

# Pakistan's national mammal makes a comeback

July 3 2012

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The Wildlife Conservation Society announced today that the markhor -- a majestic wild goat species -- is making a remarkable comeback in Pakistan due to conservation efforts. Credit: Graham Jones/Columbus Zoo

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) announced today that the markhor – a majestic wild goat species – is making a remarkable comeback in Pakistan due to conservation efforts.

WCS-led community surveys have revealed that markhor populations in northern Pakistan's Kargah region in Gilgit-Baltistan have increased from a low of approximately 40-50 individuals in 1991 to roughly 300 this year. These community surveys suggest that the total markhor population where WCS works in Gilgit-Baltistan may now be as high as 1,500 animals, a dramatic increase since the last government estimate of less than 1,000 in 1999.

Pakistan's national mammal, markhor are known for their spectacular, corkscrew horns that can reach nearly five feet in length. They are an important prey species for large carnivores such as wolves and snow leopards. Markhor have been listed as Endangered by IUCN since 1994, with a 2008 global population estimate of less than 2,500 animals across five countries: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and India. They are threatened by illegal hunting, habitat destruction, and competition from domestic goats and sheep.

"We are thrilled that markhor [conservation](#) efforts in Pakistan are paying off," said Peter Zahler, WCS Deputy Director of Asia programs.

"Markhor are part of Pakistan's natural heritage, and we are proud to be assisting the communities of Gilgit-Baltistan and the Government of Pakistan to safeguard this iconic species."

WCS, led by Program Manager Mayoor Khan, has developed a conservation program that helps create community conservation committees and trains wildlife rangers throughout Gilgit-Baltistan. Rangers focus on monitoring wildlife and enforcing both local and national laws and regulations related to hunting and other resource use. Illegal hunting and logging have stopped in most of the valleys where the community rangers are active. WCS has been the only conservation organization working in Diamer District of GB since the program's inception in 1997.

Altogether, there are now 53 community conservation committees within the WCS Pakistan program covering four districts. WCS has helped many of these committees form a larger conservation institution, the Mountain Conservation and Development Programme, which brings together members from each committee with government officials to help co-manage the region's wildlife and forests.

WCS has recently developed a new management structure called

"markhor conservancies" that use markhor herd home ranges to link different village resource committees together for coordinated monitoring and protection. This ensures that markhor are safeguarded as they travel across steep-sided mountains into different areas.

WCS has been active in research and conservation of markhor dating back to Dr. George Schaller's seminal field work in the 1970s that led to the publication of the book *Mountain Monarchs* in 1977. WCS opened the Pakistan Country Program in 1997 aimed at helping communities protect markhor and other wildlife in the region such as snow leopards and Asiatic black bear. WCS also works on markhor conservation in Afghanistan.

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

Citation: Pakistan's national mammal makes a comeback (2012, July 3) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-07-pakistan-national-mammal-comeback.html>

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