

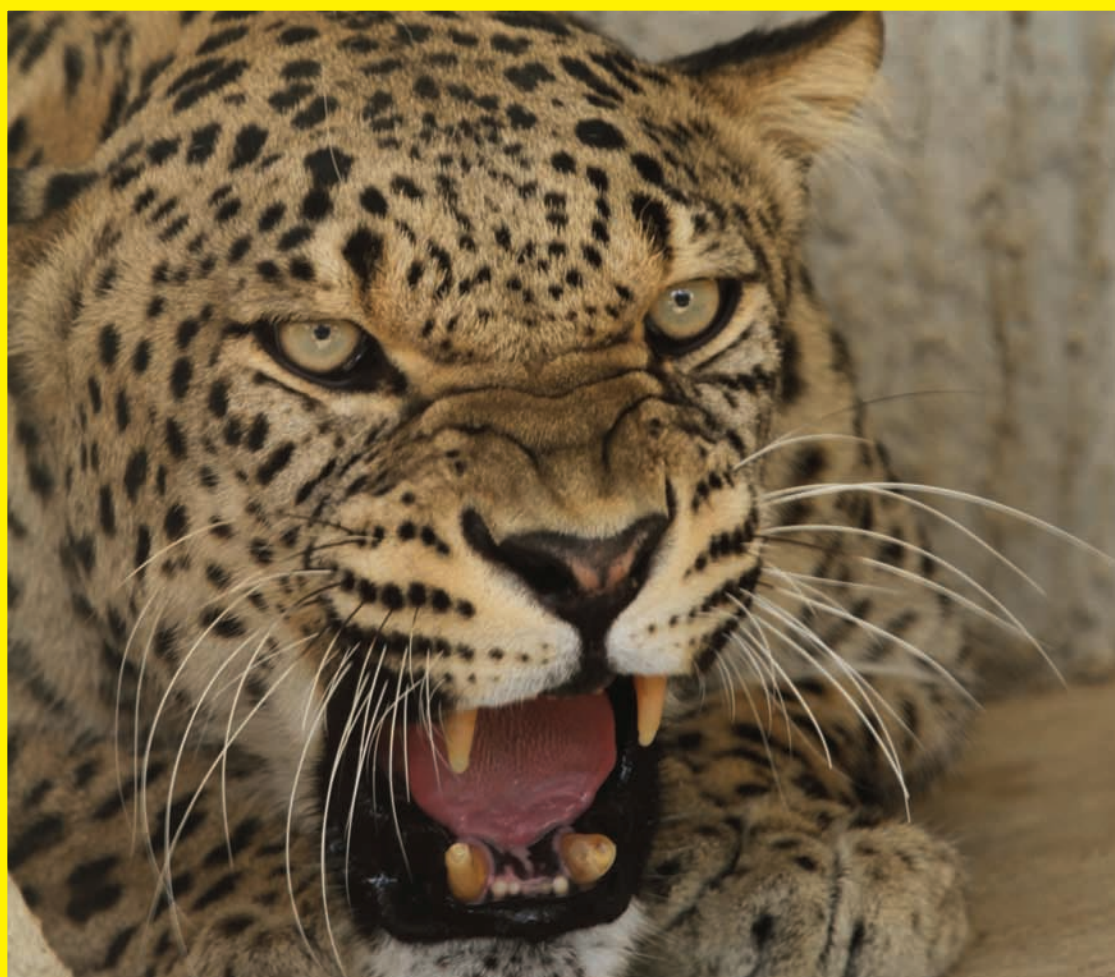
Persian Leopard



Newsletter

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Farzaneh

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THE LEOPARD STORY; A FABLE OF THE **VANITY**

Novel sciences of investigating the human-animal relationships have experienced a swift growth in the recent decades pursuing in fields like 'Anthrozoology'. Definitely, notions of animality have affected a range of concepts that play an important ideological and intellectual role in the context of contemporary thought. Examining representation of animals in literatures, arts and other cultural forms is a prevalent way of understanding human feelings and motivations toward 'non-humans' which are expressed as 'Anthropomorphism'. Anthropomorphized animals are the critical components of traditional fables that can represent a culture, religion, or nation's behavior.

In spite of bold presence of Anthropomorphism in the Persian literatures, root of this entrance is not yet clearly known. Translation of 'Panchatantra' or its renowned Persian term, 'Kalilah wa (and) Dimna', around 570 CE into Pahlavi (a Middle Persian language) is known to have a significant effect in this matter and introduce many animal symbolisms to the

ancient Iranians; however, evidences of the human-animal interactions in the country go back in Prehistoric times.

