Introduction

Environmental education (EE) is an important tool for improving people’s understanding and for motivating local communities to cooperate and take initiatives for conservation and sustainable resource use (Pritchard 1968; Cerovsky 1969). The basic aim of an EE program is to assist people in developing awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of natural resources so they can make informed decisions, driving responsible behavior and constructive action (Leopold 1949; UNESCO 1980; Roth 1992). The importance of EE is highlighted by studies on relationships among knowledge, attitude, and behavior by emphasizing that an individual must have relevant knowledge to hold a positive environmental attitude, which, in turn, is a moderate predictor of behavior (Zimmerman 1996; Bradley et al 1999; Kaiser et al 1999; Pe’er et al 2007; Tuncer et al 2009; Esa 2010).

In recognizing the importance of and need for EE, India’s National Policy on Education (1986), supported in 1991 by the Supreme Court of India’s direction, made EE compulsory at all levels of education. However, it was realized that the desired result of curricula revision will not be attained unless simultaneous changes are made in the teacher education curricula to prepare teachers for EE. Hence, in 2005, the National Council for Teacher Education made EE a compulsory course in teachers’ training (NCTE 2005).

As in other mountain societies, until the 1860s, education in Ladakhi society largely took place in the villages, in the fields, and by the family hearth (Norberg-Hodge 1991; Mingle 2003). Efforts to improve both the literacy rate and education led to an increase in the number of schools, from 72 in 1958 (Nair 1958) to 884 at present. Rizvi (1986) and Norberg-Hodge (1991) observed that modern schooling prevented children from viewing the context in which they live, which led to diminution of traditional values, skills, and sustainable lifestyles. The need for EE is more pronounced in Ladakh since development activities, concentrated over the past decade, have increased the vulnerability of its fragile mountain ecosystem and of the traditional livelihoods of the local communities. Responding to these concerns, the Jammu & Kashmir State Education Board along with the Centre for Environment Education Board along with the Centre for Environment Education worked toward inclusion of EE in school textbooks and in teachers’ training curricula (Ravindranath 2007).

Simultaneously during 2005 and 2006, the Wildlife Institute of India, the International Snow Leopard Trust, the Centre for Environment Education, and the Snow Leopard Conservancy designed a conservation education program for Ladakh, which comprised dissemination...
material and workshops for government school teachers. Ecological information used for this program was obtained through the project “Strengthening field conservation through ecological studies, capacity building, and conservation awareness in the Ladakh Trans-Himalaya,” which was a collaborative initiative of the Wildlife Institute of India, the International Snow Leopard Trust, Centre for Environment Education, and the Snow Leopard Conservancy. As part of the conservation education program, a study was undertaken to assess Ladakh teachers’ knowledge of and attitude toward wildlife conservation, because little is known about this. Hence, the present study answers the following questions: (a) What is the ecological knowledge and attitude of the teachers? (b) What factors determine their knowledge and attitude? (c) Is there any relation between knowledge and attitude?

**Study area**

The study was conducted in Ladakh, located between 32°N and 36°N latitude and 75°E and 80°E longitude, in the State of Jammu & Kashmir, India (Figure 1). Ladakh is known for its fragile mountain ecosystem and unique geographical and geological features, with a rare floral and faunal assemblage (Namgail et al 2012). The region is a stronghold of Trans-Himalaya endangered carnivores and ungulates such as the snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), Ladakh urial (*Ovis vignei vignei*), and Tibetan argali (*Ovis ammon hodgsoni*). Besides, 225 bird species have been recorded in Ladakh, and its high-altitude wetlands provide breeding grounds for the bar-headed goose (*Anser indicus*) and the globally endangered black-necked crane (*Grus nigricollis*) in India (Hussain et al 2008).

Administratively, Ladakh is divided into 2 districts, Leh and Kargil, which are further subdivided into 6 and 7 administrative units, respectively, known as blocks. Each block has a headquarters located in a town or city. At present, 3556 teachers teach in 884 government schools of Ladakh. Most of the government teachers are natives of Ladakh and were brought up in a rural setting, with the exception of the young generation of teachers, who were educated outside Ladakh. Livestock rearing and
subsistence agriculture, the main traditional livelihood options, are still practiced by the families of the teachers. Both livelihood options are historically known to be threatened by the wild carnivores and ungulates of the region (Bhatnagar et al 1999).

