

Status of a protected area system in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas: An analysis of PA coverage

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Abstract

Multifaceted patterns of protected area (PA) expansion are reviewed considering: i) the increase in PA number and coverage; ii) distribution and extent of important bird areas (IBAs); and iii) distribution and coverage of global biodiversity hotspots and the Global 200 Ecoregions that fall within the Hindu Kush-Himalayas (HKH). The analysis revealed that biodiversity conservation is a priority for the eight regional member countries of the HKH, who have established 488 PAs over the last 89 years (1918 to 2007). The eight countries sharing the HKH have committed 39% of this total geographical area to the PA network and 11% to IBAs, which is quite significant when compared to the global target of 10%. There has been an increasing trend in PA establishment over the last four decades. The PA coverage within the HKH of China alone is significant (35.5%), followed by India (1.46%) and Nepal (0.58%). When IUCN management categories are considered, the majority of PAs belong to Category V (39%), followed by Category IV (29%). Only 0.6% of PAs are managed as Category I, and, in recent years, Categories V and VI have increased. Of the total HKH geographical area, 32% is covered by four global biodiversity hotspots and 62% by the Global 200 Ecoregions. However, only 25% of the global biodiversity hotspots and 40% of the Global 200 Ecoregions are part of the PA network. There are still numerous gaps in conservation in the HKH. Coordinated and committed efforts are required to bring other critical habitats within the PA network in the HKH.