



Community-Based Human - Himalayan Brown Bear Conflict Mitigation in Kargil District, UT of Ladakh.

FINAL REPOR 2024

SUPPORTED BY

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IN COLLABORATION WITH



Introduction:



The Himalayan Brown Bear Trust (HBBT) is dedicated to fostering coexistence between communities and the Himalayan brown bear population in Kargil, a unique yet challenging environment in the high-altitude landscapes of Ladakh, India. This report reflects on the progress made under the 2024 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Eicher Group Foundation, which has played a vital role in supporting HBBT's mission to address human-wildlife conflict, promote conservation education, and create sustainable livelihoods through community-centred programs.

The Project area is focused in the Drass Valley of Kargil district. Drass, a sub-division of Kargil, situated at a height of 3230 m, is the second coldest inhabited place in the world. As per the 2011 census, it has a total population of 22,000 spread across 20 villages. Drass, due to its unique geographical location at the intersection of the Lower Himalayas, Greater Himalayas and the Karakoram range, experiences freezing weather in winters with heavy snowfall. The forest types of Kargil and Drass are temperate and alpine forest. The four distinct seasons are spring (March–May), summer (June–August), autumn (September–November) and winter (December–February). Recurring snow falls during winters lower the temperature of this township to as low as minus 40 degrees. Zojila Pass, the Himalayan Gateway to Ladakh, connecting it from the Kashmir Valley serves as the starting point of the Drass valley of Ladakh





Objectives:

1. Enhance Human-Wildlife Coexistence:

Foster a harmonious relationship between communities and the Himalayan brown bear population through awareness campaigns, conflict mitigation measures, and education programs.

2. Capacity Building:

Equip local communities with skills in nature guiding, tourism, and conservation practices to create sustainable livelihood opportunities.

3. Promote Community-Led Conservation:

Empower local communities to take ownership of conservation efforts by involving them in planning, implementation, and monitoring.

4. Mitigate Human-Wildlife Conflicts:

Reduce the frequency and severity of bear encounters through infrastructure improvements such as solar street lights and strategic information dissemination.

5. Support Sustainable Tourism:

Develop responsible tourism models that highlight the natural and cultural heritage of Drass while minimizing environmental impacts.

6. Raise Awareness and Foster Stewardship:

Use educational tools such as information boards to increase awareness of wildlife and conservation practices among residents and visitors.



Outcome:

1. Improved Safety and Reduced Conflict:

The installation of solar street lights and information boards has reduced the risk of human-bear encounters, fostering a greater sense of security in the villages.

2. Skilled Local Workforce:

The Nature Guide Training Program has created a pool of 18 trained individuals equipped to support eco-tourism and conservation initiatives in the Drass region.

3. Increased Awareness:

Informative signage and community engagement activities have educated residents and tourists about coexistence with the Himalayan brown bear and the region's biodiversity.

4. Enhanced Community Involvement:

Local stakeholders, including community representatives and village members, actively participated in project activities, fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship.

5. Strengthened Conservation Infrastructure:

Strategic interventions, such as solar lighting and signage, have improved the capacity for conflict prevention and tourism management.

6. Foundation for Scaling Up:

The successful implementation of activities has laid the groundwork for expanding efforts to additional villages in the Kargil district.



Activities:

1. Nature Guide Training Program

In June 2024, from the 20th to the 29th, the Nature Guide Training Program was successfully conducted in the Drass region of Kargil. A total of 18 participants were onboarded and trained through a comprehensive curriculum that covered both theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary for becoming a Nature Guide. The program included a diverse range of sessions led by guest speakers and professionals who imparted knowledge on:

- Biodiversity, Geography, and Climate
- Cultural Heritage and Local History
- Photography
- Business Management and Costing
- Interpersonal Communication Skills
- Dedicated training on the ecology and spotting of the Himalayan Brown Bear

Mr Raza Ali, Wildlife Warden from the Department of Wildlife Protection, LAHDC Kargil, officially inaugurated the event. On the final day, participants were assessed through an exam, with 70% of the students scoring over 60%.

Upon the successful completion of the program, each graduate was provided with a Nature Guide starter kit containing:

- Binocular
- Field Guides
- Jacket & Cap
- Backpack
- Certificates, signed by the Additional Director - Tourism and Wildlife Warden, LAHDC Kargil

We are in close communication with all participants, supporting their registration with the Tourism Department to validate the course. Monitoring will continue throughout the next tourist season to identify individuals who are interested in pursuing Nature Guiding as a career.



2. Installation of Solar Street Lights:

During July and August 2024, night surveys were conducted in Holiyal, Mushkoo, Muradbagh, and Pandrass as outlined in the project. However, it was observed that Pandrass already had a sufficient number of solar lights installed by the government, rendering additional lights unnecessary. Following consultations with the Regional Lead for Ladakh, we extended surveys to the villages of Matayen and Bearas, selecting Bearas due to increased reports of conflicts and the lack of adequate lighting infrastructure.

