

ON CONSERVING THE WILD GOAT *Capra aegagrus* IN PERAMAGROON AND QARA DAGH MOUNTAINS, IRAQ CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

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INTRODUCTION

In search of wild goat *Capra aegagrus*, the Nature Iraq CLP team started working on Peramagroon Mountain and in the Barzan area. The presence of these animals had been confirmed at Barzan, but was less certain on Peramagroon.

The team began their summer work on Peramagroon Mountain from 10 June to 23 June, 2011. Peramagroon is the highest peak in the Sulaimani governorate, with an elevation of 2615 meters and a total area of 10,028 hectares. Its climate is harsh and variable during the summer: 45°C at the lower elevations during the day and below 0° C at night at the peak. Due to ongoing security concerns, the team elected to replace Barzan with Qara Dagh and began survey work from September 18 to October 1, 2011. Qara Dagh is an area of oak forest composed of eight peaks and nine valleys, the highest peak being about 1,800 meters with a total area of 31,105 hectares. Temperatures at Qara Dagh in the summer range from 45° C during the day to 5° C at night.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The Nature Iraq CLP team observed wild goats in both designated areas and found these animals in unexpected numbers. Working from Nature Iraq's threat assessments for these areas and having confirmed the presence of the goats, the team will work to protect these animals in areas where hunting pressure is very high. In addition, the team hopes to increase international knowledge about the status of these animals in Iraq. According to the IUCN Red List, the presence of wild goats in Iraq is uncertain in the wild. Further work on goat populations in Iraq could increase international pressure to protect these animals.

According to IUCN Red List, the presence of Persian leopard (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*) in Iraq is unconfirmed, but during the CLP survey work, the team also captured the first photographic record of Persian leopard in one of the mountains of Kurdistan-Northern Iraq. This is the first confirmation of the present status of these animals in the region. Two leopards were reportedly killed in Kurdistan, one by local hunters and one by a mine, and it was thought by many that they had been extirpated from the region. In addition and as part of the CLP project, Nature Iraq CLP team with our trainer Amir Hossein Khaleghi, a mammal specialist from the Iranian conservation organization, Plan for the Land, were able to observe and photograph the least weasel *Mustela nivalis* for the first time, making this the first record of the species confirmed for Kurdistan, northern Iraq.

Another exciting find was the observation of the Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) in Barzan area. The likelihood of the presence of the Eurasian Lynx was noted by Hatt (1959) as one specimen in the British Museum from Zakho of Kurdistan but a local from Barzan was able to photograph this species, making this the first photographic confirmation on the present status of the Eurasian Lynx in Kurdistan, Iraq.



Fig 2. Persian leopard *Panthera pardus saxicolor* (Nature Iraq)

CONCLUSION

The main goal of the Nature Iraq's Conservation Leadership Programme is to preserve wild goats *Capra aegagrus* in both designated areas and the surrounding areas of Kurdistan, northern Iraq, through education and advocacy based on the results of field surveys. Following this the team were scheduled in February 2012 to commence activities in awareness raising amongst stakeholders. This included highlighting the conservation status of wild



Fig 1. Wild goat *Capra aegagrus* in Qara Dagh Area (Hana Raza)

goats and how to protect the species, the threats they face and the goals of the project. Together with distributing these leaflets and holding educational talks, workshops at different local schools were held. Forestry Police and other local stakeholders near the designated areas were also included in these awareness campaigns. The envisaged future direction the Conservation Leadership Programme will take includes, more intense field research to determine the status and distribution of the wild goat in Kurdistan, northern Iraq, strengthening the relationship with the Forestry Police Departments in the region, secure financial support for further public awareness campaigns, and periodical evaluation of advocacy and awareness raising campaigns as well as encouraging and involving new conservationists in the project.



Fig 3. Least weasel *Mustela nivalis* (Amir H. Khaleghi)



Fig 4. Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx* (Mohammed Sadiq)

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