

Wildlife surviving conflict in Afghanistan

June 27 2011



In a series of wildlife surveys conducted between 2006 and 2009 in the country's eastern province of Nuristan, scientists gathered images, DNA, and other data on the region's wildlife, still largely present after decades of habitat degradation and lawlessness. WCS has had a full-time presence in Afghanistan since 2006 and continues to be the only conservation NGO operating there. Camera traps deployed by the Wildlife Conservation Society over a 3-year period captured a wide variety of wildlife species still hanging on in the Nuristan province of eastern Afghanistan, including yellow-throated marten. Credit: Wildlife Conservation Society/Afghanistan

A new survey conducted by WCS scientists, supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), reveals that large mammals, including Asiatic black bears, gray wolves, markhor goats, and leopard cats are surviving in parts of Afghanistan after years of conflict.

The field team used camera-trap surveys, transect surveys, and [DNA](#)

[identification](#) of scat samples in the first wildlife update in the conflict-plagued eastern province of Nuristan since 1977. The surveys, conducted between 2006 and 2009 covering an area of 1,100 square kilometers, confirmed the presence of several important species in the region's montane deciduous and coniferous forests, including the first documented sighting of the common palm civet in [Afghanistan](#). The results mirror studies in other parts of Afghanistan indicating that wildlife continues to survive despite deforestation, [habitat degradation](#), and decades with the absence of rule of law.

The study appears in the latest edition of the journal *Oryx*. The authors include: Kara Stevens of Michigan State University; Alex Dehgan, former WCS Afghanistan Country Director; Maria Karlstetter of Fauna and Flora International; Farid Rawan of the University of Nangarhar; and Muhammad Ismail Tawhid and Stephane Ostrowski of the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#).

"This ongoing work in Afghanistan by WCS, supported by USAID, ensures the protection of wildlife and has a long-term positive effect on local communities," said Steven Sanderson, WCS President and CEO. "The surveys confirm the presence of globally important species in the area, despite indications of habitat loss and uncontrolled hunting. This highlights the need for targeted conservation programs to protect forest resources – including wildlife – that provide livelihoods for people. Sustainable natural resource management, including teaching new skills and building governance structures in local communities, can help stabilize the region, which has the effect of improving U.S. national security."

WCS has had a full-time presence in Afghanistan since 2006 and continues to be the only conservation NGO operating there. WCS works on community conservation, conservation education, institution building, training, capacity building, and wildlife trade issues.

Kara Stevens, lead author of the study, said: "Afghanistan's environment – like the Afghan people – has shown incredible resilience in the face of decades of instability. However, future support is necessary to ensure that communities can sustainably manage these resources for generations to come."

USAID funding for resource management projects in conflict regions like Afghanistan helps stabilize areas without military intervention, potentially saving U.S. money and lives. However, the U.S. foreign assistance budget is in danger of being cut dramatically this year, particularly the USAID Biodiversity Program, which would put beneficial projects like community-based wildlife monitoring and natural resource management in jeopardy.

In Afghanistan, USAID has provided support to WCS to work in over 55 communities across the country, training local people to monitor and sustainably manage their wildlife and other resources. One of the many outputs of this project was the creation of Afghanistan's first national park – Band-e-Amir – which is now co-managed by the government and a committee consisting of all 14 communities living around the park.

"About 80 percent of Afghanistan's people depends directly on the country's natural resources for their survival," said Peter Zahler, Deputy Director for the WCS Asia Program. "USAID has shown great insight in recognizing the importance of natural resource management for the country's continued stability and reconstruction."

The authors of the study noted that opportunities for implementing wildlife conservation measures in Afghanistan are limited due to security challenges. While the remoteness of Nuristan province provides some protection for wildlife, the effects of 30 years without effective management practices to limit unregulated logging and hunting mean that forests and [wildlife](#) are very much at risk. Continued loss of these

resources may result in economic hardship that could further destabilize the region.

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

Citation: Wildlife surviving conflict in Afghanistan (2011, June 27) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-wildlife-surviving-conflict-afghanistan.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.