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Abstract: The cheetah is very likely to be extinct in Afghanistan. Depletion of prey and the building of highways in its habitat are the main causes of population decline in the country. No sightings have been reported since the 1950s.

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National Parks and Utilization of Wildlife Resources

THE MAMMALS OF AFGHANISTAN  
Their Distribution and Status

*Felids*

by

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Flesh Eating Mammals

CARNIVORA:

The Carnivora stand fourth in actual numbers of living types (species) being surpassed by rodents, the even-toed ungulates and the bats. In number of families they stand third. Six of the seven known families are represented in Afghanistan. The number of species are distributed on the following basis according to families:

Cats ( <u>Felidae</u> ) 10	Mongoose ( <u>Viverridae</u> ) 2
Mustelids ( <u>Mustelidae</u> ) 8	Bears ( <u>Ursidae</u> ) 2
Dogs ( <u>Canidae</u> ) 6	Hyaenas ( <u>Hyaenidae</u> ) 1

Owing to their different characteristics carnivores are able to survive under varying conditions and thus are widely distributed throughout the country. Species distribution in the life zones of Afghanistan is on the following basis:

Central Highlands: Species endemic to the Hindu Kush range are the snow leopard, lynx and Pallas's cat. Wolf and red fox are widely scattered in most parts of the highlands throughout the country also. Stone marten, ermine and weasel are characteristic mustelids of this region.

Steppes: The jungle cat, caracal and to some extent the desert cat are typical of the steppes. Jackal abound here while the corsac fox occurs in isolated pockets. Marbled polecat, striped hyaena, and red fox are other typical residents while the badger is sometimes encountered. The common otter is to be found along river banks of this region.

Southern semi-deserts: This region does not have a widespread carnivorous distribution. Cheetah, jackal, sand fox, small Indian mongoose and marbled polecat together with the more abundantly distributed wolf and red fox occur here.

Monsoon forests: The leopard cat, yellow-throated marten and the Asiatic black bear are species peculiar to the forests. The leopard, snow leopard, wolf, jackal and common otter also inhabit this region.

Panthera tigris virgata

(Linnaeus 1758)

Caspian Tiger

Local names:

Pashto           abr

Dari             abr

Distribution: The first written record of the tiger is found in Babur's memoirs. Upon seeing the animal near Bagram, Babur ordered his soldiers to stalk it. This incident occurred in March 1519 while Babur and his companions were headed from Kabul to Bagram.

Aitchison, 1889 (in Hassinger, 1973) gives the following account of a tiger kill. "On 19th January 1885 at our camp at Bala Murghab the body of a female tiger was brought to the General..." The tiger inhabited a large portion of the Amu Darya and Murghab river basins prior to its decline in these areas. During the past 50 years it has only been recorded from the river islands of Darqad and Imam Sahib in Takhar and Kunduz province of northern Afghanistan. A tiger was last killed in the Darqad area about 30 years ago. They have however, not been seen during recent years.

In central Asia the tiger has only been preserved in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya basin and along its tributaries near the Aral Sea. It also occurs along the Caspian littoral of northern Iran.

Habitats: Below 1600 m. Reed beds, mountain taiga, swamps, mixed forests traversed by rivers and sub-tropical forests.

Status: Considered extinct in Afghanistan. In 1967 unmistakable tracks of a tiger were seen along the Darkad River (Kunhert, in Petocz, 1973). The animal was believed to have come from the Soviet side of the border. No other sightings have been reported during the past 30 years. Its decline is attributed to over-hunting and extensive habitat destruction.

Uncia uncia

(Schreber, 1976)

Snow Leopard

Local names:

Pashto:

Dari: palang brfey

Distribution: Inhabits the north-eastern and central Hindu Kush range and the Pamir Valleys. My personal observation includes two animals seen in Moqor Qara Jelga Valley near Zor Kol Lake in the Big Pamir sector (1974) and Qazideh in the Wakhan Corridor. Petocz (1974 pers. comm.) saw one animal crossing the road near the town of Khundud in the Wakhan Corridor in 1973. The snow leopard had also been observed near Qole Chaqmaktin, Teger Qoron and Berget Aya valleys of the Small Pamir (Naumann, Nogge, 1973). Local people report it occurs near the snowline in Laghman and Nuristan. In the southern part of Badakhshan the snow leopard is reported from the tundra zone of Zebak (Ashor Beg, 1976, pers. comm.). In central parts of Afghanistan it is found in the Ajar Valley Reserve (Abdul Haq, 1975, pers. comm.).

