

# Community Conservation Awareness Program Final Report

District Neelum, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan



Funded by:

**Oriental Bird Club**

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## Executive Summary:

Salkhala Game Reserve, categorized as Important Bird Area, lies between the geographical coordinates of  $34^{\circ} 33' N$  and  $73^{\circ} 50' E$ , having an area of 2,000 acre and about six major villages are there around the Game Reserve with a total population of about 6000 people. Community living around the game Reserve depends upon the Natural Resources of the Area having no awareness regarding the sustainable use of natural resources, resulting in the degradation of the natural resources. This program titled "Community Conservation Awareness program" was started to create awareness regarding importance of birds and their role in ecosystem. To achieves objectives different tools like workshops, seminars, quiz competition and field trip was used including the community organization especially nature club formation.

## Introduction:

Salkhala Game Reserve, lies between the geographical coordinates of  $34^{\circ} 33' N$  and  $73^{\circ} 50' E$ , having an area of 2,000 acre and is 80 kilometer in North West of Muzaffarabad city, in Bandi Range of Keran forest division in Neelum Valley, Azad Kashmir. Salkhala was notified as Game Reserve in 1982, with an elevation ranges from 5000 feet to 10332 feet above main sea level. There are six villages around the Salkhala Game Reserve with a total population of about 6000 people.

Major villages around the game reserve are Rawta, Palri, Salkhala, Anshungi, Islamapura and Gail. Salkhala is the most populated village around the Reserve with 235 house holds and 1419 persons. There are six public schools working in the project area.

## Area Profile:

Salkhala Game Reserve, lies between the geographical coordinates of  $34^{\circ} 33' N$  and  $73^{\circ} 50' E$ , having an area of 2,000 acre and is 80 kilometer in North West of Muzaffarabad city, in Bandi Range of Keran forest division in Neelum Valley, Azad Kashmir. Salkhala was notified as Game Reserve in 1982, with an elevation ranges from 5000 feet to 10332 feet above main sea level. There are six villages around the Salkhala Game Reserve with a total population of about 6000 people. Major villages around the game reserve are Rawta, Palri, Salkhala, Anshungi, Islamapura and Gail. Salkhala is the most populated village around the Reserve with 235 house holds and 1419 persons. There are six public schools working in the project area.

Major Wildlife consists of Western Tragopan pheasant, Himalayan Monal Pheasant, Kashmir Koklass Pheasant, White crested Kalij Pheasant, Himalayan snow cock, Musk Deer, Black Bear, and common leopard. The prevailing plant species of the Game Reserve include *Cedrus deodara*, *Pinus wallichiana*, *Abies pindrow*, *Picea smithiana*, *Taxus wallichiana*, *Acer caecium*, *Butula utilis*, *Berberis Spp.*, *Quercus spp.*, *Juniperus communis*, *Viburnum Spp.*, *Indegofera gerardiana*, *Juglans regis*, *Aesculus indica*, etc. Heavy rain and snowfall is the characteristic of the area.



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## Overview of the Project:

Most of the community who are living around the Salkhala Game Reserve is totally depending upon the resources of the Reserve area for their livelihood. During the summer season people make use of the pasture inside the reserve area and use the forest resources during their stay inside and around the Game Reserve from May to September every year. During this period they also have their cattle with them which also feed by the reserve resources.



People like to collect mushrooms due to their high prices in the market. During this practice, children destroy the eggs of the pheasants resulting into the decline in the reproduction. It was also observed that common people do not have any information about the global importance of the Game Reserve and important pheasants found in it. They also don't have any knowledge about the sustainable use of natural resources. Keeping in view, Project was designed under the following objectives.



## Objectives:

Major objectives of this program were;

- To create awareness about the importance of the birds in the ecosystem especially in the school children.
- To educate the community about the birds habitat destruction (especially of Pheasants) during the summer season when they use the Reserve area for their summer houses.
- To create awareness about the wealth of important species of birds of the area.

## Major Activities:

- Community organization into village Conservation Committee (VCC) for the conservation of the natural resources especially Birds.
- Natural Clubs formation in different schools of the area to involve the children in the conservation awareness program.
- Implementation of conservation awareness program through Workshops, seminars, quizzes competition among school children, field trips and published awareness material.