**Methods**

As part of the conservation education program for Ladakh, conservation education workshops were organized into 10 administrative block headquarters, across Leh and Kargil districts (Figure 1; Table S1, Supplemental data, http://dx.doi.org/10.1659/MRD-JOURNAL-D-11-00040.S1), during 2005 and 2006. The government school teachers teaching science and related subjects were nominated by the school administration to attend these workshops. To assess the knowledge and attitude of teachers in Ladakh, a questionnaire schedule was administered to the participating teachers before the start of the workshops. The teachers were told to return the duly completed questionnaire before commencing the training session. The purpose of this voluntary exercise was explained to them. Of 326 workshop participants, 277 voluntarily took part in this study.

The questionnaire schedule was divided into 3 sections. The first section obtained demographic data, the second section explored the teachers’ knowledge through a set of 12 statements (Table 1), whereas the third section examined their attitude through another set of 12 statements (Table 2). All the statements had “yes” and “no” responses. Correct answers to each knowledge statement were given a score of 1. Hence, the overall knowledge score for each respondent was obtained by adding the correct answers to the 12 knowledge statements. For attitude statements, a favorable response (yes) was given a score of 2, whereas an unfavorable response (no) was given a score of 1; by adding coded responses for each attitude statement, we obtained the overall attitude score for each teacher. Higher attitude scores represented favorable attitudes, whereas lower scores indicated unfavorable attitudes.

The teachers were classified according to gender (male/female), age (young [≤34 years]/old [≥34 years]), teaching experience (low [≤12.5 years]/high [≥12.5 years]),

### Table 1 Teachers’ responses to the knowledge statements (n = 277).

| Statements                                                                 | Yes (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| The snow leopard is an endangered species.                               | 98.3    |
| Conservation education provides knowledge on the wise use of resources.  | 92.5    |
| The correct names of wild animals not found in Ladakh were given by:     | 83.2    |
| Each and every wild animal forms a part of the food web.                 | 76.5    |
| Hemis is the name of a famous national park and monastery.               | 61.7    |
| The new textbooks provide good examples of the local environment.        | 56.9    |
| Old/present textbooks provide enough information on the environment and its conservation. | 37.3    |
| Ladakh’s biodiversity is truly unique.                                   | 85.0    |
| The snow leopard lives in and around rocky mountains.                    | 95.0    |
| The correct list of Ladakh’s wildlife was identified by:                 | 62.0    |
| Ladakh has national parks and wildlife sanctuaries to protect wildlife.  | 70.0    |
| Old/present textbooks provide enough information on Ladakh’s wildlife.   | 36.0    |

### Table 2 Teachers’ responses to the attitude statements (n = 277).

| Statements                                                                 | Yes (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| It is important to teach children about conservation.                      | 98.5    |
| Natural resources form an important part of human wellbeing.              | 98.3    |
| It is good that environmental education has become an integral part of the school curriculum. | 97.4    |
| For human survival, the wise use of natural resources is important.       | 96.7    |
| Children should be taught about the local as well as the global environment. | 94.8    |
| Wildlife education should be made an integral part of the school curriculum. | 93.7    |
| Wildlife is beneficial for people.                                        | 85.7    |
| Conservation of the snow leopard is necessary for human survival.         | 84.2    |
| The snow leopard is a serious threat to people living in remote places.   | 74.3    |
| Snow leopards and humans cannot live together harmoniously.               | 55.7    |
| For a teacher, there is no use in learning about conservation education.  | 35.3    |
| Children should be taught about the local environment only.               | 23.9    |
Preservice training undergone (yes/no), education (up to grade 12/university degree), place of education (rural/urban), and provenance (natives/non-natives), to see if these factors influenced knowledge and attitude.

The results were analyzed by using descriptive, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA), correlation and $\chi^2$ statistics, via SPSS 16.0.

Results

Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic attributes of 277 respondent teachers are summarized in Table S1 (Supplemental data, http://dx.doi.org/10.1659/MRD-JOURNAL-D-11-00040.S1). Overall, female representation was 34.5%; however, when gender participation was examined by location, it was found that female representation was higher in Tangtse, Diskit, Leh, and Khaltsi than in other places. The mean age of teachers was 34.67 years, and they had an average of 12.5±9.11 years of teaching experience. Participants from Leh, Khaltsi, Drass, and Panikhar were more experienced than those from other places. Most of the teachers (63.8%) had studied up to grade 12, whereas 36.2% had a university degree. Leh had the highest share of teachers who had undergone teachers’ training (92.9%). Overall, only 41.5% had undergone such training. About 57% of participants taught science as an individual subject or in combination with other subjects. The highest percentage of non-native participant teachers was noted for Tangtse (52.6%).