Occurrence of the leopard within the Persian literatures is generally in relation to literary epics where the animal is a symbol of 'fearlessness' and 'valiance', as well as 'fury' and 'grudge'. Accordingly, the Persian word (palang) intensively has been used as an adjective or metaphor, and doing a very hard task is referred to 'defeating a leopard'. There are several examples of these usages in 'Shahnameh' (The King's Chronicles; the national epic of the cultural sphere of Greater Persia). Moreover, the legendary royal standard (vexillum) of the Sassanid kings (224-651) allegedly was made of leopard skin.

Through the classic poetries also, in describing the wilderness, leopard [in companion with the lion] is usually present. Besides, the leopard is symbol of 'vanity' in the modern literatures. The well-known story of 'Leopard and the Moon' is the best example of this Iranian Anthropomorphism; however, it might be originally derived from a Chinese fable. "...when the leopard was ruling

over all the earth, saw the moon upper in the sky. He decided to put it down, so climbed the highest cliff and jump to grab the moon...but tumbled and died".

The paradox of fear and awe toward the Persian leopard is an inseparable part of its coexistence with the human being. But admired or hated, the animal is rapidly approaching to the threshold of extinction.

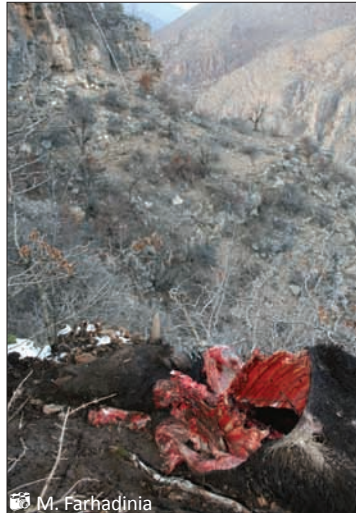


Hunters Riding (by Siyah Qalam, end of 15th century) - © Sarai Albums, Topkapi Museum

ARE CONSERVATION EFFORTS ENOUGH FOR LONG-TERM SURVIVAL OF PERSIAN LEOPARD? A CASE STUDY FROM A HYRCANIAN FOREST HABITAT, NORTHERN IRAN

Ranging across southern boundaries of the Caspian Sea in a west-east direction, Alorz Mountains are home to a number of the Iranian well-known reserves, including the Golestanak Reserve. The area is one of the oldest reserves in the country which was designated as a protected area in 1963; therefore, it is nearly half century that the area is protected. The leopard survey was carried out from 2005 to 2009 in the area to investigate various ecological aspects of this creature.

The leopards used to roam across various habitat types in the area, from rolling rocky mountains to lowland deep forests. Most of the species' signs have been found inside the forests or near the rolling rocky mountains and the least proportion on flat slopes above the timberline and below the cliffs, probably because of low cover to approach their prey as well as lack of shelter. In fact, they can live wherever there is sufficient cover and adequately sized prey animals. The leopard was filmed in the highest Mount Varvasht in Golestanak in an elevation of around 3700 meters a.s.l. (Jafari, pers. comm.). The leopards feed on a variety of preys in the area, including wild goat, wild boar, Maral red deer, roe deer, and domestic animals. However, wild goat and livestock have jointly the highest ranking in the leopard's diet in the area, each one extracted from 40% of scats found in the area. Overall, medium to large-sized herbivores were the most frequently consumed food items by the leopards and occurred in 94% of all food items with a strong tendency to medium-sized mammals.



Simultaneously, around 40% of the kills found in the area were domestic animals. Wild goat was the major leopard food item among wild kills found during the survey (75% of wild kills).

On the other hand, there is a serious conflict between the leopards and local livestock owners in the area which indicate the problem of depredation. At least 2 domestic animals (including sheep, goat or cattle) from 10 neighboring villages in the area are lost to the leopards on a monthly basis, resulting in an annual significant loss of at least

8000 USD for the local people.

The local people generally have no negative attitude toward the leopards, unless the animal turns to a "thief" of livestock which leaves no option but to eradicate. Since 2002 to 2010, a total of 10 leopards have been verified to be killed by local people, mainly (n=3) through lacing carcasses with organochlorine pesticides to poison leopards returning to feed on a kill. Outside protected areas, accidental or intentional killing by people drives local extinction of large carnivores or reduces their numbers; however, there is increasing evidence that even protected areas may not effectively protect large carnivores (Balme & Hunter 2004).

