



SNOW LEOPARD CONSERVANCY

CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Field Notes from Spiti: 2003 & 2004



Spiti's vegetation is sparse, with a human population of about 10,000, one of the lowest densities in India, with important biodiversity and cultural values.

In the fall of 2003, the Snow Leopard Conservancy partnered with The Mountain Institute (TMI) and UNESCO for an assessment of Community-based Tourism and the potential for Traditional Himalayan Homestays in Spiti District, Himachal Pradesh, India. The Homestay program is part of a larger program to link snow leopard conservation with local livelihoods in Asia.

Three villages emerged as suitable potential communities with whom to start community-based tourism activities. All are located close to or in the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary and Pin Valley National Park, and offered prospects for cultural and wildlife-based tourism that could build upon existing local skills and knowledge.

In order to help ensure sustainability and local ownership, and to build local capacity, SLC worked through two local Spiti organizations focused on cultural and wildlife tourism: MUSE and the All Spiti Youth Association, which joined forces under the banner of *EcoSphere* in 2007.

In September 2003 staff from each organization were among eighteen trainees from Ladakh, Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh attending a Community-Based Tourism course held in the buffer zone of Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, a relatively pristine protected area in India's newly created state of Uttaranchal. The park known for its remoteness and reputation as a sanctuary for snow leopard, blue sheep and musk deer. The training was sponsored by the Uttaranchal Department of Forests's Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Livelihoods, TMI and SLC. The training was directed by Mr. Rajiv Bhatari, Conservator of Ecotourism, with support from SLC-India director Rinchen Wangchuk.

In June 2004, with funding provided by the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund, and in collaboration with the International Snow Leopard Trust, MUSE, the Nature Conservation Foundation, the Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim, and the Snow Leopard Conservancy spearheaded a Nature Guide Training in Pin Valley National Park, Himachal Pradesh. Eighteen trainees, including four women, learned the basics of nature interpretation and guiding. In addition, a wildlife monitoring plan was created for the newly trained guides, along with three nature trail itineraries along with maps. A Nature Guide Manual was prepared.

Since then Ishita Khanna, voted one of India's 50 leading young entrepreneurs has helped establish a robust, award-winning

community-based tourism program and winner of numerous awards for public service and environmental protection. For details, visit:

http://www.spitiecosphere.com/about_us_team.htm

