


Plateau Perspectives Annual Report 2019





Plateau Perspectives is an international charity that supports local communities and organizations in mountain regions to find and develop long-term solutions that help to improve their resilience and quality of life and to protect their natural environment, particularly under the challenges of climate change and globalisation.

Registered in Canada, reg. no. 88353 511 RR0001

Recognized in Scotland, reg. no. SC036202

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Supporting mountain societies through
CONSERVATION and DEVELOPMENT
in the Tibetan plateau region and mountains of Central Asia



1. ECOTOURISM – FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE

Embedded within a framework of Sustainable Mountain Development, tourism may be leveraged to contribute in meaningful ways to the necessary adaptations of agro-pastoralist communities living in fragile socio-ecological systems, particularly in the face of climate change and socioeconomic globalisation.



The main objective of this work is to better define ecotourism in order to maximize benefits for local communities and for environmental conservation. We build on earlier experiences, especially since 2010 when Yushu, China, was devastated by an earthquake, then rebuilt with a focus on tourism development. We also have drawn on lessons from study tours to Nepal and Mongolia and the hands-on business experience of Chris Yuan, thus from both non-profit and business perspectives.

Two main approaches were adopted to reach our objectives, namely, conservation and community development:

1.1. RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

In October 2019, Plateau Perspectives organized a trial ecotourism venture in the Lake Issyk-kul region of Kyrgyzstan as part of a joint initiative with Horseback Planet Society, Ibirs Foundation, and Araketke-Bereket, and logistic support provided by Ecoland Travel. In addition to on-site learning by participants and local communities, a short documentary film was produced about the development of ecotourism of a tool for conservation and community development, with special attention given to the Shumkar Association in Chonkemin valley, comprised of former wildlife poachers who now monitor and protect local wildlife, and to the community-managed Baiboosun Nature Reserve situated in the Tianshan Mountains on the south shore of Lake Issyk-kul. For more information about ecotourism, see: <https://stories.plateauperspectives.org/choose-ecotourism>.



1.2. TRAINING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN TOURISM PLANNING AND OUTDOOR SKILLS, SPORTS, HEALTH & SAFETY

Practical training was provided to community members and local associations in a range of outdoor skills and activities, along with community-centred dialogues aiming to bring further support to local community-based conservation and ecotourism ventures. Planning for future growth and the development of guidelines for equestrian tourism were also advanced, in collaboration with the Horseback Planet Society. Participants in a trial ecotour including clients from China also received specialist training and several are now serving as ‘ambassadors’ for community-based conservation of snow leopard in the Tianshan Mountains of Kyrgyzstan.



Additionally, Plateau Perspectives had opportunity to transfer some of its lessons learned back to Qinghai, China...

1.3. FURTHER TRIALS, SCALING UP IN CHINA

Following on from the above, training was given to ~25 people from 4 provinces in matters of ecotourism, conservation, and sustainability – along with a successful friendly horseback archery competition held on the south shore of Qinghai Lake in December 2019. The activities and skills learned and networking amongst participants led to excellent dynamics that have continued to the present, facilitated by social media platforms in China. A public lecture was given in the capital, Xining, on ecotourism and biodiversity conservation.



Invitations have also been received, requesting similar outreach and support for conservation and community ecotourism purposes with other partners across the country. In Qinghai province, a hockey league and winter sports club were launched as well, emerging in large part from the networking, encouragement and enthusiasm engendered from the training event.

Summary of key activities undertaken in ecotourism:

- Trial ecotour and training in Kyrgyzstan, October 2019
- Horseback archery competition and training in China, December 2019
- Photo-story, policy brief and documentary film developed about ecotourism to promote approach
- Collaboration with Ilbirs Foundation strengthened, working with community conservancies