With respect to the present high conflict with local people as well as easy access to agricultural poisons and low level of official protection, it seems that annually a minimum of 1 to 2 leopards are poached, usually as a result of conflict with livestock owners. Therefore, immediate conservational actions are necessary to prevent the extinction of the species in Golestanak.

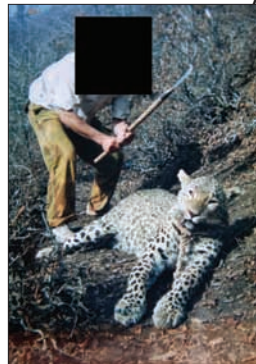


fig.1: Livestock depredation is the main reason of human-leopard conflicts at Golestanak
fig.2: An undated photo showing [probably] a local livestock owner on a dead leopard

A LIBRARY FOR THE PERSIAN LEOPARDS!

Although the general knowledge about the Persian leopards has been improved during recent years, it is also one of the poorly known subspecies of felids around the world. Published data concerning the animal is scarce but an important baseline for further studies; however, they are usually not easily available for [or even understood by!]

students and scientists with an enthusiasm to launch new investigations. An online open-access library is prepared for the reason, gathering the currently available published bibliography on the Persian leopards within its whole range. The articles are available in electronic formats to download on ICS' website under Year of Leopard page at: www.wildlife.ir

ICS YOUNG VOLUNTEER JOINED LEOPARD CONSERVATION

Sajjad Samiy is a senior high school student who is from Aligudarz, northern Lorestan. He joined the ICS as volunteer 2 years ago and is quite dedicated to the animals with the highest level of enthusiasm and passion. He found the leopard crisis in his hometown and initiated a variety of activities. He accompanied the area's wardens within the leopard habitats and recorded leopard's presence in different areas. His knowledgeable character encouraged the Lorestan DoE to ask him to prepare an educational brochure about the leopard status in the province. The brochure is going to distribute among the residents where the number of human-animal conflicts is high.



LEOPARD FOOTAGE

Capturing several pictures of a female leopard with two cubs by camera-traps drew



East Azarbaijan DoE

attentions to Kiamaky Wildlife Refuge (KWR) in late 2008. However, more photos of the species have been obtained from the area including an adult male feeding on carcass of a domestic donkey. As an important habitat of the species in the Iranian Caucasus, KWR is probably playing a source role for the individuals occasionally crossing the border toward the north. Recently, short movie of a large male was captured by camera-traps in the area following a mountainous path. Surprisingly, the camera was placed at top of a steep slope which was unlikely to take any photos of the animal. The absence/presence study is conducted by East Azarbaijan DoE to recognize the habitats of the Persian leopard through the province.

LEOPARD CRISIS IN LORESTAN: EACH MONTH ONE LEOPARD POACHED

Located along Zagros Mountain in west central Iran, Lorestan (Luristan) Province is considered of those areas that rarely have been surveyed for the wildlife in the country. The province is of the first localities where caracal has been verified in Iran, but wildlife knowledge is awfully scant in/about this province.

Recently, the Iranian media declared that “9 leopards have been poached during the past year in Lorestan”. This is highest confirmed annual poaching within a province in Iran during 2009 which with respect to non-reported numbers, it is logical to expect that 1 leopard is poached on a monthly basis.

A majority of the animals have been killed by local people, both hunters as well as livestock owners. Also, road incidents were also reported to be a minor cause.

The leopard status in Lorestan has raised serious concern within the Iranian Department of Environment (DoE) and a joint agreement has been formed with the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) to conduct status assessment and to train experts and game wardens. The areas are going to be visited by the ICS biologists and camera traps have been set in western province where is supposed to hold the largest population and around half of poaches occurred there, namely



Oshtoran Kouh Protected Area. Other than the Persian leopard, the largest carnivore in Iran also suffers serious poaching in the area. Brown bears have been subject to regular killing by local people. Last year, a training workshop was held by the ICS in Lorestan DoE for local experts about the leopard.

LEOPARDS OF IRAN, UNDER THREAT

As an internet-based wildlife magazine, Wildlife Extra reports numerous news on wildlife worldwide. Recently, it has presented a report about Persian leopard in Iran which is a brief review about the species status and conservation in the country. The report is accessible through here:

<http://www.wildlifeextra.com/go/world/iran-leopards.html>

LEOPARD LOSS COUNTER (JULY & AUGUST 2010)

We were happy to think these two months possessed the lowest number of leopard mortalities reported in 2010, with one confirmed event from Qali Kouh region in Lorestan Province. The sub-adult animal was shot by a local shepherd and traditionally stuffed. However, just before developing the newsletter layout, we were

informed that 2 more animals were poached, not too far from the capital of Tehran.