Ecological knowledge of the teachers

Responses to statements that aimed to establish the knowledge of the teachers are summarized in Table 1. Knowledge scores ranged from 3 to 12, with a mean of 8.11±2.02. More than half of the respondents (61.3%) scored 8 or higher. Knowledge scores were dependent on the teachers’ teaching experience, education, and place of education. Those who had fewer years of teaching experience (8.35±1.91 years) had higher knowledge scores than more experienced teachers (7.84±2.09 years) ($F[1,275]=5.465; P=0.034$). Teachers who had a university degree (8.76±1.62) scored higher in knowledge than teachers who had studied up to grade 12 (7.72±2.11) ($F[1,275]=18.019; P=0.000$) (Figure 2). Compared with teachers educated up to grade 12, higher knowledge scores were observed for teachers with a university degree because all of them (100%) were able to tell the correct list of wildlife of Ladakh ($\chi^2=31.36; P=0.000; df=1$), and 89% of them knew the fact that Ladakh has protected areas ($\chi^2=27.12; P=0.000; df=1$).

Place of education played an important role in determining the knowledge of the teachers. One-way ANOVA revealed significantly higher knowledge scores for teachers who had studied in an urban locality (8.58±1.75) ($F[2,274]=8.725; P=0.000$) than for those who had attained education in a rural locality (7.57±2.15) (Figure 2).

Attitudinal response of the teachers

In general, a large percentage of teachers had favorable attitudes (Table 2). Teachers’ overall attitude scores ranged from 17 to 24, with a mean of 20.78±1.25. More
than half of the teachers (62.5%) scored above 20, which indicated favorable attitudes. Female teachers (21.12 ± 0.86) held more favorable attitudes compared with male teachers (20.61 ± 1.40) (F[1,273] = 10.063; P = 0.002). Similarly, attitude scores were higher for native teachers (20.82 ± 1.24) than for non-native teachers (19.91 ± 1.31) (F[1,275] = 6.12; P = 0.014) (Figure 3).

Despite the high percentage of teachers agreeing about the benefits of wildlife (85.7%), snow leopards were considered a serious threat to people living in remote places by three fourths of the teachers (74.3%), and more than half of the teachers (55.7%) felt that snow leopards and humans cannot live together harmoniously (Table 2). When further exploring these statements against demographic attributes, it was found that more natives (76%) perceived snow leopards as a threat than non-natives (42%) (χ² = 6.95; P = 0.008; df = 1).

Relation between knowledge and attitude
A significant positive correlation was observed between teachers’ knowledge and attitude scores. This correlation, though weak (r = 0.242; P = 0.000), contributes to the literature on the positive relation between knowledge and attitude.

Discussion
For teaching conservation to schoolchildren, the prerequisite is that teachers should be knowledgeable in terms of ecology and biodiversity conservation, and should have affirmative attitudes toward wildlife conservation. This study suggests that teachers in Ladakh are knowledgeable about the basics of local wildlife and have favorable attitudes toward wildlife, except when it threatens their economy, in this case, the snow leopard, which causes significant economic losses at the local level (Bhatnagar et al 1999).

Until recently, Ladakh had little access to higher education; the number of schools was limited to 72 in 1958 (Nair 1958). Hence, older teachers tended not to have a university degree, which explains the negative correlation. Although the number of primary and high schools has increased, there is still only one degree college in Leh and young people go outside Ladakh for university education, which explains the fact that young teachers are more educated and were educated in urban settings, mostly outside Ladakh.

The study found that teachers who had university degrees were more knowledgeable. These findings are in conformity with studies by other scholars (Fiallo and Jacobson 1995; Pyrovetsi and Daoutopoulou 1997; Gillingham and Lee 1999; Badola et al 2012) who concluded that education is an important factor that influences knowledge. Higher knowledge scores were observed for teachers educated in an urban locality. Respondents who were educated in an urban setting also definitely had a university degree. Hence, we concluded that studying in an urban setting provides ample access to the various sources of information as well as opportunities for higher education, which leads to holistic knowledge and better understanding.