Outside Afghanistan it is distributed in the Karakoram range and the Himalayan chain from Kashmir to Bhutan. In the Soviet Union the snow leopard is encountered in the mountains of Tajakistan and Soviet Pamirs.

Habitats: 3000 - 5000 m. Alpine valleys and meadows, coniferous forests, tree and scrub zone.

Status: Endangered. Numbers declining due to high value in fur business. It is still stalked despite a hunting ban. It is estimated that about 50-80 animals are shot annually for export (Rodenburg, 1977). Most of the furs are exported to European or North American markets.

Panthera pardus

(Linnaeus, 1758)

Leopard

Local names:

Pashto: prang

Dari: palang

Distribution: Distributed in all of the major mountain ranges, the leopard inhabits the Hindu Kush, Kohe Baba, Kohe Paghman ranges of the central highlands, the Wakhan corridor and Darkad peninsula of Badakhshan. Despite habitat destruction it has still maintained a foothold in the Khost Fereng and Salang mountains in northern Baghlan province (Sultani 1975. pers. comm.). A specimen shot by Kullman was taken from the Lataband Pass between Kabul and Sarobi. Other records from eastern sections of the country are from the Logar Valley, Dare Pech in Kunar and along the border zone near Torkham (Kullmann 1965). During a field trip to the Ajar Valley in October 1976 a hunting party encountered a leopard in the Surkhab bowl while looking for ibex. The animal however, escaped unharmed.

Habitats: 1500 - 4000 m. Rugged mountains, coniferous forests, plains, semi-deserts and hilly steppes.

Status: Endangered. A good market for furs has decreased numbers in most of their former habitats.. Encountered rarely in some of the most remote and rugged montane regions. Considered a notorious killer of domestic animals leopards are chased by hunting parties when they cause considerable damage to livestock. Rodenburg (1977) estimates about 80 - 100 animals are taken annually to supply the burgeoning fur market.

Felis chaus

(Guldenstaedt, 1776)

Jungle Cat

Local names:

Dari: smūncha

Distribution: The jungle cat has established itself in the steppes along river drainages. Scully (1887) describes seeing it near Maimana; The Street Expedition (1965) reports shooting specimens in the Hari Rud basin near Herat and the Helmand river drainage. Moreover, they were presented with a live kitten captured in Kandahar. Niethammer (1966) reports it from Nangrahar province in eastern Afghanistan, and Kandahar. In 1972 a specimen caught at the governor's compound in Meterlam, Laghman province, was presented to the Kabul Zoo (Naumann, 1973).

Habitats: 400 - 1000 m. Semi-deserts, open plains, watercourses, reed beds and cultivations.

Status: Vulnerable. Numbers abundant, however hunting pressure at present rate could decimate the population seriously if strong measures are not taken. Its furs are the most numerous in Kabul fur market of all the felid species (Rodenburg, 1977).



Caracal caracal

(Schreber, 1776)

Caracal

Local names

Dari:                               psk qarh qol

Distribution: Few records of caracal are known from Afghanistan. Nogge (1973) reports a specimen collected from Sare Pul of Jozjan province and a pelt from the Herat bazaar. Although rare, it occurs in the northern steppes. Collections of caracal in the Hari Rud, Murghab and Amu Darya basins in Soviet Turkestan verify their occurrence in northern Afghanistan. To the west it is found along the Iran-Turkemia border zone and southwards in Baluchistan and Sind.

Habitats: 500 - 1000 m. Lives essentially in semi-deserts, hilly steppes and dry mountainous terrain.

Status: Vulnerable. The caracal has been reduced in its former range in northern Afghanistan. Hunting pressure accompanied by advances in agriculture which have resulted in destruction of habitat are considered main causes of decline.

Lynx lynx

(Linnaeus, 1758)

Lynx

Local names:

Dari: syah gos

Distribution: An inhabitant of montane biotopes the lynx is found in the Hindu Kush range. In Wakhan it has been observed near Sarhad and the Big and Small Pamirs. It also penetrates the Zebak valleys (Ashor Beg, 1976, pers. comm.) with its range extending southward towards the forested regions of upper Nuristan. Specimens procured by the Kabul Zoo are reported to have come from the Ghorband Valley and the Shibar Pass (Naumann, Nogge 1973).

