



Through the interest of hunters, who are willing to pay a lot for hunting a Markhor, a portion of the money taken in can be reinvested in conservation of the species.

Markhor

Improved Markhor Status in the Latest IUCN List

Thanks to community-based wildlife management and trophy hunting of markhor some populations have recovered, which is reflected in the current IUCN Red List. It's a success story that highlights the importance of sustainable hunting for endangered wild species.

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The *Red List of Threatened Species* of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the internationally recognized tool for measuring the conservation status of species globally. Currently the list includes 77,340 species, all assessed in accordance with standardized criteria, and assigned to categories that describe their risk of extinction. The following categories are assigned to species threatened with extinction: Extinct, Extinct in the Wild, Critically Endangered, Endangered, and Vulnerable. Species in the 'Near Threatened' category no longer, nor do not yet meet the criteria for any of the threatened categories. However, this status could change with any reduction of ongoing conservation efforts, any unfavorable changes of habitat conditions or other factors that can cause declines of population numbers within a short period, thus potentially threatening the survival of the species. The Red List assessments do not confer any legal protection status, but are widely recognized as independent, thoroughly peer-reviewed and science-based.

Recently, in mid-June 2015, the IUCN updated its Red List to version 2015.2, that included a number of new and revised species assessments. Traditionally, negative changes in status get more attention in the news media. But occasionally positive im-

provements in conservation status receive coverage like in the case of the Iberian lynx, *Lynx pardinus*, which is no longer considered as 'Critically Endangered'. Another species which did not make it into the headlines is the markhor, *Capra falconeri*. This magnificent wild goat, which has made an amazing recovery in which community initiatives and well-managed hunting played a key role, is found in mountainous areas in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Due largely to poaching, its numbers have dropped dramatically since the mid-twentieth century, and its range area was fragmented into small sub-populations, many of which were almost or entirely extirpated by poachers. The markhor is highly attractive to trophy hunters. The species is listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). As such exportation of the animal or its parts is only permitted in exceptional cases, if such international trade has a positive impact on the conservation status of the population.

Because of the decline in population numbers and range areas, the species' status in previous Red List versions (1996, 2008) was 'Endangered'. Its current assessment as 'Near Threatened' represents an improvement of two categories. Under the

previous assessment, the data available for markhor would have qualified the species as 'Vulnerable', due to the improvement in its population size, which can be largely attributed to the positive population trend of the straight-horned markhor, *Capra falconeri megaceros*, in the Torghar hills in Balochistan, Pakistan. Since the assessment in 2008, positive developments became evident as well in other areas and in populations assigned to the other two subspecies, the flare-horned markhor (*Capra falconeri falconeri*) and the Tadjik markhor (*Capra falconeri heptneri*). The Red List assessment estimated the total population in 2011-2013 at about 5,800 mature animals, i.e. not including kids and yearlings. Compared to this, the numbers for 1997-2008 suggested only about 3,200 and for 1985-1992 there were less than 2,800! This means that the total population has more than doubled over the period of three generations.

The comeback was not due to simple top-down conservation measures nor the establishment of protected areas, but to local people coming together to protect the species. The recovery of the numbers started with the beginning of trophy hunting programs, in the course of which local communities and their institutions received tangible benefits from the harvest of a very



Markhor have been mercilessly poached in many areas across its native range.

few older males. Markhor were always in demand by trophy hunters, but as long as local communities did not become involved directly nor benefit from the income created by these hunts, poaching continued. Since the 1980s, the allocation of management responsibilities and the prospects of legal trophy hunts motivated local communities in the Torghar hills and in various areas in the north of Pakistan (current provinces Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) to stop poaching by community members and also to prevent outsiders from hunting illegally. These efforts paid off when in 1997, Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CITES COP10) the allocation of an annual nationwide export quota of six markhor from Pakistan's community-based hunting management areas. This annual quota was increased to twelve in 2002, to further encourage community-based conservation.

In the mid-90s there were less than 350 markhor in Tajikistan. In 2004, several traditional hunters living within their shrinking range, realized that the markhor was becoming extinct due to poaching. At the same time, the funds generated by outfitters for guiding illegal trophy hunts did not provide sufficient incentives to conserve the markhor. After researching the community-based trophy hunting programs in Pakistan, the prices of legal hunts there, and the benefits these provided to local communities, these traditional hunters mobilized people in their villages and nearby areas and established small enterprises dedicated to the conservation and the future sustainable use of the markhor. With support from international organizations, currently three family-based and one community-based conservancy successfully lead the recovery of this species. Local population surveys in these areas since 2008 show remarkable local population re-

coveries, and range-wide surveys in 2012 and 2014 yielded total numbers of 1,018 and 1,300 of directly observed markhor, respectively. These numbers are higher than the estimates for the three former Soviet republics in the 1970s!

Thus, most of the growing populations contributing to the improved conservation status, reflected in the new IUCN Red List, are in areas where communities or their organizations protect the markhor and host trophy hunters. Some of these trophy hunting operations are integrated in the management of protected areas and/or their buffer zones. In a few cases, protected areas without ongoing hunting management have maintained stable or growing markhor populations, notably the strictly protected areas in the Kugitang Mountains in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The existence, through the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered re-



Only after a monetary value was placed on the species were locals interested in protecting it.

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Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), of an international legal framework that ensures that any export of hunting trophies is legal, sustainable and traceable, makes it possible to reduce opportunities for corruption and discourages illegal trophy hunting. The substantial direct income and the benefits for the communities that protect the markhor provide the incentives to conserve the species. Only hunts that provide these benefits can qualify for trophy import permits. Illegal trophy hunts, and even legal hunts, sold by outsiders and bypassing the community-based conservancies, would seriously challenge the successful conservation of the markhor. The Red List assessment describes the widespread poaching outside the trophy hunting areas, as well as other issues like loss of pasture, deforestation, and disease transmission from domestic livestock as threats still present. Trophy hunters paying fair prices to those people that conserve wildlife and its habitat will in future be crucial for the continuation of the success reflected in the recent change in the IUCN Red List listing. The International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), with its Markhor Awards, has recognized conservation successes through the sustainable use of wildlife. In 2010 this was awarded to the Torghar project in Pakistan (which originally is also the origin of the CIC prize name) and in 2014 to the community-based conservancies under the Tajikistan Mountain Ungulates Project. Both projects play a crucial role in the recovery and further conservation of the markhor.

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