

Foreword

The Indian Subcontinent has the greatest mountain systems of the world - the Himalaya, which is well recognized for its rich and diverse biodiversity, and for its significance in providing the life support systems for several million people in the northern region. The Himalaya has many magnificent mountain ungulates that are widely known for their diversity and splendour. The beautiful Hangul, the majestic Argali, the agile Ibex, the sure-footed Tahr, the bounding Musk Deer, the mighty Yak, the elegant Kiang, and the elusive Serow are just some of the mountain ungulates that occur in the Himalaya. Mountain ungulates have always been admired by explorers, adventurers, naturalists, hunters and the common man for their beauty, sure-footedness, and their ability to survive in steep and rugged terrain under harsh climatic conditions.

Mountain ungulates have remained least studied as their habitats are in the remote high altitudes of the Himalaya where conditions are inhospitable. Despite these limitations, some of the best natural history observations have been made on mountain ungulates by the early explorers, hunters and naturalists. Hunting was probably the only activity that could have had some effect on mountain ungulate populations in the Indian subcontinent in the pre-independence period. The rapid human and livestock population growth in the Himalaya in the last five decades have led to habitat loss, habitat degradation, poaching, trade, wildlife-human conflicts and consequently have seriously threatened several mountain ungulate species and their habitats in the Indian subcontinent.

Conservation of these mountain ungulates is crucial as they form the prey base of the elusive snow leopard and other large carnivores, and some of them are of international importance. Undoubtedly, protection to these mountain ungulates and their habitats is of prime concern and also the need for efficient wildlife management based on scientific information. During the last two decades, attempts have been made to conserve and manage mountain ungulates in the Indian subcontinent. Creation and management of Protected Areas was one significant step. Some scientific studies and several status surveys and short studies have been carried out on mountain ungulates in the Indian subcontinent that have added substantial knowledge to our understanding of the species ecology and conservation issues.

Proper dissemination of information is as important as the collection itself. This ENVIS issue on Mountain Ungulates of the Indian Subcontinent brought out by the Wildlife Institute of India is a good combination of updated information on mountain ungulate species, their status and distribution in different states of India, conservation and management issues, natural history by veterans, and bibliography. This publication will be of great value to biologists, wildlife managers and others.

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