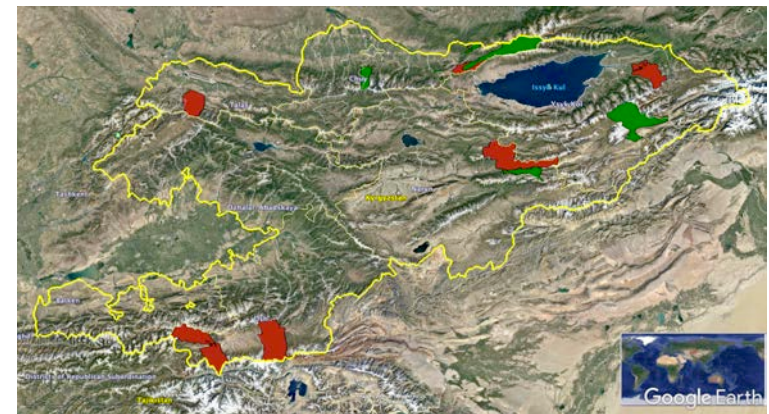
The 20-minute documentary film *“The Future We Want”* was produced by Marc Foggin and Pavel Bolshakov and launched on International Biodiversity Day 2020 in partnership with The International Ecotourism Society and Mountain Partnership. A press release about the film’s launch is available on the FAO Mountain Partnership website, at <http://tiny.cc/press-release>.



2. COMMUNITY CONSERVANCIES, KYRGYZSTAN

In Kyrgyzstan, Plateau Perspectives is supporting several community-based conservancies (local protected areas) by way of its partnership with Ilbirs Foundation. (*Ilbirs* means snow leopard in Kyrgyz language). These community-led initiatives are distributed across the entire country (see map) and are mostly comprised of groups of former poachers who are now using their unique skills and experience to protect wildlife. Ilbirs Foundation has long been partnering with such community groups in several provinces, from Aksu to Talas to Chong-alai, and also with several nature reserves. In each case, the primary approach is to empower communities, responding to their needs and interests and encouraging them to proactively design and carry out conservation projects as well as conduct anti-poaching patrols, work as rangers and nature guides, and develop sustainable ventures such as bee keeping, family homestays, and community ecotourism.

Plateau Perspectives is supporting Ilbirs Foundation in several different ways including design and analysis of baseline socio-economic surveys, development of ecotourism and trails-based tourism, and community co-management of protected areas in Kyrgyzstan as well as in Tajikistan.



Ilbirs Foundation partners across Kyrgyzstan – Community conservancies and protected areas in the Tianshan and Pamir-Alai Mountain Ranges



3. YAGNOB NATIONAL PARK, TAJIKISTAN

Yagnob Valley in northern Tajikistan is the home of the last descendants of the Sogdian empire, a secluded land hidden from numerous invaders over the centuries by its deep canyon entrance and high mountain passes blocked by snow for half the year. Now the partially depopulated valley is beginning to recover following many disruptions over the past several decades, and as of May 2019 the entire valley has been designated Tajikistan's newest national park. The over-arching purpose of the national park is to protect the unique biocultural heritage of the park, including alpine biodiversity along with the unique but endangered Yagnobi culture, particularly its language and traditions. Working closely with Anahita Organization, Plateau Perspectives is supporting the processes leading to a community-friendly co-management model of national park operation.



4. ICCA'S – TERRITORIES OF LIFE

Indigenous and community conserved areas or ICCAs are natural or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities through customary laws or other effective means – also known as *territories of life*. Plateau Perspectives is working at regional level to help identify, document, and strengthen such territories of life and their custodian communities in Central Asia. In this endeavour, it is working closely with the ICCA Consortium, especially through its West & Central Asia and Caucasus regional group. Plateau Perspectives is actively participating in regional and global assemblies and has also raised the profile of issues pertaining to conservation and equitable development for local communities and indigenous peoples in the mountains of Central Asia. Senior staff are also involved in assessments the impacts of large-scale developments on local communities.

In December 2019, Marc Foggin was appointed as Auditor of the Accounts & Ombudsman for the Consortium, as well as regional representative. ICCA Consortium seeks to advance solidarity, empowerment and support for indigenous peoples and local communities, i.e. social justice, particularly in relation to situations that support conservation outcomes. Plateau Perspectives has sponsored two local organizations in Tajikistan and Afghanistan to become consortium members.



5. LAPIS GUIDES APP

The Lapis Guides framework and smartphone application (see <http://www.lapisguides.org/>) is a tool that was developed by Amadeus DeKastle and Marc Foggin to support and encourage more participatory approaches in biodiversity conservation. With its in-built capabilities to easily develop customized digital field guides and thus to enable data collection by amateurs and professionals alike, the Lapis Guides app is versatile, functional, and easy to use. Plateau Perspectives is already applying the Lapis Guides framework to a range of projects and purposes.

