PERSIAN WILDLIFE

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In The Name Of God

Editorial

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May 23rd, an international day for biodiversity

extinction; one species per every 20 minutes

As we go to sleep, nearly 30 species go extinct every night. This means that the genomes of 30 plant and/or animal species simply pass on, as if they had never existed before. One species every 20 minutes and 20,000 species every year; that is, 20,000 invaluable genomes that represent thousands and millions of years of natural evolution. Five waves of extinction have swept our planet in its 4 billion years. The sixth may be the first caused by the human species.

I recently read in an article thatSome 2,000 species of Pacific Island birds (about 15 percent of the world total) have gone extinct since human colonization. Extinction is a natural phenomenon. It occurred in the past and will continue to happen in the future. However, it is the speed and cause of extinction that is our concern today. In the mid-17th century the earth's population was around 450 million and only 7 species of animals went extinct. In the 18th century, 550 million people lived on earth and 11 of the animal species became extinct. In the 19th century the human population jumped to 900 million with 27 animal species lost. In October 1999, the earth's human population leapfrogged to 6 billion and 157 species croaked! Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, with the planet boasting 7 billion people, 6 animal species have so far answered the last call. Some 10 to 30 million species of living organisms are estimated to live on earth, with only a fraction of those identified. Approximately 10% of these species are critically endangered. Of these 21% are mammal, 12% bird, 21% reptile, 30% amphibian, 21% fish, 30% invertebrate, 68% plant, and 33% fungus and protist.

These may just be numbers, but they represent living beings. A slight change in figures may mean irreversible loss or reversible gain. But bearing witness to the pain of crunching numbers may just be the first step in the stride toward bringing life back to endangered species, even to a cell in the depths of the ocean.

What can we do? We can help by: supporting reliable conservation groups, saving energy and reducing carbon emission (which is the main cause of global warming and drastic changes in habitats that we are witnessing today), refusing to buy souvenirs or ornaments made of animal body parts, choosing sustainable sources of food (aquaculture), responsible disposing of waste materials and using recycled paper. All these initiatives can be part of a set of steps that we can take to help prevent the extinction of living beings on earth.

Let us not forget that the fires we have ignited will one day burn our own species. Yes, humans may also face extinction, like many civilizations that have gone extinct throughout history.

Masoumeh Safaei

Objectives of Persian Wildlife Newsletter:

- Reporting on conservation activities and conservation-related studies of the PWHF and other affiliated NGOs and environmental groups
- Providing information on major conservation activities in Iran and in the world
- Increasing environmental awareness with regard to wildlife conservation
- Dissemination of information for improving the management of protected areas and of wildlife of Iran
- Providing space and a forum for researchers and practitioners in the field of natural environment to present their scientific achievements and to discuss their field experiences

Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation

PWHF was established in 2008 to help protect biodiversity in Iran. It is active in wildlife research, conservation, and educational programs designed to raise public awareness about the state of the wildlife and environment in Iran. It is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization. All PWHF activities are supervised by a Board of Trustees. Projects are coordinated with the Islamic Republic of Iran's Department of Environment. All funds for projects are raised from individuals concerned about the state of wildlife in Iran and socially responsible corporations. The Board of Trustees sets and ratifies goals and helps to find necessary financial resources for successful accomplishment of goals. Projects and day-to-day affairs of the Foundation are run by a Board of Directors composed of wildlife managers, academics and experienced conservationists.

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The Emperor newt, Haft-Tanan hunting prohibited areas in Dezful District, Photo: Barbod Safaei Mahrou

The Asiatic black bear facing humans

Hadi Fahimi

Asiatic black bear, Deh-bakri area, Kerman Province, captured by Camera trap

The Asiatic black bear is one of the rarest mammals of Iran. The Baluchi sub-species population of this bear is currently spread in Iran and Pakistan. Iran is the western-most distribution area of this critically endangered animal. Lack of information on living conditions of the black bear in these two countries is an impediment to conservation efforts.

