PRESS RELEASE  
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World Environment Day

Ten Red Pandas Collared in Nepal

Under the leadership of Ministry of Forests and Environment, Department of Forests and Soil Conservation (DoFSC), Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and in collaboration with Red Panda Network (RPN) ten Red pandas have been successfully equipped with GPS-satellite collars in the Panchthar-Ilam-Taplejung (PIT) Corridor: a belt of forest that connects protected areas in Nepal and India. This is the first time that the DOFSC has led a wildlife collaring study.

The red panda collaring field work took place for three months (September to December 2019) in Sandakpur Rural Municipality of Ilam district, eastern Nepal. Six females and four males were equipped with collars. The government of Nepal launched the country’s first five-year (2019-2023) action plan for red pandas. The action plan facilitated this collaring research project.

Technical committee recommended for the field implementation of red panda collaring work based on its scientific relevance and scrutiny on proposal submitted by RPN. The research team consisted of officials from the Divisional Forest Office, Ilam, DoFSC, DNPWC; Purushottam Pandey, senior Veterinary Officer at the Directorate of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF); Janno Weerman, the Zoological Manager at Rotterdam Zoo and Red Panda EAZA Ex-Situ Program Coordinator; and RPN’s Damber Bista, a Ph.D. student at the University of Queensland in Australia who is also the principal investigator of this research. This research was carried out upon the supervision of the technical committee.

“This is a great milestone in red panda conservation”, says Man Bahadur Khadka, Director General of the DOFSC. “We assure protection and conservation of this charismatic species whose survival is mainly threatened by anthropogenic factors.”

The collar study will not only provide critical baseline data on red panda ecology, distribution, and behavior in the wild but will also apprise stakeholders with valuable insight into landscape-level conservation efforts required to manage biological corridors. “This is a proud moment for us to have the opportunity to fulfill one of the objectives of Nepal’s Red Panda Conservation Action Plan”, comments Ang Phuri Sherpa, RPN’s Country Director in Nepal.

“This study aims to better understand how red pandas interact in human-dominated landscapes. The collars are programmed to record data every two hours, which will be transferred via a satellite system for one year. The data will help us get a better insight into their movement and space-use pattern, social behavior, and their response to disturbances.”, says Damber Bista, Queensland University student, RPN biologist, and team leader of the GPS collaring research project.

Prior to this collaring, the GPS collars were tested with two captive red pandas at the Rotterdam Zoo to evaluate their effectiveness and any possible disruption of the animal’s movement or behavior. The collar devices were found to be effective with no disruption. The training on safe capturing and handling of the animal in the field was provided by Janno Weerman, the Zoological Manager at the Rotterdam Zoo and Red Panda EAZA Ex-Situ Program Coordinator. The red pandas were named Paaru, Dolma, Chintapu, Mechhachha, Bhumo, Senehang, Ngima, Brian, Ninamma, and Praladdevi by local people; the names represent culture, landscape, language, and ethnicity of the region. The name Praladdevi was given in tribute to Pralad B. Yonzon.

On behalf of Government of Nepal, DoFSC thanks RPN, Rotterdam Zoo for the financial and technical support for this study and all those who were involved in this study.

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