

range. Although conservation interventions have mitigated leopard persecution in Oman, this is not the case in Yemen. Most worrying are the recent reports from Hawf, as it is outside the conflict zone. If killings continue, the remaining small population of the leopard in Hawf could be lost. The estimated global population of the Arabian leopard is < 200 and the species is on the edge of extinction in the wild. Regional interest in the conservation of the subspecies is high and the leopards of Yemen's Hawf mountains are an opportunity for urgent conservation intervention.

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New global alliance to help improve the practice of biodiversity conservation

The global conservation community is facing a critical moment. As climate change and anthropogenic activities such as wars and unsustainable use of resources continue to threaten biodiversity at an unprecedented rate, it is becoming increasingly clear that top-down conservation approaches have been neither sufficient nor ethically sound. Historically, these approaches have led to injustices to and marginalization of local and Indigenous communities, and to compromised long-term conservation outcomes.

An expanding group of conservationists, currently representing 23 countries and with a cumulative experience of 45 decades, working across continents and oceans, have announced the formation of the Partners Conservation Alliance. The Alliance's mission is to help improve how biodiversity conservation is practised worldwide by recognizing and empowering local and Indigenous communities.

The Alliance issued a statement on 2 December 2022, in Kashka Suu village of the Kyrgyz Republic, ahead of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal. The Kashka Suu Statement highlights the need to recognize the role of local and Indigenous people in biodiversity conservation. Initiatives built upon respectful, ethical and resilient partnerships with local and Indigenous communities are the most effective and morally defensible conservation approach, not just to address biodiversity loss but also for sustainable economic development. It is noteworthy that community-led biodiversity conservation programmes can address 10–13 of the 17 sustainable development goals set by the United Nations. The Kashka Suu statement was referenced by the government of the Kyrgyz Republic at the Conference of the Parties in Montreal.

During a 5-day workshop in Kashka Suu village, leading to the Statement, a core group of the Partners Conservation Alliance also committed itself to creating and offering training toolkits and resources for conservation practitioners, to help them engage local and Indigenous communities and strengthen their ownership and conservation leadership. The Alliance plans to offer training in various locations, and the first training course was delivered in Kenya in February 2023.

The Partners Conservation Alliance is determined to help strengthen conservation efforts worldwide by empowering local and Indigenous communities and ensuring their voices are heard in the global conversation about biodiversity conservation. It is time for conservation to be rebuilt on a foundation of respect, equity, transparency, accountability and partnership.

The Kashka Suu Statement on Global Biodiversity Conservation is available at globalsnowleopard.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Partners-conservation-alliance-Statement.pdf

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Saving the threatened forest fish

Nepal is home to two pangolin species, the Endangered Indian pangolin *Manis crassicaudata* and the Critically Endangered Chinese pangolin *Manis pentadactyla*. Both are threatened by poaching and habitat degradation. The scattered distribution of pangolins often overlaps with human-dominated landscapes, and generally there is limited funding available for pangolin conservation as Nepal's conservation efforts focus on flagship species, such as the tiger and rhinoceros, in protected areas.

In this context, Greenhood Nepal initiated a survey in the Chitwan-Parsa Complex during October 2022–February 2023, to investigate pangolin distribution and public awareness of these species. The Chitwan-Parsa Complex was chosen because it is a secure landscape for globally threatened megafauna and we aimed to examine whether the existing conservation measures could also benefit pangolins.

We visited 13 Buffer Zone User Committees of Parsa National Park and 21 Buffer Zone User Committees of Chitwan National Park, and interviewed Indigenous communities living around the Parks. Our survey revealed that Indigenous communities are unaware of the

conservation status of pangolins and often hunt them for their meat.

The majority of the Indigenous fishing communities described pangolins as fish found in the forest. They call them *sal machha*, which means fish from the *sal Shorea robusta* forest, and *ban machha*, which means forest fish. Many of these communities harvest and eat pangolins, regarding them as just another fish, but from the forest. In earlier research interviewing people convicted for wildlife crimes in Nepal, we encountered the term *sal machha* in conversation with a prisoner from this region (Paudel et al., 2020, *Conservation Science and Practice*, 2, e137). In our current survey, we found this phrase to be common in the vernacular.

Communities living with wildlife, especially rural Indigenous communities, have their own perceptions of species and the role they play in their environment and lived realities. If such communities are not aware that a species is globally threatened, they may also not know that hunting it may be illegal and could result in penalties.

It is imperative to ensure that local communities are aware of the conservation status of pangolins, so that they are not hunted just like a fish in the river. Priority conservation areas for pangolins need to be identified, and park authorities and communities encouraged to incorporate pangolins into their conservation programmes. Creative outreach programmes could lead to improved awareness and behavioural change to help protect pangolins.

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A comparison of (a) a Chinese pangolin (photo: Kushal Shrestha) with (b) a fish (photo: Kumar Paudel) harvested by Indigenous communities in Chitwan-Parsa Complex, Nepal, demonstrates why Indigenous fishing communities describe pangolins as *sal machha* (forest fish).