In 2007, the Mohitban Society has initiated a program to study this species in the province of Kerman with the support of Kerman Province Department of Environment (DoE). The program seeks to identify: the species' habitats within the province, habitat preferences in Deh-Bakri area, food habits, conflict with humans, and population density. As an outcome of these studies and in response to suggestions made by Mohitban Society, 3 protected areas have been designated for the black bear in Kerman.

The presence of this species has so far been confirmed in the provinces of Kerman, Hormozgan and Sistan-Baluchistan. The habitat of the black bear extends from Makran Mountains in Sistan-Baluchistan to Jebal-e Barez Mountains in Kerman Province, where the most diverse habitat of the species can currently be found. The presence of the black bear in altitudes varying from 800 meters to 2,600 meters in four different habitats exhibit different conditions compared to the two Provinces of Hormozgan and Sistan and Baluchistan. Bahr-Aseman and Jebal-e Barez regions are among the most elevated habitats of this species in Iran. Significant variation in high altitude habitats, such as gradual disappearance of plants like dāz (fan palms) or domestic date palms (both important sources of food for the bear in Hormozgan and Sistan and Baluchistan Provinces) in altitudes above 1,500 meters show the flexibility and diversity in the food habits and behavior of the species. Kalmorad and Bashagard in Kerman, having the same altitude and latitude as Qasr-e Qand and Nikshahr in Sistan-Baluchistan, are covered with nearly the same kind of vegetation.

In these areas, the presence of food supplies (specifically fruit gardens), the steepness of slopes, the direction of slopes, security, the number of caves, and proximity to water sources are important habitat selection criteria for the black bear. But elements such as periodic environmental changes (changes in seasonal cycles), disturbances resulting from the presence of sheep herders, and changes in food sources may also impact the bear's choice of habitat.

Black bears and humans occupy the same habitat and this causes perpetual conflicts over resources. Population growth, especially among rural and low income communities, increase in cultivation areas and consequently the cutting of forest trees, and the formation of clear-cuts have made finding food even more difficult for black bears. As a result, they tend to look for food in the village gardens and farms, leading to more conflicts with humans. In the uneven competition between humans and bears, the latter are usually the losers.

To enhance conservation measures, the Mohitban Society collected information on the most sensitive conflict points between bears and local communities. A questionnaire survey was administered in Deh-Bakri and Bahr-Aseman areas of Sistan-Baluchistan. Unfortunately, the presence of bear near rural areas is a constant source of anxiety for the locals. Most see the black bear as a threat to their communities and are frightened of any encounters. Such attitudes are less often seen with regard to other mammals.

It is clear that any conservation measure will have to find a way of providing alternative food sources for the bear and hence decrease cases of conflicts over village fruit gardens; otherwise, the black bear will soon face a rapid decline in population and move toward total extinction. With financial assistance provided by Barez Industrial Group and financial support and participation of Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation, saving the black bear project has entered a new phase, and it is hoped that effective measures to conserve this critically endangered species will bear fruit.

Dead trees and their role in bird nesting

Saeedeh Bani Assadi

When trees die, they continue to play an important role in the ecosystem. Some may think that dead trees, also called snags or deadwoods, are dispensable and aesthetically unpleasing. To wildlife and sylvan ecology, however, snags are vital.

Dead trees, whether standing or fallen, are habitat to different species, play an essential role in the carbon cycle, provide nursery for the growing of seeds and saplings, and cause tree seeds to germinate. They are also recognized as crucial attributes in forest biodiversity. Studies show that 20% of the forest fauna depend on snags and dying trees.

Birds benefit most from snags. Cavities provide food, roosting, and resting areas while trunks and branches serve as pecking areas, stages for courtship displays, and, most importantly, nesting sites. Cavity nesting birds either create their own cavities (primary cavity nesters like woodpeckers) or depend on existing cavities (secondary cavity nesters such as owls).

