

Chapter 5

Status and Distribution of some Caprids in Himachal Pradesh

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Introduction

The mountainous state of Himachal Pradesh, with elevations ranging from 300 to over 6000 m, accounts 17% of the area of the north-western Himalayas. Bio-geographically the state can be divided into four distinct regions: the Trans-Himalaya (Biotic provinces 1A & 1B), which include the cold deserts of northern Lahul and Spiti districts; the Greater Himalayas ((Biotic provinces 2A & 2B), high and middle mountains covering most of the state; and the semi Arid zone (Biotic province 4A), consisting the hot dry foot hills in the south (Rodgers *et al.* 2000). The biotic provinces 1A (Ladakh mountains) and 1B (Tibetan Plateau) have mammals of international conservation significance such as the Snow leopard, Tibetan argali and Tibetan gazelle. The biotic provinces 2A (North-west Himalaya) and 2B (Western Himalaya) also have species of international conservation significance such as the Hangul or Kashmir stag and pheasants such as the Wesern Tragopan and Cheer (Rodgers & Panwar 1988). Two National Parks and 32 Wildlife Sanctuaries have been set up so far in Himachal Pradesh covering 10.37% of the state area with proposals for new PAs that would add another 1.08% coverage (Rodgers *et al.* 2000).

Himachal Pradesh has a rich assemblage of over 74 species of mammals (excluding Chiropterans) belonging to eight Orders and 21 Families / Sub Families. Of these,

17 species are unconfirmed although they are most likely to occur in this state. Seven species of caprids are reported to occur in Himachal Pradesh. They are: Tibetan Argali (*Ovis ammon*), Bharal or Blue Sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*), Asiatic ibex (*Capra ibex*), Himalayan tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*), Serow (*Nemorhaedus sumatraensis*) and Goral (*Nemorhaedus goral*). Himalayan Musk deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*), and Tibetan Gazelle (*Procapra piticaudata*), are the other mountain ungulates that are present in this state. The Hangul or Kashmir Stag (*Cervus elaphus hanglu*) was reported to occur in the northern parts of this state (Chamba district), particularly in the forested areas (2,500 –3,200m) in and around the Gamgul-Siahbehi WS. There are no recent reports of this species in this state in the recent past. Based on the results of the Wildlife Surveys conducted in Sutlej and Beas catchments, the information on some caprid species in Himachal Pradesh is given below.

Goral (*Nemorhaedus goral*)

In Sutlej and Beas river catchments, Goral is very common. During a wildlife abundance estimation exercise in February 1990, I estimated a density of 1.2 goral/km² in Daranghati Wildlife Sanctuary. An estimate of 1.47 goral/km² was obtained for Rupi Bhaba Wildlife Sanctuary in Kinnaur district. Goral has been reported from Sangla Valley Wildlife Sanctuary and short of Lippa Asrang



Wildlife Sanctuary, both in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh.

A good population of goral exists in the proposed Rupi Bhaba Wildlife Sanctuary in Shimla and Kinnaur districts. In Kanawar Wildlife Sanctuary, 18 gorals were sighted in a 2 km² area during December 1989 wildlife survey. During March 2002, 48 gorals were counted in a day's walk in Rolla-Nara area (immediately after snow fall).

Serow (*Nemorhaedus sumatraensis*)

Serow is fairly common in Sutlej and Beas Catchments. Wildlife survey party could sight one animal in Rashi Thach of Daranghati Wildlife Sanctuary in February 1990. In Rupi Bhaba Wildlife Sanctuary (Kinnaur district), six animals were sighted in different nallahs and evidences for another three animals were recorded during the period, March 1989 to January 1990. Only one fourth of this sanctuary may be considered to be Serow habitat. The area around Srikhand peak is reported to hold good Serow populations. In Kullu district, Serow has been reported in Jiwa Nal and Sainj Nal catchments, and Nalchi forest of Parbati river catchment. Serow has been reported to occur in high abundance in Kalatop-Khajiar Wildlife Sanctuary in Chamba district.

Bharal (*Pseudois Nayaur*)

This species has wider distribution than any other member of Caprinae in the catchment of Sutlej and Beas rivers. The upper reaches of Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti and Kullu districts hold good Bharal populations. In a wildlife survey (last week of June, 1990), three groups of Bharal (of 7, 5 and 4 individual respectively) were sighted about 4,000 metres on the extension of Hansbesin Massif which forms eastern boundary of Shimla and

Kinnaur districts. During various wildlife surveys (1987-90), Bharal has been recorded from both the banks of Sutlej river in Kinnaur district. All the three Wildlife Sanctuaries of Kinnaur, namely Rupi Bhaba, Sangla Valley and Lippa Asrang have good Bharal populations. In April, 1989, the wildlife survey party sighted 26 Bharal and 11 Ibex sharing same hillock in Lippa Asrang Sanctuary. The areas below Pandoswar Peak in Rupi Bhaba Wildlife Sanctuary and the adjoining areas of this sanctuary with Pin Valley National Park and Great Himalayan National Park have good Bharal populations. The newly created Sangla Valley Sanctuary (which includes the earlier Rakcham Chitkhul Sanctuary) has forested as well as arid areas (Transition zone). The eastern part of this sanctuary (close to Indo-Tibet Border) has Bharal populations. In addition to these, Ropa Valley, Pooh, Rishi Dogri, Neshang, Nako and Sumdo are places in Kinnaur district where Bharal sightings have been made during 1988-90. It has also been sighted along the Shrikhand Dhar in the Rupi Bhaba Wildlife Sanctuary.

