3. Law enforcement and anti-poaching

Wildlife poaching is a serious threat to many wildlife species, especially large carnivores across the majority of their global range. Rangers, as frontiers in combating wildlife poaching, are key personnel to ensure the survival of large carnivores, including the leopard. However, such important frontiers are frequently overlooked.

The Project Future4Leopards predominantly focuses on improving the performance of rangers who are the key persons monitoring illegal activities and poaching. In Iran, they are hired by the DoE, but they suffer from lack of proper training, unsuitable equipment and shortage of motivation. Also, anti-poaching units are severely understaffed, meaning that local people must help the rangers in detection and stopping illegal activities. We are supporting ongoing governmental activities addressing these four main challenges.

Accordingly, local rangers are receiving training on population monitoring of the leopards, conflict resolution, trapping and ecology of the leopards. Also, an event for outstanding leopard rangers to acknowledge their efforts on a bi-annual basis has been established, to recognize several leopard rangers with highest performance (assessed based on number of poachers arrested, leopard sighted, etc.). We also support the creation and maintenance of a network of local informants, key persons who can report poachers to rangers to reduce poaching pressure on the wildlife (mostly herders). In order to support anti-poaching patrols, in partnership with local authorities, access trails are built and maintained in higher elevation with preventive gates for better controlling of illegal activities, such as poaching and fire control.

As part of the Project's action plan, empowering and supporting anti-poaching and commitment by the rangers is one of the key priorities in coming years. Therefore, the majority of conservation resources raised by the Project will be spent to support them. As the first step, providing basic high-tech equipment was sourced to enhance their performance in anti-poaching.

Impact Zone: Better motorbikes for better anti-poaching patrols

Powerful motorbikes are essential for rangers to patrol effectively within harsh mountainous areas. Nevertheless, many of them are working for years within the leopard areas, sometimes up to 15 years. Inappropriate maintenance using fake parts is the main reason for poor performance of the rangers' motorbikes, resulting in regular failures and crashes. As a result, anti-poaching patrols decreased which put the leopards and their prey at more risk of poaching. We have found a solution, thanks to the generous supports from our donors, an annual motorbike fixing program has been organized for the leopard areas' rangers. Therefore, in 2016, Tandoureh National Park received 1400 GBP from the Project Future4Leopards to fix a total of seven motorbikes functioning in the Park. All motorbikes were restored using original Yamaha accessories and a complete engine check-up was carried out for each motorbike. Afterwards, the rangers were able to increase their anti-poaching effort to control poachers aiming for leopards and their prey in Tandoureh National Park.

Highlight Zone: Appreciation of leopard rangers

During 2016, almost 55 rangers working within the Project sites, including Bafq, Dohezar-Sehezar, Ors-Sistan and Tandoureh received personal equipment for better patrolling in different mountainous conditions. All rangers were given high quality jackets to keep them warm in cold winters. Also, 30 rangers in Tandoureh and Ors-Sistan were given ramble walking trousers, because their own trousers are made from low quality materials, very susceptible to erosion when sitting and crawling among thorn bushes and rocks. The new Project funded trousers are suitable for such landscapes.

Additionally, following three years of working together to improve leopard conservation in Tandoureh, an acknowledgement ceremony was held in Tandoureh on 18 October 2016 to thank committed rangers. The Project's manager, Mohammad Farhadinia presented a story on what happened and was achieved during three years of Project implementation in Tandoureh, then DoE managing director, Hamid Salehi endorsed the Project outcomes for improving conservation in Tandoureh. The ceremony concluded by presenting special gifts to the rangers.

Testimonial: Abolfazl Shabani (Chief ranger commander, Razavi Khorasan Department of Environment)

Engagement of local rangers in research and monitoring activities supplemented by improving anti-poaching infrastructures, such as motorbikes and access trails, all managed by Project Future4Leopards have resulted in more anti-poaching patrols by motivated rangers in Tandoureh National Park.

Success Zone: Making a new powerful motorbike for rangers

The majority of Iranian rangers ride weak trail motorbikes in contrast to their poacher counterparts who usually reach far into the reserves on powerful motorbikes. Weak motorbikes normally have higher maintenance costs and need more experienced riders due to difficulty to keep the moving motorbikes balanced in narrow mountainous trails.
Our local partner in Bafq Department of Environment has found a better way: making a new motorbike out of 2-3 old broken Yamaha DT 175 motorbikes and an original new Yamaha added to make a new powerful motorbike for rough terrains. The first motorbike, made out of three old motorbikes, was supported by the Project, now used by one of the local rangers.