To determine the role of snags in the Caspian Hyrcanian forests and their effect on the richness and abundance of birds, a study was conducted in April and May 2010 in the educational and research forest of Kheirud in Mazandaran Province. This study was part of a graduate thesis for the University of Tehran.

Standing and downed snags in Kheirud Forest were seen in abundance, the majority being small in size. Deadwoods with large diameter at breast height are rare and this decreases the quality of habitat for cavity nesting birds. However, our study found a high correlation between the number of snags and the relative abundance of cavity nesting birds in sampled units. We can therefore assume that the relative abundance of birds, especially of cavity nesting birds, is strongly correlated with the presence of both standing and downed snags. The determination of the density and volume of standing and downed deadwoods in every forest depends on the type and age of the forest, its past and present management, its location and position with respect to the surrounding lands, and the needs of the wildlife living in it. WWF has suggested that by 2030 all northern and temperate forests should contain 20-30 cubic meters of snags per hectare for the conservation of biodiversity. Based on the studies that were conducted in Kheirud Forest during the recent years, we suggest 10-30 cubic meters of snags per hectare for this forest.

The author,while studying dead trees./
Photo: Nooshine Sateei

Dead oak provides nesting space for various birds. Photo: Saeedeh Bani Assadi

Golestan National Park's Persian leopard captured by camera trap.

The Persian leopard and the Golestan National Park: two endangered treasures

Houman Jowkar[1], Amir-Hossein Khaleghi[2], Mahmoud Soufi[2], Taher Ghadirian[2], Arash Ghodoussi[2], Mahmoud Shakiba[3]

1.Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation, 2.Plan 4 Land Society, 3.Golestan Province Department of Environment (DoE)

The Golestan National Park (GNP) has been protected for various reasons since 1957, long before it was registered as the first national park of Iran. Consecutive years of conservation in this unique environment which enjoys a diversity of altitudes, habitats, vegetation and wildlife, have made the GNP an important international biosphere reserve. The irreparable extinction of the Caspian tiger has left the park with its only big cat, the Persian leopard (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*) which has been internationally recognized as a critically endangered species. The main objective of Studying the status of the Leopard in the Golestan National Park, a project initiated by the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation with the collaboration of the Plan 4 Land Society and Pantehra, is the conservation of the leopard by identifying and reducing the threats to its survival, and by doing so it is hoped that the protection of this valuable park gets a further boost. The first phase of this project consisted of the study of the leopard population and its trend, major threats to the survival of this species, its living needs and how they all relate with the local communities bordering the Park.

Methods

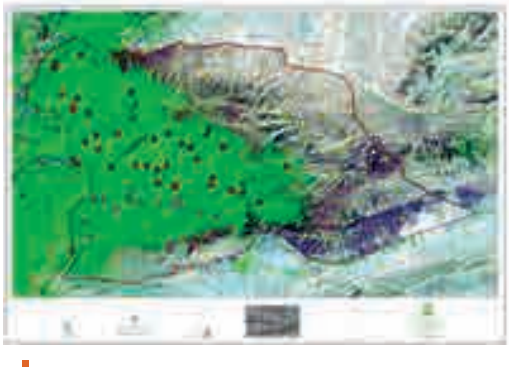
In order to estimate the population of this evasive animal, camera traps were used which are considered the best instrument for this kind of research. Camera traps can only be used for the identification of species with distinctive skin patterns and/or rosettes, and this applies very well to leopards. The total area of the Park was divided into three sections and cameras were placed according to the table.

Zones	Number of sites where cameras were placed	Number of cameras	Total number of days
Steppe zone	30	34	49
Northern wooded zone	33	33	45
Southern wooded zone	20	20	44
Total	83	87	138

Analysis of pictures taken by cameras and other field data showed the number of identified leopards as well as information on other species and their ecologies. Data on the leopard population was analyzed with Capture (a software for the estimation of wildlife population).