## Approach adopted for objectives achievement:

A survey was conducted to identify the major conservation issues in the villages around the Salkhala game reserve. For this purpose people were interviewed from areas and hamlets especially hunters and school children. On the basis of collected assessment, target groups were identified with defined criteria. To address and encounter these issues, community was organized into village conservation committees and Nature clubs were organized in the school. Workshops, seminars, field trips and quiz completion were arranged to educate the target group about the importance of the area and its sustainability. Awareness (Audio Visual) material has been prepared and distributed among the community members and school children.

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## Identification of major Conservation Issues of SGR:

The assessment has been conducted to identify the major conservation issues of the Salkhala Game Reserve. For this, meetings were arranged with the community (especially hunters) living around the Salkhala game reserve with the representation of the whole community. During the survey major issues identified were;

- Forest Fires
- Destruction of Pheasant's Eggs
- Degradation of Reserve resources
- Lack of conservation Education



## Project groups targeting and identification:

It was also the strategic planning to address and identify the relevant groups who are more relevant with our conservation awareness project. As a result of survey, two major groups were identified who were more relevant for conservation education.

- 1- Community members (Especially hunters, those people who have more access to natural resources and having lack of conservation awareness education of natural resources and its sustainability)
- 2- School children (To promote conservation education at school level and child level).

These are the several major issues identified during the survey, community meetings, observations regarding the conservation of the natural resources especially birds (pheasants). There is need to proper planning and implementation to cope with these issues and problems. To address the above mentioned issues following steps were taken with the community participation which are stated below;

- 1- Community organization
- 2- Nature club formation
- 3- Workshops and seminars
- 4- Quiz completion
- 5- Field trip and monitoring visits
- 6- Preparation and distribution awareness material

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## Project Progress:

### 1- Community organization Formation:

For the project sustainability, it was most needed to work with and fully involve the local resources like community members, community leaders, religious person, younger students etc. So it was our first step to develop a community group for this project. For this purpose, the community who are living around Salkhala Game Reserve was contacted and meetings were arranged to introduce the community with the program and its objectives. After the delivery of complete message at village level and with the consent of the community Village Conservation Committees (VCCs) were organized. A total of 6 VCCs were organized around Salkhala Game Reserve. To ensure and monitor the actions of the representatives of the VCCs, a Conservation Monitoring Committee (CMC) was formed after the election from the representatives of the VCCs. CMC will be also responsible to prepare a 6 monthly monitoring report regarding the impact of the conservation program on the community of the Area. The different type of other responsibilities is also assigned to these VCCs. The monitoring visits are also conducted with VCCs to support them for the best management and utilize their skills for the better management and conservation of natural resources. The purpose of this visit is basically to build the capacity of VCC and CMC.



### 2- Nature club formation:

The students were the second major identified with the relevancy of the project group. The purpose of the nature club formation was to promote the conservation education at school level. For this purpose, six nature clubs were organized in different schools. The conducting/ formation methodology of the nature club is that, in a nature club two representatives were students from class 5th to 10th and two from teachers. President of each club is a teacher who will supervise the club regarding the involvement of the students in conservation related activities. There was active participation found in students and teacher during nature club. Girls' students are also getting more interest in nature club.

## Workshops and seminars:

### Community workshops:

Two workshops of community members were arranged to sensitize the community about the importance of the Salkhala game reserve at community level. The major issues and possible solutions have been mostly discussed around natural resources conservation. One workshop was on Forest fires which are found to be the most threatening agent to the Habitat of the Birds of Salkhala game reserve. Almost every year fires damages the forest area and community does not know how to control it. Some times this fire started due to the careless behavior of the villagers. Another workshop was to realize the community about the global importance of the Salkhala Game reserve and birds found in it (especially Pheasants). Workshop comprised of both male and children participants.



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## Workshop of school children

### 1- Workshop on importance of Birds in Ecosystem:

Two workshops were arranged to educate the school children about the importance of the Birds Area and importance of Birds in Ecosystem. School children were educated how birds play their role in ecosystem. They were also told how they could take care of habitat of birds. Teachers of the schools also show their interest in the Birds and their conservation.



### 2- Workshop on Ecotourism:

A workshop of school children was arranged to create awareness regarding the ecotourism. Children were shown pictures of different parks with a proper management and some pictures of parks with improper management to compare the role of ecotourism. They were also educated how ecotourism is important in saving the Birds and their habitat.



### 3- Meetings of Wildlife staff and VCCs:

Meeting of the Wildlife staff and community members were arranged to set up coordination regarding the role of the VCCs in the conservation of Wildlife (especially Birds) in Salkhala Game Reserve. Wildlife Staff was brief how VCCs will help the staff in the conservation of wildlife in Salkhala game reserve.