The favorable environmental attitudes shown by female teachers in the present study support findings of Zelezny et al (2000), Alp et al (2006), and Tuncer et al (2009). Research results have shown that females express more concern about the environment than males, irrespective of cultural and educational status (Worsley and Skrzypiec 1998; Eagles and Demare 1999; Tikka et al 2000; Loughland et al 2003). Bord and O’Connor (1997) explain this as being due to differences in perceived
vulnerability to environmental risks. Traditionally, women have been closer to nature while performing day-to-day activities, when even providing meals for the family is linked to nature, and women also perceive changes in the environment, which affects their capacity to provide for the family.

Tanner (1980) and Peterson (1982) suggest that informal education and life experiences with role models, such as parents and teachers, are crucial factors in developing the environmental sensitivity of an individual, which indicates that age and education did not influence the attitude of the teachers. Newhouse (1990) argues that favorable attitudes toward the environment are perhaps developed on the basis of life experiences rather than any educational program, which holds true for the present study, because native teachers of Ladakh were found to have higher attitude scores than non-natives. The strong background of traditional ecological knowledge reflected in the folk songs and the tradition of hunting and gathering resources for self-sustenance (Norberg-Hodge 1991; Koshal 2001) explains the overall favorable attitude of native teachers.

However, closer scrutiny of the individual attitude statements revealed that the native teachers had unfavorable attitudes toward snow leopards. We attribute this to the life experiences of these teachers, who grew up in a community dependent on livestock rearing, where any damage to livestock caused considerable economic losses (Bhatnagar et al 1999; Wang et al 2006). The significant correlation between higher knowledge scores and more favorable attitude scores established for teachers in the study area reemphasizes the positive relation between knowledge and attitude as noted by Chawla and Cushing (2007), Pe’er et al (2007), and Esa (2010).

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the director, Wildlife Institute of India; the program coordinator, Centre for Environment Education–Himalaya; the J&K State Education Board; the J&K Wildlife Protection Department; the International Snow Leopard Trust; and the Snow Leopard Conservancy; the school teachers of Ladakh; and the team members of the project “Strengthening field conservation through ecological studies, capacity building and conservation awareness in the Ladakh Trans-Himalaya” for their intellectual and logistic support. We also acknowledge financial support provided by the Wildlife Institute of India’s International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)-funded project “Valuation of ecosystem services of Hindu Kush Himalayas: The Livestock Production Function of Rangelands,” and the constructive comments received from 2 anonymous reviewers on a previous version of this paper.

References

Alp E, Ertepinar H, Tekkaya C, Yilmaz A. 2006. A statistical analysis of children’s knowledge and attitudes in Turkey. International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education 15(3):210–223.

Badola R, Barthwal S, Hussain SA. 2012. Attitudes of local communities towards conservation of mangrove forests: A case study from the east coast of India. Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science 96:188–196. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecss.2011.11.016.

Bhatnagar YV, Wangchuk R, Jackson R. 1999. A Survey of Depredation and Related Wildlife–Human Conflicts in Hemis National Park, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, India. Unpublished report, Seattle: International Snow Leopard Trust. Available from the corresponding author of this article.

Bord RJ, O’Connor RE. 1997. The gender gap in environmental attitudes: The case of perceived vulnerability to risk. Social Science Quarterly 78:830–840.

Bradley JC, Waliczek TM, Zajicke JM. 1999. The relationship between environmental knowledge and environmental attitude of high school students. The Journal of Environmental Education 30(3):17–21.

Cerovsky J. 1969. Environment education—An urgent challenge to mankind. In: IUCN. Environment Conservation Education Problems in India. Proceedings of the working meeting of the IUCN commission on education, held at FRI colleges, Dehra Dun, 21–22 Nov 1969. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, pp 34–42.

Chawla L, Cushing DF. 2007. Education for strategic environmental behavior. Environmental Education Research 13(4):437–452.

Eagles PFJ, Demare R. 1999. Factors influencing children’s environmental attitudes. Journal of Environmental Education Research 30(4):33–37.

Esa N. 2010. Environmental knowledge, attitude and practices of student teachers. International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education 19(1):39–50. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10382040903545534.
Fiallo EA, Jacobsen SK. 1995. Local communities and protected areas: Attitudes of rural residents towards conservation and Machalilla National Park, Ecuador. Environmental Conservation 22(3):241–249.

Gillingham S, Lee PC. 1999. The impact of wildlife related benefits on the conservation attitudes of local people around the Selous Game Reserve, Tanzania. Environmental Conservation 26(3):218–228.