Findings

"The minimum number of leopards" was the main question that the study aimed to answer and then provide that information to the Park managers. The minimum number of leopards is a figure with nearly 100% confidence, as all photographed individuals are separated and counted on the basis of their distinctive skin patterns or other identification marks. This study established the presence of at least 20 leopards. In other words, we can say without guessing or estimating that a minimum of 20 leopards live in the GNP, comprising 10 males, 7 females, and 3 individuals of undetermined sex. Obviously, this is not the total population of leopards in the total area of the GNP; therefore it should be regarded as a good baseline estimate. Using Capture and Jackknife methods, it was estimated that between 23 and 42 leopards (with a confidence level of 95%) live in the Park.



Camera trapping map showing spots of camera Camera installations

Threats and conservation programs

Finding ways to decrease threats will be the next step of this project. Other experts like sociologists, economists and legal experts will have to help biologists to determine the causes of the threats and to solve problems like poaching, human encroachment on wildlife habitats, conflicts between leopards and communities living around of the park, the impact of the transit road crossing the park (wildlife collisions, uncontrolled tourism) and other threats.

Realization of this research would not have been possible without the collaboration and guidance of the GNP director, Mr. Ali Rostaghi and his dedicated and experienced environmental guards. We also thank the Natural Environment Deputy of the Department of Environment of Iran and Golestan Province DoE Head Office.

The role of ecotourism in conservation of biodiversity

Afsaneh Ehsani, Nima Azari
Avaye Tabiat-e Paydar Institution

Nature conservation and biodiversity are accepted values in most societies today. For the most part, conservation takes place directly in natural settings and is an outcome of measures taken by conservation experts and environmental activists. It goes without saying, however, that activists and experts are not present in the field all the time. They usually leave when a project comes to an end. Therefore, innovative methods are required to continue with conservation efforts when non-local conservationists leave the field. One such method is ecotourism, which links the livelihood of local communities to biodiversity.

Experience has shown that when local communities come to realize that their livelihood depends on wildlife and nature, and once this linkage is established, we can be certain that protection and sustainable use of natural resources would automatically follow. In fact, local communities get involved in conservation and promotion of biodiversity only when they clearly see that sustainability of resources is directly linked to their livelihood. To be more precise, local communities respond when protection of natural resources in the region is tied to sustainable economic activities.

Ecotourism has been able in many ways to establish this relationship. Eco-tourists are usually interested in local cultures and traditions alongside the natural environment. They try to have the least cultural or environmental impact when visiting an area. They are by and large enthusiastic about nature conservation. The flow of eco-tourists encourages host communities to develop economic, social and cultural infrastructures while meticulously safeguarding and conserving natural resources in order to guarantee the durability of this flow. We must still keep in mind that ecotourism is a delicate business and requires special social, cultural and economic considerations. Even in societies where strong cultural infrastructures exist for the conservation of nature and biodiversity -and most eco-tourists are responsible enough- ecotourism may have negative repercussions, including: prioritizing economic rather than conservation requirements, admitting irresponsible eco-tourists, yielding unfair income distribution in the host community, and not attending to the ecological and/or social factors involved. In spite of these reservations, ecotourism has in general proven beneficial to the environment. Today, conservation through ecotourism has many advocates. The main body of ecotourism has evolved in terms of concept and approach. One such concept is «geo-park," or ecotourism in geologically interesting sites, and seeks to improve the host communities' livelihood while protecting their environment. Creation of geo-parks is an indirect conservation method that involves the local populations.

With an increase in demand for ecotourism, this branch of the tourism industry should be regulated according to the latest scientific findings and international experiences so that a responsible culture of ecotourism can be disseminated among eco-tour companies and eco-tourists. This objective will only be realized with the full collaboration of environmental activists.