Impact Zone: Trails for trekking rangers

There are traditional trails within Tandoureh, some dating back two centuries and used by rangers to patrol the National Park. Some of them have been abandoned for years, making some remote areas difficult access for rangers whose duty is to monitor large areas. Sadly, some of these remote areas have created a haven for poachers, because they know that there is very low chance of encountering a ranger.
In 2016, we suggested an innovative trail for rangers in Sarigol National Park, to control both poachers and possible fire. Equally important, we learned that there is haven for poachers in Tandoureh, and of course the leopards, based on numerous images of the leopards. Therefore, local workers were hired to construct a trail for 4 kilometer penetrating the National Park, on foot or motorbike. Access trails are carefully placed so they do not provide any extra accessibility to poachers, for example they are regularly started from a ranger post, so full control is expected over any plausible entry. For 2017, we are planning a big online event to raise money for constructing a trail on the periphery of the National Park, with the purposes of better accessibility for rangers as well as to improve fire control in high altitudes.

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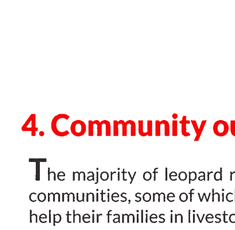
4. Community outreach programs

The majority of leopard reserves are surrounded by rural communities, some of which have schools. Many rural people help their families in livestock husbandry activities, normally as shepherds accompanying the herds during outdoor grazing. The Project Future4Leopards is addressing school kids and students, educating them on the lives of the leopards, and the hope is for them to pass on the knowledge and educate their families, as they are the next generation co-existing with the leopards.
Besides educational activities and outreach festivals, the Project is organizing eco-tours to Tandoureh National Park for school kids in spring 2017 to provide them with a unique experience of wildlife, nature camps, and museums. Thus, local people who are not normally allowed to visit the National Parks can learn more about the area.

Impact Zone: Leopard Calendar on Rural Walls

In January 2016, the Project Future4Leopards decided to share its amazing collection of Persian leopard images with hundreds of rural communities around our Project sites. We posted a request for financial support on our facebook. Surprisingly, within just two weeks, nearly 40 generous individual donors granted us their invaluable donations to raise an amount of 1640 $, enabling us to develop and publish 2200 new Persian year wall calendar (commenced on 21 March 2016). Thanks to our Project partner, Huttell Company, all calendars were safely sent to four Project sites, Tandoureh, Sarigol, Salouk and Ors-Sistan. Over 2000 rural families received the calendar which is expected to increase their awareness about the leopard life and survival.



