

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE SULEMAN MARKHOR IN KOH-E-SULEMAN

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Summary

Investigations carried out on the Suleman Markhor, *Capra falconeri jerdoni* Hume revealed that the animal is so severely hunted that it is extinct in many places of its previous habitats in Baluchistan and N.W.F.P. The population which is left over, some how, can be increased to sizeable number in Koh-e-Suleman provided it is declared as game sanctuary and sufficient preventive staff is employed for this purpose. Present population of the Suleman Markhor in the study area was determined as 53 which indicated the presence of atleast 400 animals in whole of Koh-e-Suleman.

Suleman Markhor (*Capra falconeri jerdoni*) is a well known wild animal species of Pakistan occupying several pockets in famous hill ranges of Baluchistan, N.W.F.P. and Tribal territories.

Just like other big game species in Pakistan, this unique animal had also to face a drastic decline in its population, even to the extent of extinction in most of its previous habitats. Reasons for such decline were ruthless hunting and habitat deterioration.

To find out the present status of Suleman Markhor in the Koh-e-Suleman, investigations were carried out with the help of local inhabitants and shikaris, using binocular 8x40 and 10x50 mm for spotting the animal.

The area/habitat: Suleman Markhor is available in scattered population in about 8,000 ha of Suleman Range in District Zhob of Baluchistan which is full of steep rocky slopes. The altitudinal range lies between 1500 to 3300 m with numerous peaks above 2400 m.

The forests are mainly coniferous with *Pinus gerardiana* predominating in 90% of the area while *Pinus wallichiana* occupying about 10% area with *Pistacia* spp. and *Acer* as associated broadleaved species. *Olea* occur but on lower sites only. Main shrubs include *Daphne*, *Lonicera*, *Cotoneaster*, *Rosa*, *Ephedra* and *Berberis* while herbaceous flora consist mainly of *Thymus*, *Andropogon*, *Stipa*, *Charysopgon* and *Cymbopogon*.

There are only two perennial springs in the area with quite insufficient water. Summer inhabitants of the area have to depend, mostly on rain water. There are 4-5 pony paths leading to the interior of the area and used mainly for the extraction of timber. Within the Markhor habitat, there is no permanent habitation but inhabitants from the adjoining villages occupy and use this area for grazing purposes in summer only.

Legal status: The whole of the range is owned privately by about 100 families, 80%

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from Baluchistan and 20% from N.W.F.P., enjoying full rights of the land and forests. Forest Department has no share in protection or management of the forests in this area.

The people: Illiteracy is met among 95% of the inhabitants and almost every adult is equipped with a gun. Shooting Markhor stands as most favourite game among all, who are capable of reaching Markhor in the difficult terrain. They feel proud if they could kill a male Markhor with maximum horn length. Such horns when attained are usually displayed in their houses, or donated to the mosques. One can see rarely a mosque which is not decorated with these horns. Horn is the only attraction in killing a male Markhor otherwise, people would like meat of a female Markhor or yearling or even a young as compared to the male Markhor. This attitude seems to be mainly responsible for the drastic decline in markhor population through out the area.

The animal: Suleman markhor has straight horns making up to three spirals, with an open twist as well as a tight one resembling a corkscrew. Male markhor has a short ruff and its pelage is greyish. Female which is smaller than male in size, has gray face and fawn-coloured coat except for its whitish chin, underside and lower legs; a dark line runs down the back and another from chin to chest; and the beard is short and wispy.

Habits: Suleman markhor mate in November and bear young in late April or early May. During rut season, severe fighting is observed between males for a female. In the Suleman range, two skeletons of male markhor were observed with their horns badly tangled. It appears that either they fell down during fight and broke their necks or their horn tangle resulted in their starvation to death.

Herd formation starts in early November and the animals were seen still in discrete herds during the mid of December. Maximum number of animals seen in a herd were 15 with two males over 5 years of age; the minimum being a single male of about same age. Since the area is full of hunters, the animal has to be much security conscious, getting out only in early morning or in late afternoon. I could spot, however, a herd of 3 markhors as early as 1500 hours.

The animal must be feeding on a variety of herbs and shrubs during spring and summer but during December, I could see them feeding on *Olea cuspidata*. The animal used to stand on their hind legs and browse the foliage.

Population estimates: Population was estimated both directly and indirectly at 8 points. The situation was as under:

Area	Locality	Total animals	Male	Female	Yearling
Niazikot	Dola (i)	15	4	(rest could not be identified correctly)	
	(ii)	3	1	2	—
Ahmadi	Obasht Sukay	5	1	1	3
	Skhanu Naray	2	1	1	—
Dargah	Khruchey endah	3	1	1	1
	Urkey	2	1	1	—
	Naray (Tracks)	20	(correct identification was not possible)		
	Tor sar	1	1	—	—
	Pazay	2	1	1	—
Total		53			

According to a rough estimate, this population was available in about 1200 ha. Projecting the figures to whole of the area, there may be 400 animals surviving presently.

Management Strategy:

Protection is the only technique whereby population of this unique animal can be built up to sizeable number. Proper protection can be afforded only when the whole of this range is declared as game sanctuary and at least six watchers are recruited from the local influential families and posted at important points. Preventive staff is urgently required for checking the summer hunting because maximum number of females, yearling and young are hunted during this period by the summer inhabitants of this range.

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