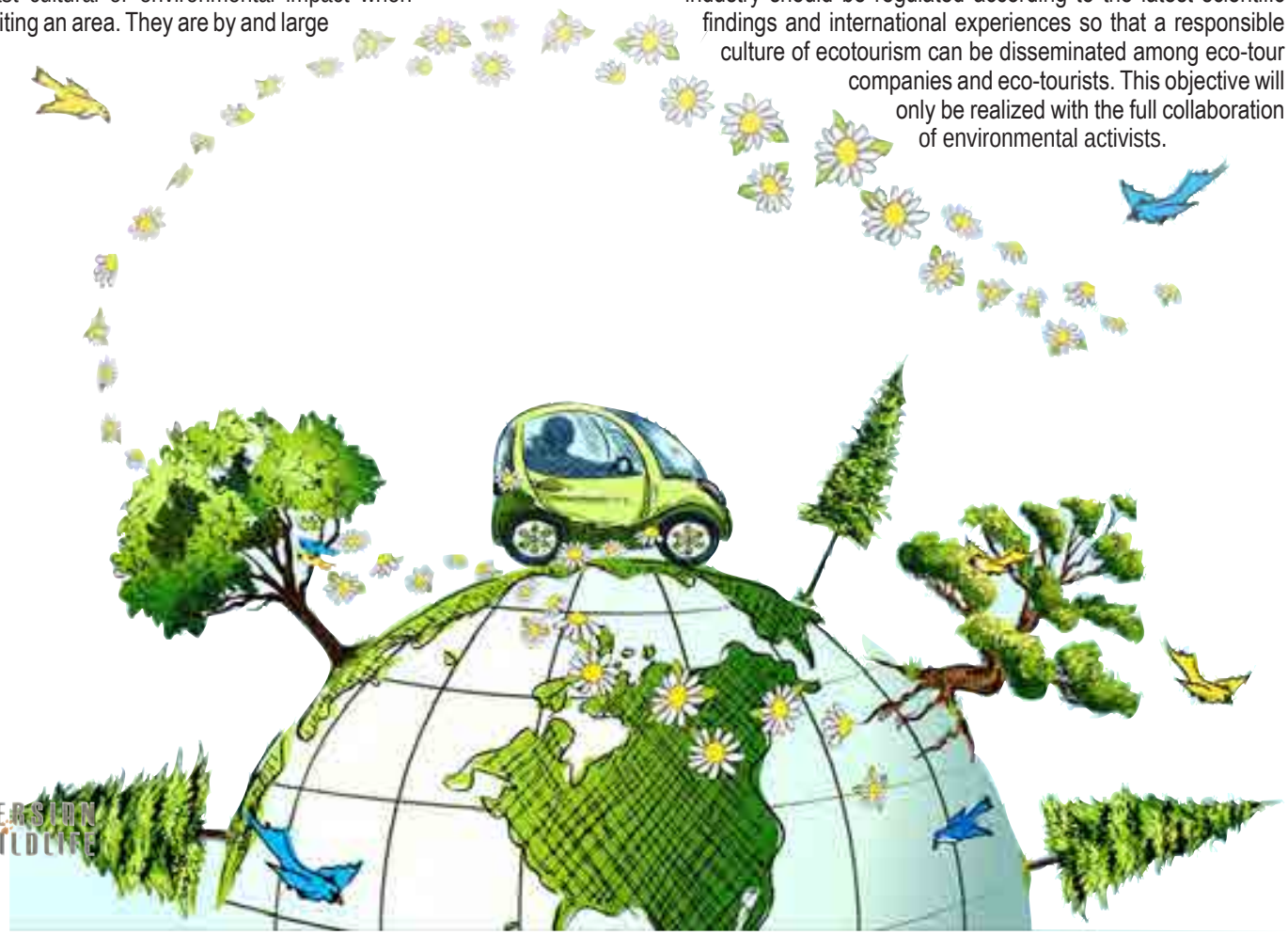


Photo: Morteza Eslami

Performance Caravan to raise environmental awareness in Iranian towns and villages

Safoura Zavaran Hosseini
Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS)

Education is an integral part of any conservation project. Bolstering hands-on conservation with educational activities ensures the sustainability and depth of such programs. Environmental education in Iran has grown remarkably over the past few years. Specialists In the field of environmental and conservation education have continuously tried to improve educational methods in order to meet the needs of interlocutors and to better cope with existing problems.