Outside Afghanistan it is distributed in the Soviet Pamirs, the Kopet Dag mountains of Turkmenia and the Gilgit and Kashmir valleys in the upper Indus valley.

Habitats: 1500 - 4500 m. Adapted to a variety of habitats such as rugged mountains, alpine meadows, forests and pistachio scrub.

Status: Vulnerable. Numbers have been depleted in former habitats because of continued stalking by hunters. An estimated 200 - 250 skins are annually produced for the fur market (Rodenburg, 1977).

Prionailurus bengalensis

(Kerr, 1972)

Leopard Cat

Local names:

Dari: psk jangley

Distribution: Found in the forested regions of eastern Afghanistan. Specimens brought to the Kabul Zoo are reported to have come from Jalalkot in the Kunar Valley, the Waygul Forests of Dare Pech and Norgal in the lower Kunar Valley. Naumann (1973, pers. comm.) has occasionally seen the leopard cat in Dare Nur, northwest of Jalalabad.

Outside Afghanistan its range extends into the forested regions of Chitral and Kashmir, Baluchistan and the Himalayas.

Habitats: 1000 - 3000 m. Inhabits forests and jungles in hilly and mountainous regions

Status: Vulnerable. Occasionally encountered in its range; hunting probably has declined numbers.

Felis lybica

(Forster, 1780)

Desert Cat

Local names:

Dari: psk dsty

Distribution: This cat is found in different varieties and colors in the central Hazarajat mountains (Hutton, 1845, in Hassinger, 1973) and the steppe region. The Street Expedition (1965) collections include two desert cats from the Shibar Pass and the stony steppes near Herat.

Gaisler et al. (1968) reports taking a specimen from Bamiyan. A record from the eastern section of the country includes a specimen on display at the Kabul zoo museum taken from Waygul Valley of Nuristan.

It has a widespread distribution in Asia and is found from Punjab and Sind into the Ganges Valley, Baluchistan and southern Iran. Northwards it occurs in Soviet Turkmenia and Kazakhstan.

Habitats: 500 - 2000 m. Steppes, clay valleys and sandy plains.

Status: Vulnerable. Rodenburg (1977) estimates seeing over 1200 pelts in Kabul bazaars manufactured into different articles. Although common, it is hunted at large.

Felis manul

(Pallas, 1779)

Pallas's Cat

Local names:

Dari: psk kũhey

Distribution: An inhabitant of alpine and sub-alpine valleys of mountainous regions. Skins brought to Kabul fur market mainly come from the Salang Pass and Panjsher Valley of the central Hindu Kush range. In northern Badakhshan it occurs in the Wakhan Corridor and the Zebak valleys (Ashor Beg, 1976, pers. comm.).

Outside Afghanistan it is found in Turkestan and Kazakhstan, Gorgan in Iran and eastern Ladakh in India.

Habitats: 1500 - 3500 m. Rocky and treeless dry stony plateaus. Also lives in the steppes and deserts.

Status: Vulnerable. Formerly common in montane habitats but hunting and trapping has caused its retreat to isolated valleys where it still occurs in suitable numbers.

Acinonyx jubatus venaticus

(Schreber, 1776)

Cheetah

Local names:

Pashto: tazy prang

Dari: tazy palng

Distribution: The cheetah is now extinct in Afghanistan but once occurred in the Helmand, Farah, Hari Rud and Murghab basins (Aitchison, 1889). Ognev (1935) (in Hassinger, 1973), lists cheetahs from three drainages which have their sources in northern Afghanistan. " In 1932 he reports seeing three animals in the Murghab basin. Other cheetah records are a skin photographed in the Herat bazaar by Nogge in 1971 and a pelt purchased by Paludan in 1948 at Farah but their origin is unknown.

The cheetah population in Iran is building up where it is reported to occur in the Mohammad Reza Shah and Bamou national parks and the Parvar protected region. In the Soviet Union the range of cheetah is limited to Turkmenia.

Habitats: 500 - 1000 m. Inhabits deserts, semi-deserts and open dry areas.

Status: Extinct. Depletion of prey, the building of new roads in its habitat are main causes of decline in cheetah population. No sightings have been reported during the past two decades.