The following projects have already been developed or are in process:

- Environmental monitoring – butterflies, birds, mammals, etc.
- Digitizing of regional herbarium, with the Academy of Sciences
- Identification of illegally traded endangered wildlife species
- Petroglyphs of the Tianshan Mountains (cultural heritage)

Publication arising from data collected with the Lapis Guides app:

Hermann, L., DeKastle, A., and Foggin, M. (2020). The Rock Art of the Karakol Region (Tchouï and Naryn Oblast) in Kyrgyzstan. *International Newsletter On Rock Art (INORA)*, 86: 17-25.

See <http://www.marcfoggin.com/rockart/>.



Petroglyph of a hunter and ibex



Local community member using *Butterflies of Kyrgyzstan* mini app.



6. SOCIAL SUPPORT

As needs arise, Plateau Perspectives also brings various forms of support for people in need, in particular for people affected by natural disasters, conflicts, or other emergencies. Over the past few years, assistance has been given to several families with food assistance, accommodation, health care, language training, schooling, skills development, and emotional support.



NEW PROJECT AFFILIATES

Two new colleagues have recently joined Plateau Perspectives as affiliates:

Chris Yuan – China

Chris Yuan has contributed substantially to disaster relief and development in western China over the past couple decades. He has led emergency response teams and provided on-going support to many people, especially children, who suffered greatly from the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and 2010 Yushu earthquake. In more recent years, he has specialised in outdoor pursuits and has brought together his passion for the environment and caring for the wellbeing of people in poor rural areas through the development of community ecotourism. Through Horseback Planet Society (HPS), which he co-founded in 2016, he has enabled the launch of several local ecotourism enterprises in the Tibetan plateau region. Working with Plateau Perspectives, he now also works in Central Asia.

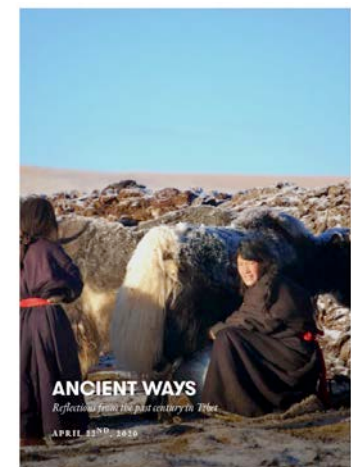
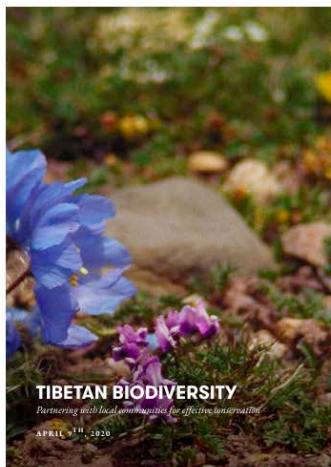
Laurens Buist – Russia (Caucasus)

Laurens Buist has over 5 years of experience in community development, primarily supporting enterprise development with a focus on creating additional sources of sustainable income, such as through mountain tourism. Laurens has a Masters in Dutch Administration and Governmental Law (ML) from Leiden University, together with a post-graduate Masters in Legislative Drafting (LLM) from the Academy for Legislation in The Hague. Laurens has lived in the Russian Federation since 2014, and is developing partnerships for community-based tourism business centred on the North Caucasus region.

WEBSITES & PUBLICATIONS

- Plateau Perspectives' website: <http://plateauperspectives.org/>
- Plateau Perspectives' policy brief series: <http://plateauperspectives.org/policy-briefs/>
 - Biodiversity is essential for human development
 - Ecotourism: Purposefully bringing benefit for both people and nature
 - Achieving sustainable development with equity in an era of globalisation
- Plateau Perspectives "Exposure" photo-stories: <https://stories.plateauperspectives.org/>
 - Tibetan Biodiversity: Partnering with local communities for effective conservation
 - Inclusive Development, An Imperative for the Future: Building partnerships
 - Twenty Years: Reflections on life in Tibet and Central Asia
 - Ancient Ways: Reflections from the past century in Tibet

and more...



PARTNERS



The ICCA
Consortium



Working together to build and sustain hope, providing support and encouragement for grassroots initiatives that promote development and well-being, environmental conservation, and positive sense of cultural identity across the generations.