The educational activities of the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) have followed the same pattern in its 10 years of existence. After experimenting with different educational methods, the ICS decided in the spring of 2010 to set up a Performance Caravan. The Caravan wrote and staged a play called The Cheetah's Troubles, combining art and science to create an effective educational instrument in the conservation of this precious species. Since then, the Caravan has staged 25 plays in various towns and villages closer to cheetah habitats but also in Tehran. Performances were mostly organized within the context of small festivals where, in addition to plays and songs, other awareness activities, such as showing films, playing games, engaging in question and answer sessions between locals and the Department of Environment (DoE) representatives took place.

Positive feedback from local communities and local DoE representatives about the play and other educational activities encouraged ICS to start planning a theater troupe and a choral ensemble for the second most endangered big cat of Iran -- the leopard. The troupe and ensemble staged four performances in the winter of 2012 in Lorestan Province.

This spring (2012), The Cheetah's Troubles took stage twice in villages bordering Khosh-Yeylaq Wildlife Refuge and once as part of the opening ceremonies of the "National Project to Train Environmental Guard Aides" in Semnan Province. The DoE of Semnan gave administrative support and the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation provided financial assistance. The ICS Caravan hopes to secure enough funds to continue with performances across Iran. By making and distributing clips of these plays they are seeking to attract even larger audiences in the hope of improving conservation efforts for this precious species of Iran.

The play "Cheetah's Troubles" received such a positive feedback that we decided to stay another play for the second endangered big cat of Iran,the leopard./

Photo:Mohamad Farhadynia

A new habitat for the Emperor newt

The Emperor newt larva, Haft-Tanan Mountain,Photo: Barbod Safaei

Masoumeh Safaei[1], Barbod Safaei Mahrou[2]
1.DoE, 2. Pars Herpetology institute

The environmental guards of Masjed Soleyman recently discovered a new habitat for the Lorestan newt while patrolling near Andika Township in the early Spring 2012. It was the first time that this precious species was seen in the highlands of Shuo-va-Landar "prohibited hunting" area overlooking Olad Village in the Abezhdan region of Andika Township (Masjed Soleyman district). It had been previously assumed that this species was only distributed in habitats north of Khuzestan Province (Dezful and Andimeshk) and south of Lorestan Province. The Lorestan newt is dependent on waters that contain high levels of oxygen, and therefore lives in the cascading and cool waters of waterfalls. This is why it is mostly seen in cool springs and waterfalls, especially in Shevi falls in the District of Dezful.

The most important habitats of the Lorestan newt are Kul-e Sat, Vazhan-Ab, and Shadab-Kuh in south of Lorestan, Shevi falls near Shevi Village, Dezh-e Mohammad-Ali Khan in Haft-tanan prohibited hunting area in the District of Dezful, north of Khuzestan Province, Haji-Barikab mountains and Mazu va Duraq region in the Alvar-e Garmsiri of the District of Andimeshk.

Poaching and trafficking of this newt sub-species in the markets of larger towns and cities and even abroad have inflicted serious damage to the animal. In recent years, this unique and precious species is seen next to the traditional goldfish as a decorative item on the Haft-Sin table of the Persian New Year. In general those who live-capture or poach these amphibians are rarely locals, as this animal has a special spiritual value for the local communities living close to its habitats. The Zagros region's train stations, especially Taleh-Zang, Shahbazan and Tang-e Panj, are the usual trafficking points for the Lorestan newt.