The selection of locations was based on the following criteria:

- Recent incidents involving attacks on houses or cattle sheds
- Frequency of human and bear movements along the same paths
- Absence of existing lighting systems
- Areas where one or two lights could benefit multiple households

To better understand the impact of poor lighting on human-bear encounters, a small survey was conducted, and a follow-up assessment will be made to evaluate how improved infrastructure reduces conflict. In total, 100 locations across four villages were identified for lighting installations. In October, 100 solar lights were installed with the assistance of local community members. A local representative from each village was onboarded to help with the installation.

In Pandrass, residents reported a significant reduction in bear attacks due to the government's streetlight intervention, leading to an increased sense of security. A follow-up assessment in 2025 will provide further insights into the effectiveness of lighting as a conflict mitigation strategy.



3. Installation of Information Boards:



In August 2024, a detailed survey of the Drass region was conducted, identifying 20 strategic locations for installing information boards. A designer was engaged to develop the infographics, ensuring the boards were both visually appealing and informative. The content on the boards included:

- Responsible tourism practices
- Guidelines for coexisting with the Himalayan Brown Bear
- Introduction to the Himalayan Brown Bear
- Local fauna of the Drass region
- Cautionary signs with creative messaging



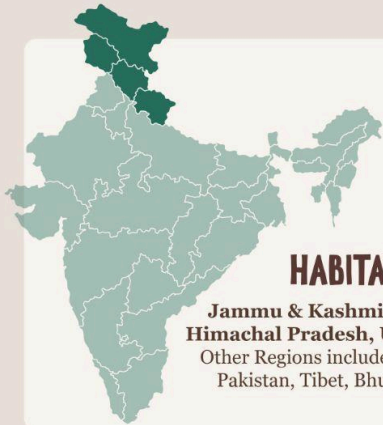
Once the designs were approved, orders for fabrication were placed in September, utilizing reflective sticker bases to ensure night-time visibility. Throughout September, approvals were secured from the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) and the Wildlife Department for board installation. By the end of the month, the boards were installed in four villages along the Srinagar-Kargil highway. These information boards enhance the villages' aesthetic value and serve as important educational tools for tourists and local communities, fostering greater awareness and understanding of conservation issues.



DISCOVER THE HIMALAYAN BROWN BEAR

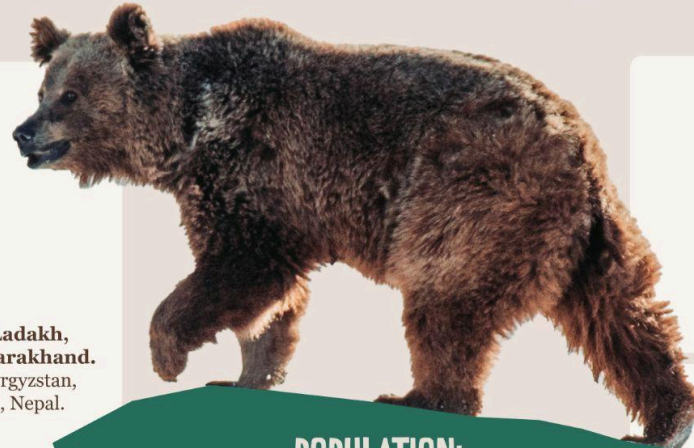
LARGEST MAMMAL OF THE TALLEST MOUNTAINS IN THE WORLD

ROYAL
ENFIELD



HABITAT:

Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh,
Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand.
Other Regions include Kyrgyzstan,
Pakistan, Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal.



PHYSICAL TRAITS:

5-6 feet tall & 175-350 kg

Life span: 25 years

Dark to golden brown,
some with beige collars.

Hibernation (Partial): Dec - Mar



DIET:



Omnivorous: Grasses, roots, fruits, berries,
insects & small mammals like Marmots, Pika.

ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE:



Keystone
Species



Seed
Dispersal



Insect
Control



Biodiversity
Sustainer

POPULATION:

2000 500-800

EX EW GR EN VU

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

Locally called Drenmo (Purgi) & Irsh (Shina)

THREATS:

Climate Change: Shorter winters

Human Impact: Overgrazing, habitat loss,
retaliatory killings, wildlife trade.

CULTURAL SYMBOL:

Represents **strength and resilience**
for local communities.

SUPPORTED BY:



www.himalayanbrownbear.org

Course of Action Ahead:

The completion of these activities marks the beginning of our efforts to mitigate human-Himalayan brown bear conflicts in the Kargil district. Through capacity building, infrastructure improvements, and awareness initiatives, we have laid a strong foundation for continued conservation work in this region. With the beginning of the season in 2025, we look forward to conducting assessments to identify the impact of these activities. We also want to scale up these activities to other villages in Kargil. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with the Eicher Group Foundation to ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

