

Newsletter

May 2018



Wild tiger and young cubs in India, Credit: Tigersintheforest

The UK government is hosting an international conference about the illegal wildlife trade from 10 to 11 October 2018. The conference will bring together global leaders to help eradicate illegal wildlife trade and better protect the world's most iconic species from the threat of extinction.

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The Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) is a serious criminal industry worth up to £17 billion each year, threatening both wildlife and people. Funded by the UK Government, the IWT Challenge Fund tackles the illegal wildlife trade and, in doing so, contributes to sustainable development in developing countries. It funds projects which address one or more of the following themes:

- developing sustainable livelihoods and economic development, to benefit people directly affected by IWT
- strengthening law enforcement
- ensuring effective legal frameworks
- reducing demand for IWT products



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**[gov.uk/government/collections/
illegal-wildlife-trade-iwt-challenge-fund](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/illegal-wildlife-trade-iwt-challenge-fund)**



TWC Trainees ready to hike in Alichur, Credit: Panthera

In the background no more: snow leopard conservation empowers local women in Tajikistan

Community-based conservancies (CBCs) are local organisations united towards the cause of sustainably managing their village lands and associated natural resources. Granted authority by local and regional government bodies, over 3000 km² are now protected in this manner in the remote Pamir Mountains of eastern Tajikistan through Panthera's work with local partners which began a decade ago. Here, community rangers actively patrol their lands to prevent poaching and monitor wildlife. Their goal is to stabilise and increase wild ungulate populations to allow sustainable use of wildlife through ungulate hunting and non-invasive tourism to provide an alternative income stream, as well as support and increase their local snow leopard populations.

To date, ranger and tourist guide work has always been conducted by the men of these villages in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. Community meetings were entirely populated by men while the women carried out domestic duties; our interaction with local women was primarily within their homes. But through these limited interactions, we realised that these strong women represented a potentially powerful force for wildlife conservation. After discussions with the male leaders of two conservancies, "Burgut" in Alichur Village and "Parcham" in Ravmed Village, we found they were very receptive to the idea and have given their enthusiastic support to the project we launched in 2017.

Through Panthera's Tajik Women and Conservation Initiative (TWC), we have begun training 18 women from these two conservancies to become both wildlife rangers in the conservancies, and mountain and hunting guides for tourists. Our goal is to graduate ten successful

women from this pilot programme and then expand to additional conservancies in Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic.

The three-year programme for these women began in summer 2017 with basic backcountry hiking and guide training. Instruction continued last winter for the nine trainees from Alichur, with training provided by hunter Kelli Poole from Montana, USA, including identifying individual mountain ungulates to hunt, wilderness survival and safety, and camp management skills. In between trainings, TWC trainees shadowed hunts, assisted in guiding eco-tourists, and some are already working as rangers in their conservancies. Training will continue in summer 2018 with components including wilderness first aid and a more in-depth wildlife curriculum.

This programme provides an opportunity for snow leopard conservation to empower women and offer them a chance to be on an equal footing with men as rangers and guides. Our TWC Initiative Coordinator Shirin Muhametkadyr Kyzy of Panthera Kyrgyzstan, remarked on our impact to date: "The women were so motivated, full of energy, with an open heart to a completely new experience, eyes sparkling with enthusiasm ready to go and start their new career. The support from the men-rangers in the two conservancies, their families, sisters and brothers who encouraged the women's choices was outstanding."

We are grateful to the IWT Challenge Fund for supporting and empowering the active participation of Tajik women in conservation.

This article features project IWT037 "Conservation and community resilience: IWT Alternatives in snow leopard range", led by Panthera, which works in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.