Staff highlight

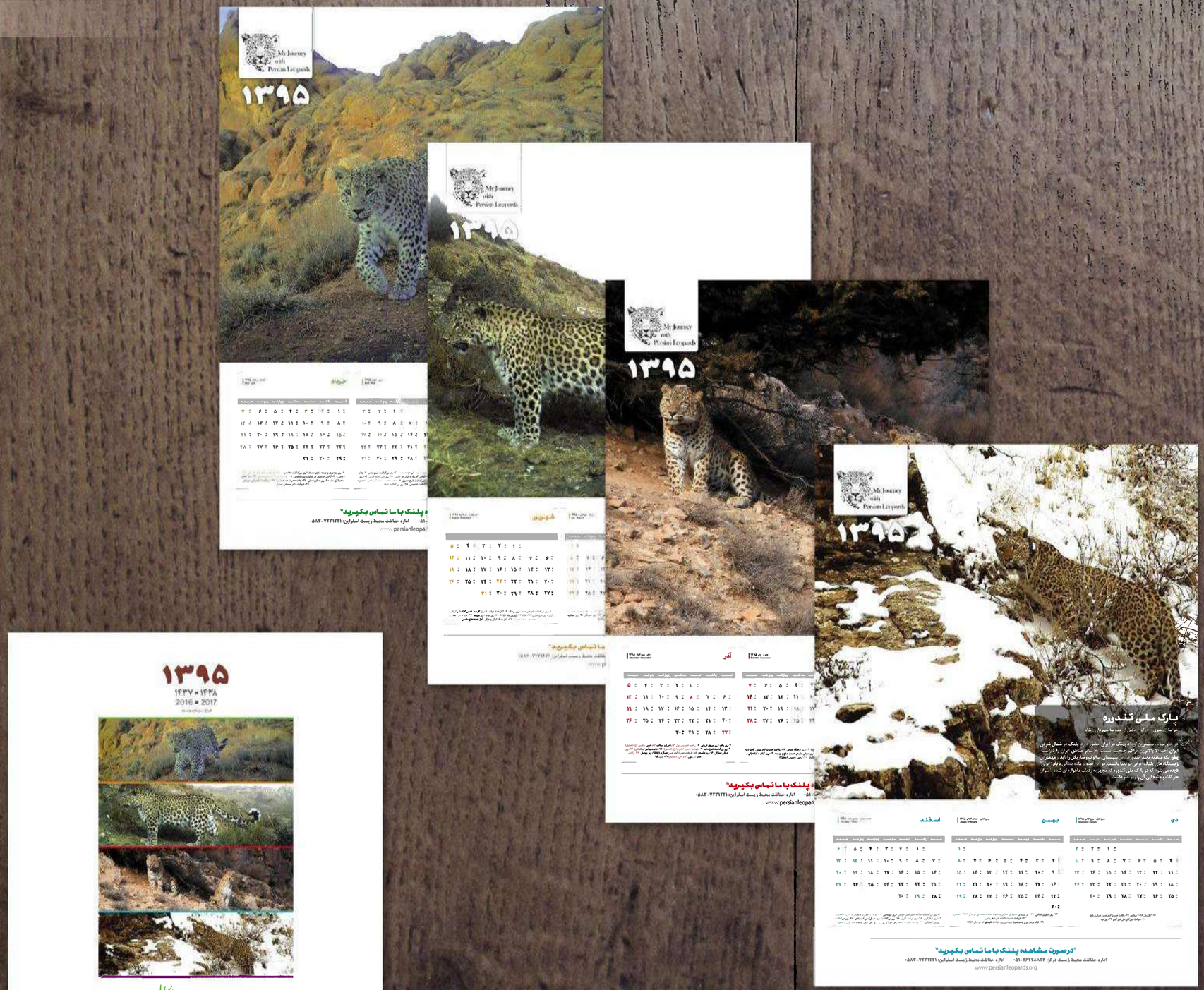
Reyhaneh Rouhi

Education is crucial to protect nature, but sometimes the solution is beyond just sharing information and passion. This is when enterprise and marketing will come to the forefront, through Reyhaneh. She recently joined the Project and is currently working with local partners in Tandoureh to find achievable sustainable plans for marketing conservation products (excluding trophy hunting).

Staff highlight

Mina Aghvami

With a background of many years working as a conservation educator, Mina joined the Project in spring 2016 to develop community-based educational materials. She led development of innovative training materials for communities sharing their lands with leopards.



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Highlight Zone: Let's get to know the leopards

In fall 2016, more than one third of school kids within nine communities around Tandoureh National Park were educated about the leopards and their conservation needs. Implemented in partnership with local Department of Environment and Bureau of Education, more than 180 school kids 11-13 years attended two series of educational classes specifically developed by the Project Future4Leopards.
Located on the border with Turkmenistan, Tandoureh has hosted a satellite collaring project since 2014. So far, most of the collared leopards occasionally wander into rural areas around the National Park, but very rarely depredated on livestock. Although conflict with local communities seems be a minor challenge for leopard conservation in this area, roaming among villages, probably in search for dispersal routes or new resources, may bring the leopards into direct encounters with local people. There have been several cases in which frightened people have attempted to kill the leopards, because a wandering leopard can be perceived as a dangerous animal by non-educated people. This is why we established a comprehensive education and outreach program, to cover various social groups, starting with school children.
Villages were chosen based on leopard patrolling areas derived from satellite collar data.
In the coming winter, another 9 villages will host outreach programs, to reach a total of 18 educated villages around Tandoureh and even on borderland. Then, in spring 2017, school kids are invited to come along on eco-trips to visit Tandoureh National Park to obtain first-hand experience of the natural wilderness nearby.

Stay tuned: Operation Leopard

Since 2014, **Wildlife Picture Institute (WPI)**, an award winning Iranian film production company who has produced fascinating documentaries about Iranian wildlife, is filming the Project's activities in Tandoureh. Co-directed by WPI's Nima Asgari, the film covers major activities undertaken by the Project crew to increase public awareness about leopard and its habitat. The film, named Operation Leopard, is still ongoing in the area and is expected to be aired in 2018.

Staff highlight

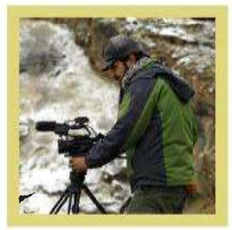
Alireza Shahrdari

It is difficult to find someone more passionate of animals than Alireza Shahrdari, whose passion has led him to educate local students across a wide variety of conservation projects in Iran, including Project Future4Leopards. He has been coordinating our outreach programs in 2016 across several communities around Tandoureh. When Alireza is speaking at local schools, transferring his love of the animals is his main focus.

Staff highlight

Atieh Taktehrani

A very lucky person to see leopards in the wild, she has sighted a leopard every time she visits Tandoureh. Atieh is working on different approaches useful to implement community outreach programs while she serves as a conservation educator in local schools around Tandoureh.



Staff highlight

Nima Asgari

While he has not been hired by the Project, he has been a key member of the Project crew for the past three years. A cameraman and documentary director working at the Project's partner Wildlife Picture Institute, he has spent dozens of days in Tandoureh, filming the Project's activities. He was lucky to film the leopards several times during 2016, which will be later used for the documentary he is co-directing with Fathollah Amiri, the renowned award-winning Iranian documentary producer, to be aired in 2018.

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