Bharal is principal species of left bank of Spiti river, though it has been sighted in good numbers on the right bank, too. During last week of November, 1989, the density of Bharal was estimated by the King's Method. A total of 28 Bharal were sighted on a stretch of 14 Kms road length, thus resulting in a density of 2 Bharal/km². This density increases dramatically, immediately after the snowfall when Bharal move down into the valley bottom. In Pin Valley National Park, Bharal have been sighted in very low numbers. Only one Bharal was seen with a group of 25 male Ibex above Mud village during August, 1988. I could see a six feet high cairn made up of Bharal horns in



November, 1989 near Tabo village in Spiti Valley. The local Buddhist people collect these horns to ward off the evil spirits.

There are positive reports of Bharal from the higher reaches of the Great Himalayan National Park in Kullu district. In October, 2001, a group of more than 45 bharals were sighted at Sartoo glacial lake in Jiwa-Nal valley of this Park (Pandey, pers. Observations). Regular sightings of bharal are reported from the Tirath area in the Tirthan valley. In Parbati river catchment. Bharal have been reported from above Tos Nal Forest on right bank and Tebla Thatch on left bank. In Lahaul, Bharal have been reported from near Bara Lach Pass.

Himalayan Tahr (*Hemitrangus jamlahicus*)

In Sutlej Valley, the Himalayan tahr has been sighted in Daranghati, Sangla Valley and Rupri Bhaba Wildlife Sanctuaries. A wildlife abundance estimation exercise conducted in Daranghati Part-II during January 1990 resulted in a density estimate of 2.26 tahr/ km². The largest group size recorded was of 4 animals only. Its status in extended Rupri Bhaba sanctuary on the right bank of Sutlej river is quite good. However, its sightings, at present have become progressively less towards Rupri Bhaba and Sangla Valley Wildlife Sanctuaries beyond which arid zone areas of Kinnaur district start. The Kullu district in Beas catchment has good Himalayan Tahr population. During a wildlife survey in December 1989, in Kanawar Wildlife Sanctuary, a total of 130 Himalayan Tahr were seen in a 2 km² area. The largest group size of Himalayan Tahr was of 25 individuals. This trend continues upto the Great Himalayan National Park though the habitat is quite fragmented in between the two PAs. During October

2000 surveys, 17 Himalayan Tahr were seen in one group along the dividing ridge between Sainj and Tirthan catchments.

Siberian Ibex (*Capra ibex sibericus*)

During 1987-90 wildlife surveys, Ibex was seen on the right bank of Sutlej river only. This fact confirms the statement of Prater (1971) that its eastern limits are set by the upper reaches of the Sutlej river, east of which it does not occur. However, a larger number of Ibex horns could be seen as offering to the temples in the Sangla valley which is in east of Sutlej river (*i.e.* on the left bank of the river) in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. No ibex was sighted on the left bank. It appears that the horns were collected and transported from the right bank of the river.

In Kinnaur district, Ibex were sighted in Lippa Asrang Wildlife Sanctuary in April 1989 (11 Ibex and 26 Bharal on the same aspect). The reported occurrence of Bharal in Rupri Bhaba and Dharangati Wildlife Sanctuaries is incorrect. The Pin Valley National Park is a stronghold of Ibex. In November 1989, a total of 174 animals were seen in about 76 km² which indicates an estimated density of 2.29 Ibex/km². Ibex is found on both the banks of Spiti river above Kaza. The areas of Ratang Valley near Losar and Kunzam Pass have good Ibex populations. Evidences of Ibex have been obtained from Chandra and Pengleng valleys. Recently, sightings of Ibex have been made in Manali Wildlife Sanctuary, Hamta Nala and Solang Nala in Kullu district. Its presence/absence is yet to be confirmed from the Great Himalayan National Park.

Nayan or Tibetan Argali (*Ovis ammon*)

The only confirmed place from where horns of Argali could be obtained is in Kibber Nala (Spiti Valley). The villagers



told that at times Nayan cross over to Himachal area from the adjoining Jammu & Kashmir state. The usual route is along Parang La. Only a few individuals come (one or two or three) along with local sheep and goat. I have no other evidence of the presence of this species from Himachal Pradesh.

**Astor or Straight-horned Markhor
(*Capra falconeri*)**

There is no confirmed evidence or sighting of Markhor from the Chenab river catchment in Himachal Pradesh.

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