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## THE STATUS OF MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NORTHERN AREAS OF PAKISTAN

by Ghulam Rasool

### Introduction

The Northern Areas of Pakistan include the districts of Gilgit, Ghizer, and Diamer (of the former Gilgit Agency) and Skardu and Ghanche of Baltistan, part of the Ladakh Wazarat of the former Jammu and Kashmir State. It lies between 71° and 75° East longitude and 36° and 37° North latitude. Topographically it falls in the most mountainous and rugged region of Pakistan. The longest glaciers outside arctic regions and the largest

concentration of the world's highest mountains are located in this area. The whole of the Northern Areas lies at the southern end of the Palaearctic region and the wildlife is of central Asian and Tibetan origin.

Until 1947, almost all the important valleys, most of them now included in the protected area, were supporting a high density of wild animals and birds. There

was very little concern about decreasing animal populations from hunting, as poaching was nominal, and hunting was allowed only to the few British and high ranking local officers, rulers, and persons with higher social status. Furthermore, this area was only accessed with difficulty; hunting for the common poacher was not an easy matter. Traditional muzzle loading guns were commonly used, but were not very effective. The passage of time, however, witnessed an alarming decrease in wildlife populations. This was due to the introduction of modern automatic weapons, excessive hunting and poaching by all classes who could afford it, the application of chemical fertilizers and insecticides, the cutting and felling of forests and associated loss of habitat, and thoughtless planning of development projects. This, coupled with the interference of man and his domesticated animals into the virgin wildlife habitat, and man's advantage of being able to drive jeeps into the area, resulted in a situation where nature could no longer maintain wildlife populations and their habitat at sustainable levels.

## Conservation Drive

The Government of Pakistan first realized the situation in 1972, and the Forest Department of the Northern Areas was charged with the responsibility of control and management of wildlife in the whole of the Northern Areas. A WWF expedition to Pakistan visited the Northern Areas in 1967-68. As an outcome, their recommendations and the directives of the Wildlife Enquiry Committee of the Government of Pakistan resulted in the establishment of one National Park, five Wildlife Sanctuaries, and nine wildlife reserves in the Northern Areas. This was accomplished under a development scheme sanctioned for the conservation and development of wildlife in the Northern Areas in 1975. A separate Wildlife Wing was created to manage and control wildlife, with staff under the general administrative control of the Forest Department of The Northern Areas. The Northern Areas Wildlife Preservation Act of 1975 was enacted and implemented, resulting in the protection of the National Park and the Protected Areas (4022 Km<sup>2</sup>, forming about 10% of the land surface).

## Obstacles To Conservation

Undermanned and ill-equipped, the Forest Department has not been able to enforce the law in letter

and spirit. People do not fully understand the value of living resources, and tend to oppose all restrictions which do not allow them to enjoy their perceived rights and concessions in the protected areas. They break the law purposely and thus defeat the conservation policy of the government. Government agencies do not have trained personnel who could convince the people to conserve resources; sufficient funding and manpower support to manage protected areas are lacking. People do not realize the threats and devastation to the environment and to natural resources which they are causing themselves, due to their negative attitude, ignorance, and faulty land use.

Government agencies are not only underfinanced, but have no mandate to work and coordinate with people. The concept of integrating conservation with development has not been realized. In development planning, environmental implications have never been kept in view. People are not unaware of the benefits of conservation, but do not feel the responsibility to conserve the living resources on which they depend directly or indirectly.

The National Park and other protected areas are not free from permanent or temporary inhabitation. The surrounding communities are mostly dependant on living resources, mainly grazing grounds, in and around these areas, and under garb of their traditional, pre-1975 rights and concessions they are abusing or over-exploiting the resources with little fear of retribution. The law is flaunted and the concerned agencies are just helpless spectators. This state of affairs is the main hurdle to the proper management of these protected areas, and has resulted in the rapid depletion of living resources.

## Requirements of Management

For proper law enforcement, additional field staff – fully equipped with all necessary facilities and transport – are required. For the quick disposition of offences committed under the Wildlife Act, officers of the Wildlife Wing should be vested with magisterial powers. The efficacy of the Act is now a subject under review, in light of existing population pressure and land uses and the programmes of NGOs. The major issues being addressed are categories of protected areas, agreeable and allowable uses, buffer-zones, and NGOs and community participation.

Under a well-planned awareness and education

programme, the communities living in and around the protected area should be made aware of the values of the resources and the conservation message conveyed to them. Government agencies responsible for management of protected areas should have trained and qualified people with sufficient supporting staff and funds. NGOs should be involved to convey the message of nature conservation to surrounding and local populations. Different programmes on environmental conservation should be arranged by government agencies and NGOs, and selected people from rural villages be trained in proper land use. Development policies should be designed in accordance with the World Conservation Strategy, and with Pakistan's National Conservation Strategy.

