

Project Update: November 2006

The funds from Rufford were received in March 2006 and the field study was initiated in April 2006 when Yash Veer Bhatnagar visited the area with the research scholar, Riyaz Ahmad. The base camp in the Babgail village and local field assistants were hired, after which numerous field visits were made to test out and finalize methods and sampling protocols. After some trial runs, Riyaz continued work on markhor ecology and human dependence on the area. Based on the summer data collection a presentation was made at the IV World Congress on Mountain Ungulates in Munnar, Kerala, India, (12-15 September 2006) where the paper was appreciated by peers from all over the world.

Data on markhor population size, composition, seasonal distribution, habitat usage, sexual segregation, human dependence on the area are being collected and a limited portion of this data has been analyzed for the above conference (Pl. see attached abstract and PDF of the presentation). The local wildlife department and the Army units stationed in the area are constantly being updated with the findings of the study. Later in 2007 a detailed awareness package for the Indian Army will be prepared based on findings from the study that should hopefully go a long way in long-term conservation of the species.

After collection of winter data the field team will be arriving in the NCF headquarters in Mysore for a month to prepare manuscripts based on work so far and prepare proposals for continued funding.

Title: SUMMER HABITAT USE AND SEXUAL SEGREGATION OF THE ENDANGERED KASHMIR MARKHOR IN JAMMU & KASHMIR, INDIA

Category: Oral Presentation

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Abstract

The status of the little known KASHMIR MARKHOR (*Capra falconeri*) had remained unknown for the last two decades owing to political strife and insurgency in its habitat along India's border with Pakistan. Our recent surveys confirmed the continued occurrence of c. 200 MARKHOR in

the Kajiinag range of western Kashmir, which is the largest surviving population of the species in India. We have recently initiated a study on the ecology of the MARKHOR in this region where over 60 observations on markhor groups were obtained by systematic monitoring of trails in early summer (May-June). Preliminary data on habitat use by the MARKHOR in this season indicates that they disproportionately used steep, relatively open forested (blue pine-spruce-fir) areas, interspersed with rocky outcrops and cliffs in mid to upper slopes (2,500-3,200m). They avoided the alpine meadows above the forested zone. There was indication of sexual segregation, with females mostly occurring in small groups of two to four, confined to the cliffs with open forests, mostly at lower altitudes, while males occurred in higher (>2,800m) forested slopes with relatively denser tree cover. It appears that during early summer (kidding period), habitat use by females may be determined by the need to maximize neonate security against predators such as the common leopard. Male habitat use, on the other hand, appears to address the need to maximize forage intake after the period of lean forage availability in winter.