a direct impact on the local tourist economy.

Animal-animal conflicts:

- Common Leopards already present in this region could get into territory related conflicts with the released leopard which could cause injuries or in the worse case the death of the released leopard.
- There is also the possibility that a Himalayan black bear or other animals may threaten or kill the released leopard.

Human-animal conflict needs to be mediated through discussions within the community, the VDC and the local farmers. The local authorities working in conjunction with ACAP need to embark on

awareness programs and trainings about how to deal with conflicts and how to solve any problems that may occur.

The risk of animal-animal conflict will be mitigated through the information gathered on the local wildlife population resulting from projects aboard camera trap survey.

REFERENCE

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