### Role of NGOs in Conveying the Conservation Message

Four NGOs (IUCN, The Aga Khan Rural Support – AKRSP, WWF/Pakistan, and BASDO) have actively been involved in conveying the conservation message to the people living in nearby rural areas. IUCN, in partnership with AKRSP, is carrying out an extensive tree planting programme in the regions of Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral. An objective of this large scale tree planting effort, among others, is to reduce pressures on natural tree populations in upland forests, particularly in the Khunjerab National Park and other protected areas. AKRSP creates and supports village level development interest groups (Village Organizations), and links them to supportive measures of other outside organizations. AKRSP staff have conveyed the conservation message to some Village Organizations in parts of the region. Bar valley of Nagar sub-division is a classic example. Several dialogues were carried out with the local villagers of Bar valley, which is rich in wildlife, and finally villagers were convinced that they were spoiling and destroying their wealth of flora and fauna through indiscriminate felling of trees and hunting. They understood that if this state of affairs continued indefinitely, the living resources would be exhausted.

As a result of continuous motivation, Bar valley villagers were able to prepare a plan under the leadership of their elected member, Syed Yahya Shah, with the technical guidance of AKRSP and WWF/Pakistan. According to this plan, the villagers are responsible for wildlife protection, especially for ibex, with the condition that when the ibex populations recover to allow harvesting, villagers will be entitled to 50% of the

revenue derived from trophy hunting by foreigners; the rest will go to the government. Villagers sought a subsistence allowance to meet their expenses of meat which they used to obtain from hunting ibex. The villagers further confirmed their commitment to protect animals through declaring an oath which was administered by a high ranking government official (Administrator) of the Northern Areas.

For implementation of the above scheme, the people of Bar valley first approached AKRSP, who in turn referred the case for sponsorship by other NGOs like WWF/Pakistan and IUCN, and to the Forest Department of the Northern Areas. WWF/Pakistan took the first initiative, and deputed their consultant for preparation of a feasibility study. On the basis of his recommendations, WWF/Pakistan provided a sum of Rupees .24 million (US \$9, 700) for distribution among concerned villagers at the rate of Rupees 1,000 (US \$40) per household after entering into a signed agreement. This project will remain operative until the villagers repay the amount of Rupees .24 million with revenues derived from trophy hunting.

WWF/Pakistan was also charged with preparing a management plan for Khunjerab National Park (near the China border). During the plan's formulation process, the graziers, being aggrieved with the present park management, resisted and filed a suit in the civil court. The court, however, issued orders to maintain the status quo, but the status survey work for the management plan was impeded. WWF took the initiative to resolve this problem and several dialogues were carried out with the graziers and their representatives. Finally, the villagers were convinced and this ensured their active participation in the management of the National Park, and their support for conservation activities – which is a requirement of Pakistan's National Conservation Strategy. The parties entered into an agreement according to whose terms and conditions the grazer communities will continue grazing, but with certain restrictions; they will get their share of park revenue when it is generated; they will be offered employment possibilities subject to eligibility – and in lieu thereof – they will be responsible for the protection of wildlife in the park. A management board comprised of locals and others also has been constituted to undertake important decisions concerning the management of the park and other related matters.

This important event will have an everlasting impact and provide a firm basis to resolve similar problems in the area, which have hitherto remained unsolved in the absence of such precedents. The active

involvement of the graziers in the park management will be a first step to establish a sustainable economy in this remotest part of Pakistan.

IUCN, in partnership with AKRSP, has prepared a plan for sustainable wildlife management in the Northern Areas. After a fact-finding survey they have selected nine rural villages to prepare wildlife management plans for demonstration and management activities of economic potential, and these will be researched and developed for implementation by villagers.

BASDO, a local NGO (which is a registered member of IUCN), has started its activities in motivating the rural population for conservation of nature, and many papers have been written and distributed among the villagers.

## Conclusions

- Management of protected areas in Pakistan should be carried out in accordance with concepts devel-

oped through innovative management practices, and by prescriptions of the World Conservation and Pakistan's National Conservation Strategy.

- Active involvement of people depending on managed resources should be ensured by giving them economic incentives; these, in turn, should be institutionally sustainable.
- More NGOs should be involved to convey the conservation message and to support projects concerning management of National Parks and protected areas.
- More suitable areas should be selected to be included in the list of similar protected areas.

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## Book Review

### THE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ELEPHANTS

**From their origins and evolution to their ceremonial and working relationship with man.**

*Consultant Editor: Dr. S.K. Eltringham*

*Salamander Book, London 1991. ISBN 0 86101 556 8 UK price 18.95*

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Elephants is the work of Lyn de Alwis (Sri Lanka), James Barnett (UK), Dhriti K. Lahiri-Choudhury (India), Phyllis C. Lee (UK), Richard Luxmore (UK), Jeheskel Shoshani (USA)

and R. Sukumar (India), all of whom all are considered experts on elephants. This book should be read by everyone who is interested in elephants and their long term survival prospects and, more importantly, should