Hussain SA, Singh RK, Badola R. 2008. An ecological study of the Trans-Himalayan wetlands of proposed Changthang Biosphere Reserve, Ladakh, India for conservation planning. Biosphere Conservation 9(1):53–63.

Kaiser F, Wolting S, Fuhrer U. 1999. Environmental attitude and ecological behaviour. Journal of Environmental Psychology 19:1–19.

Kosha S. 2001. Ploughshares of Gods: Ladakh—Land, Agriculture and Folk Tradition. New Delhi, India: Om Publications.

Leopold A. 1949. A Sand County Almanac. New York: Oxford University Press.

Loughland T, Reid A, Walker K, Petocz P. 2003. Factors influencing young people’s conception of environment. Journal of Environmental Education Research 9(1):3–20.

Mingie J. 2003. Rewriting the books in Ladakh. Cultural Survival Quarterly 27(4). Indigenous education and the prospects for cultural survival. www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/india/rewriting-books-ladakh; accessed on 30 March 2012.

Nair K. 1958. Council on foreign relations. Foreign Affairs 36(2):330–339.

Namgail T, Rawat GS, Mishra C, van Wieren, SE, Prins HHT. 2012. Biomass and diversity of dry alpine plant communities along altitudinal gradients in the Himalayas. Journal of Plant Biology 125(1):93–101. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10265-011-0430-1.

NCETE [National Council for Teacher Education] 2005. Environmental Education Curriculum Framework for Teachers and Teacher Educators. New Delhi, India: National Council for Teacher Education.

Newhouse N. 1990. Implications of attitudes and behaviour research for environmental conservation. Journal of Environmental Education Research 22(1):26–32.

Norberg-Hodge H. 1991. Ancient Futures—Learning from Ladakh. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.

Pe'er S, Goldman D, Yavetz B. 2007. Attitudes, knowledge and environmental behaviour of beginning students. The Journal of Environmental Education 39(1):45–59.

Peterson N. 1982. Development Variables Affecting Environmental Sensitivity in Professional Environmental Educators [PhD dissertation]. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University.

Pritchard T. 1968. Environmental education. Biological Conservation 1(1):27–31.

Pyroveti M, Daoutopoulos G. 1997. Contrasts in conservation attitudes and agricultural practices between farmers operating in wetlands and a plain in Macedonia, Greece. Environmental Conservation 24(1):76–82.

Ravindranath MJ. 2007. Environmental education in teacher education in India: Experiences and challenges in the United Nation’s Decade of Education for Sustainable Development Environmental education in teacher education in India. Journal of Education for Teaching 33(2):191–206. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02607470701259481.

Rivi J. 1986. Ladakh: Crossroads to High Asia. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.

Roth CE. 1992. Environmental Literacy: Its Roots, Evolution, and Directions in the 1990’s. Columbus, OH: ERIC/CSM Environmental Education.

Tanner T. 1980. Significant life experiences: A new research area in environmental education. Journal of Environmental Education Research 11(4):20–24.

Tikka PM, Kulaen MT, Tynys SM. 2000. Effects of educational background on student’s activity levels and knowledge concerning the environment. Journal of Environmental Education Research 31:12–20.

Tuncer G, Tekkaya C, Sungur S, Cakiroglu J, Ertepınar H, Kaplowitz M. 2009. Assessing pre-service teachers’ environmental literacy in Turkey as a mean to develop teacher education programs. International Journal of Educational Development 29(4):426–436. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2008.10.003.

UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization]. 1980. Environment Education in the Light of the Tibetan Conference. Paris, France: UNESCO.

Wang SW, Lassiole JP, Curtis PD. 2006. Farmer attitudes towards conservation in Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park, Bhutan. Environmental Conservation 33(2):148–156. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0376892906002931.

Worsley A, Skrzypiec G. 1998. Environmental attitudes of senior secondary school students in South Australia. Global Environmental Change 8(3):209–225.

Zelezny LC, Chua PP, Aldrich C. 2000. Elaborating on gender differences in environmentalism. Journal of Social Issues 56(3):443–457.

Zimmerman LK. 1996. Knowledge, affect, and the environment: 15 years of research (1979–1993). Journal of Environmental Education 27:41–45.

**Supplemental data**

**TABLE S1** Demographic attributes of the teachers from 10 administrative block headquarters of Ladakh, India.

Found at DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1659/MRD-JOURNAL-D-11-00040.S1 (56 KB PDF).