To prevent further damage to the dwindling numbers of Emperor newts living in the southern provinces, various initiatives and activities have been undertaken since 2009, including: identification of the Lorestan newt's habitats in Khuzestan; patrolling and monitoring vulnerable areas; holding two educational workshops in the cities of Dezful and Andimeshk for railways authorities, railway patrols, nature lovers, mountaineers, biologists from Dezful and local people in general; printing of brochures on the Lorestan newt with the collaboration of Pars Herpetology institute; printing of brochures on the prohibition of live-capturing and selling of Lorestan newts and distributing them before the Persian New Year among people, especially pet shops and goldfish vendors; selection and training of environmental volunteers in Shevi falls and Haft-Tanan hunting prohibited areas in Dezful District; sensitization of villagers and pastoralists by face-to-face education or distribution of educational materials; follow-up on the registration of the Shevi falls as a national natural heritage site and completion of its file with the Department of Environment (DoE) of Iran; and last but not least, implementation of more effective law enforcement measures against poachers and violators and strengthening of conservation efforts.

All educational and informational activities in this program were supported by the United Nations Small Grants Program (SGP).

The Lorestan newt, known by the scientific name of *Neurergus kaiseri*, is one of the seven identified newts of Iran. This species is known by the names of Orange newt, Qeysari, Emperor and Lorestan Mountain newt. Its local names are Haji-Barikab and Vaqfi. This species is endemic to Iran and its distribution range is limited to the south of Lorestan and north of Khuzestan provinces.

The Lorestan newt is listed in IUCN's red list as Critically Endangered (CR), which means that it will soon face extinction given the rapid pace of decrease in its population. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has prohibited any sale or trading of this species since 2010.

The first phase of protecting Laristan sheep ends

Sam Radjabi
Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation

The Laristan Wild Sheep is one of the rarest kinds of wild sheep in the world, limited to an area between Laristan in Fars Province and Bandar Abbas in Hormozgan Province. It is considered the smallest of the world's wild sheep and its numbers have sharply declined in recent decades. Lack of substantial studies on the numbers and distribution of Laristan sheep prompted the Persian Wildlife Foundation (PWF) to fund a rapid survey on this species. PWF tasked the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation (PWHF) to organize and manage this project. PWHF chose three groups of researchers and deployed them in the fall and winter of 2011 to the areas. The first group studied wild sheep habitat from Havā Mountain located between Khonj and Alāmarvdasht to the hills west of Bastak and eastwards to Port Khamir and southwards to Gāvbandi hills. The second group focused on Hormod Protected Area, established in 1975 specifically for the protection of Laristan sheep. The third group studied the habitats between Bastak and Geno Protected Area.

Based on the estimates announced by the Department of Environment (DoE), there are 550 to 750 Laristan sheep throughout the above-mentioned range. Our surveyors, however, could not independently verify these figures. The second research group saw 159 and the third 235 individual wild sheep, while the first team did not come up with a reliable count. According to the DoE, in Hormod Protected Area the number of wild sheep has declined by 80% in the last thirty years. Our researchers found that for the most part human activities were at the root of the problem. However, in Hormod, for example, drought has also taken a toll in recent years. Waterholes have degraded greatly and turned into centers of disease transmission. Diseases are brought in by domesticated animals, which also compete for food resources with wild sheep. Another major problem is lack of adequate funds, with protected areas being understaffed. Illegal hunting for both subsistence and sport is widespread among local communities.

In non-protected areas the main threat seems to be illegal hunting. This is exacerbated by various mining activities that drastically degrade the habitat. Roads built to supply mines serve illegal hunters to access otherwise rugged terrains. DoE does not possess enough resources to effectively manage all its protected areas let alone non-protected areas. Keshār Mountain Protected Area for example has the highest number of wild sheep of Hormozgan Province, yet does not even have a single guard. This void is partly covered for by volunteers who help in various ways. Among other activities, volunteers patrol areas and clean and fill water holes. Yet, they do not enjoy proper backing by the DoE. Recently, a volunteer was imprisoned for inflicting injuries on a poacher in a confrontation between the poacher and the game wardens.