TANDUREH NATIONAL PARK

As a part of Kopet Dag region and closed to the Turkmenistan borders, Tandureh National Park (TNP) is located at Khorasan Razavi Province, Northeastern Iran. The 35540ha area is a mountainous region with an altitude range of 2600-1000m, enormous cliffs and deep valleys which make it a completely unique habitat among the other protect areas in the country.

TNP is part of a larger reserve which has been

protected since 1968 and after that was promoted to a Wildlife Refuge, and later to National Park in 1969 and 1974, respectively. The mean annual precipitation and temperature are 350mm and 14°C,

leading to the development of temperate semi-arid climates.

The park has a rich dense rangeland cover especially on the northern and western slopes. TNP's rocky walls and hilly trails provide suitable habitats for both of Wild goats and Uria's. Hence, presence of predators such as the Persian leopard,

grey wolves, striped hyena, could be attributed to the good populations of wild ungulates.

As a matter of fact, TNP is hot spot for the leopards in Iran. It is also known to be home for a variety of lesser cats including Wild cat, Jungle cat, and the elusive Pallas' cat. Moreover, last winter, a group of ICS biologists have recorded the occurrence of Eurasian lynx within the area which is the first confirmed evidence of the species not only in TNP,



 Saadati

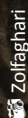


 Khorasan Razavi DoE

but also NE Iran. Several members of the Mustelidae family and birds of prey, including Bearded vulture, show the richness of TNP's biodiversity.

Despite of problems in management, existence of well-known "Chahelmir Valley" and mountain-access roads have facilitated tourism activities in the park.



 Zolfaghari

A ROAD TO ANNIHILATION

The long story of road construction in Golestan National Park (GNP) seeks an end but seems it cannot have. Despite of continuous critics on extending one of the main traffic routes through the largest National Park of the country, it is still remained as a 40 years-old conservation battle to be solved by the Iranian Department of the Environment.

The Landmark project that had been planned long ago on a basis of easing the traffic for villagers and woodmen around the park, have passed many challenges getting to this point. Additionally, the call of conservationists to remove it outside of the GNP's borders always has been rejected by the Iran's Ministry of Road and Transportation during several different governments. Dividing GNP into the fragmented areas and threatening its spectacular wildlife are the growing concerns due to the transport infrastructures as the possible consequences have been recognized in other cases around the world. However, less attention had been paid before starting the new phase of extending it as a highway since 2005. Indeed, the road has experienced several partial destroying because of annual floods which is believed to be a side-effect of decades of deforestation for the road constructions.

In spite of lack of any study to examine the effects of the road on the GNP's ecosystem, high number of wildlife mortalities during recent years could be a clear sign of human disturbance on survivorship of its vertebrate fauna. As described to be one of the best habitats for the endangered Persian leopard in Iran, allegedly the animal is suffering from the road impacts. Just during 2009, three individuals were found dead due to the incidents inside the park which all of them were non-adults. Meanwhile, some of the possible road casualties were possibly unaccounted.

The long delay in finishing the constructions



makes it is unclear to understand the necessity actions in order to reduce the impacts on survival of the Persian leopard in GNP. Nevertheless,



planning proper management strategies for conservation of the animal in one of its main reserves is critical.



SPECIAL THANKS TO ...

The Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) would like to thank the following people and organizations for their generous support to save the Persian leopards in Iran:

- Allwetter Munster Zoo, Germany
- Amersfoort Zoo, the Netherlands
- Conservation des Espèces et des Populations Animales (CEPA), France
- People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), UK

We still need your help to save the vanishing Persian leopards in Iran



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Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) is a non-governmental, non-profitable organization devoted to save the biodiversity which is so rich, but disappearing in Iran. Carnivores have essential priority within the ICS activities and various research and conservation projects have been implemented on the species, such as Asiatic cheetah, brown bear, striped hyeana, grey wolf, Eurasian lynx, caracal, mustelids and Persian leopard whose more than two third of its wild population occurs in Iran. It has been established in 2001 (registration number 13640) and hopes to celebrate its first decade of biodiversity conservation soon.



To learn more about Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS)
visit: www.wildlife.ir