### 4- Quiz competition:

A quiz completion among the school children regarding Environmental awareness and role of birds in Ecosystem was organized. The purpose of the quiz competition to assessed the children knowledge regarding conservation of the birds and ecosystem. Members of 4 nature clubs participated in the quiz. During this exercise other students also show their interested in the conservation of birds of Area. Winners were awarded with prizes at the end of the competition.



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## Field trips and field monitoring:

Field trips were arranged with community members and VCCs members to practically educate about the Birds of Salkhala game reserve, their habitat and threats to their habitat. Representatives from all villages were taken into the Salkhala Game Reserve for exercise. They were sensitized regarding the birds and their habitat. Community representatives were also trained in the monitoring of the Birds population and they were also trained to prepare a six monthly report on the population status of different species of the Birds especially Pheasants so that the impact of the program could be evaluated. Monitoring visits also help us to identify the gaps, where we can work more for the project impact and its sustainability. Monitoring visits also helps to improve the VCCs and CMCs capacity for their maturity.



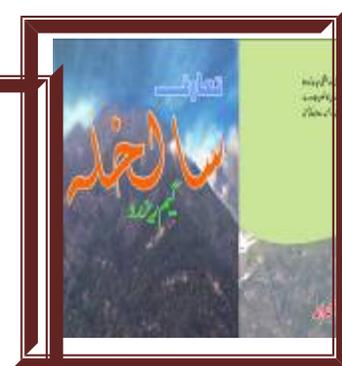
## Preparation and Distribution of Awareness material:

### 1- Preparation of pamphlets:

Pamphlets were prepared in Urdu and distributed on introduction of Salkhala Game Reserve. Pamphlets contain the introduction of Salkhala, global importance of the Reserve, important Wildlife, threats to the Wildlife especially Bird. These pamphlets has been displayed in the community at the major side where the accessibility of the community members and other villagers to promote conservation education of birds and natural resources.

### 2- Preparation of Posters:

Poster reflecting the Habitat and important pheasants of Salkhala was prepared and distributed to the Nature clubs. "Salkhala is our identity come to save its natural Resources" is written on the poster in Urdu. Published Awareness material has also been handed over to Village Conservation committees, Nature Club members, Wildlife Department, Birds Conservation Society of Azad Kashmir and president EHAD.



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## Lesson learnt & Future Recommendations:

### Lesson learnt:

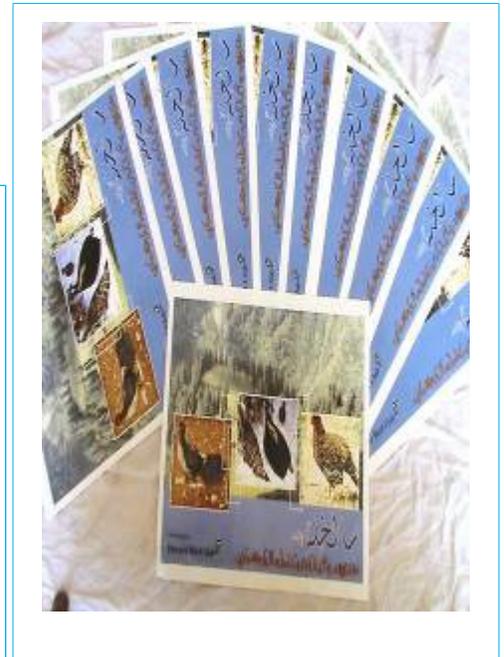
- Children and women are found to be directly involved in the habitat destruction as most of the activities are done by children and women. Although the some nature clubs has been established and workshops were organized to create awareness but women were not involved in the program.
- People took their cattle on pastures and stay there for about 4-5 month and regular use of pastures results in degradation of Natural Resources.
- Mushrooms collection is purely an activity of women and children and during this activity they destroy pheasant's eggs just to earn a little amount of money.

### Recommendation:

- Women are also needed to be involved in the program for the sustainable use of natural resources and conservation of Birds (Pheasants) of the Area.
- A strong awareness campaign is needed to be launched to sensitize the community to ensure the sustainable use of pastures.
- A program for the sustainable harvesting of the Mushrooms may be started along with conservation Awareness program to enhance the socio-economic condition of the community living around the Salkhala Game Reserve. This would be helpful in the conservation of Birds of the area

### Acknowledgement:

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