PWHF has initiated a program to tackle some of the issues related to proper management of Laristan sheep habitats. Our rapid survey shows that to save this species we need a comprehensive conservation program which pays as much attention to social issues as it does to habitat problems.

Laristan wildsheep, Photo:Fars Province Department of Environment (DoE)

Great Bustard nest discovered in Bukan

In a dispatch sent by Ahmad Barati, of Bukan Environmental Office, to the Great Bustard Group, an international conservation group dedicated to the cause of saving Great Bustards around the world, it was reported that a local farmer in Bukan area in Northwest Iran discovered a nest belonging to a Great Bustard. The nest was inadvertently damaged in the course of harvesting, but its occupants, two Great Bustard chicks, were successfully rescued. The chicks are reported to be approximately two weeks old but appear to be well.

The Great Bustard Group is currently advising on the birds' care, which can be difficult, as birds are particularly vulnerable to stress. The young birds may need to be given water via pipette initially to ensure they do not succumb to dehydration. As a stop-gap solution, they can be fed cat food – high in energy and protein – but in the longer term they need foods more closely matching what would be available in their natural habitat. Great Bustards are opportunists. As large flying birds, they require a lot of energy and in the wild will eat a variety of foods.

The Great Bustard chicks will be fed meat, boiled eggs and chopped vegetation as well as insects and later, mice.

The chicks were found on the Sekanian plain, (a hunting prohibited area) which is one of the five important habitats for the remaining population of Great Bustards in Northwest Iran. It is located 24km North of Bukan (360 39 ' -36 045 ' N and 46012 ' -46 017' E) and between the villages of Qormish and Sekanian.

Source: www.greatbustard.org

New hopes for the Cheetah in Khorasan-e Razavi

Long ago, in the western parts of Khorasan-e Razavi Province there were sporadic reports of Asiatic cheetahs. However, in recent years there were no confirmed report about this species and, as such, the area was de-listed as a cheetah habitat.

In late June 2012, a unique encounter with cheetah was reported by the residents of Kalateh-ye Barq Village of Bardeskan Township in the westernmost part of the Province. The villagers who spotted the animal took great care not to disturb it and reported it to the DoE authorities, who were able to take some pictures and confirm the reports. Shepherds of the area, in spite of suffering occasional damages by wildlife, not only did not harm this endangered animal, but treated it with much respect and considered it a valuable natural treasure.

This village is located next to one of the oldest protected areas of Iran, Doruneh Protected Area. The report on the presence of the cheetah in this region after so many years has raised hopes about establishment of a new sanctuary for this endangered species. On the other hand, humane treatment and understanding showed by the local people has raised new hopes about people's awareness in participating in conservation programs.

Asiatic Cheetah, Photo: Houman Jowkar

Humpback whale saved in the Persian Gulf

Gouran Village, 80 kilometers west of Qeshm City, is situated on the northern shore of Qeshm Island and borders west of Harra mangroves.

In late June three fishermen from the village went to the sea to pull out their fishing net. They noticed a large animal trapped in the net. Considering the existence of a crocodile farm in Hengam Island, they first suspected that the animal was a crocodile. But after paying close attention, they found out that the creature was a Humpback whale. Having been previously informed about the conditions of marine mammals and turtles, they realized the importance of the species and did their best to save it. So, they carefully let one end of the net open to help the whale free itself without any harm.

The fishermen who took part in this conservation act were Yousef Gourani, Abdolrahman Gourani and Ayoub Hedari. Mr. Seyed Mohammad Hashem Dakhteh, Manager of Qeshm Geopark, has remarked that this should be considered an important sign of success for various educational projects of the NGOs, including the workshops held for the local youth and fishermen on the topic of conservation of marine mammals by the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation.