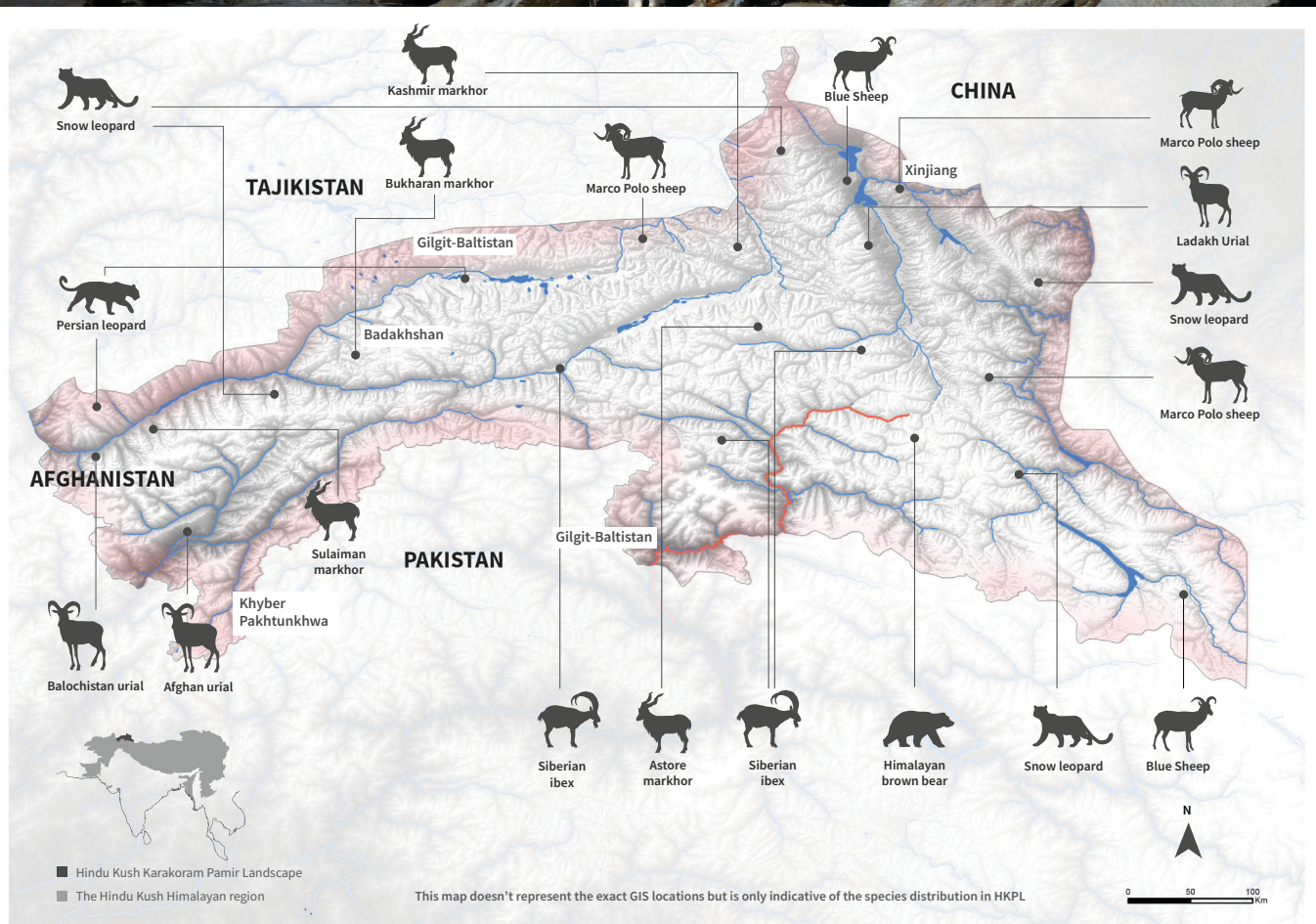


Community-based trophy hunting

Integrating conservation and community livelihoods



DISTRIBUTION OF WILDLIFE IN HKPL

Wildlife in HKPL

The Hindu Kush Karakoram Pamir Landscape (HKPL) represents a fragile alpine ecosystem with unique biodiversity values. The landscape includes parts of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, with six physically interconnected protected areas – Wakhan National Park in Afghanistan; Taxkorgan Nature Reserve in China; Broghil National Park, Qurumber National Park and Khunjerab National Park in Pakistan; and,

Zorkul Nature Reserve in Tajikistan. Together, these protected areas cover more than 33,000 sq. km.

The landscape is an important habitat for several iconic species of wildlife, including the critically endangered Himalayan brown bear (*Ursus arctos isabellinus*), the endangered Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*), the near threatened snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), urial (*Ovis vignei*), Siberian ibex (*Capra sibirica*), blue sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*), and markhor (*Capra falconeri*), among others.



THE COMMUNITY-BASED TROPHY HUNTING PROGRAMME ALSO AIMED AT STOPPING THE RETALIATORY KILLING OF SNOW LEOPARDS.
Photo: WWF-Pakistan

Evolving approaches to wildlife conservation

The approach to wildlife conservation in the HKPL landscape has evolved over time. The first was a strict protection approach, where the government was the sole authorized institution for the protection and management of wildlife. This was a period that saw the creation of formal protected areas including national parks, sanctuaries, and game reserves. This approach was unsuccessful as it did not include the voices of communities that co-existed with wildlife.

The strict protection approach gave way to an approach where people and private groups were involved in conservation. This came from the realization that the livelihoods of people was largely dependent on natural resources, and their support was essential for conservation of wildlife in remote areas. This led to hunting concessions and the formation of private game reserves, ranches, and hunting areas.

The third approach – participatory conservation and management – is a blend of the two older approaches. It takes into consideration human needs and aspirations from nature and natural resources. This approach has enabled the government and communities to work together for the conservation of biodiversity, and has led to the creation of Community Conservation Areas (CCAs).

The origins of trophy hunting in HKPL

Like in many other isolated and remote areas, communities in the HKPL co-exist with wildlife and have a long tradition of subsistence and commercial hunting. Their co-existence with wildlife also comes at a cost, including human-wildlife conflict. Local hunters killed a large number of ungulates each year to provide food for their families to tide over the long, harsh winters. There

was also retaliatory killing of carnivores that preyed on livestock. This led to a drop in wildlife numbers and imbalance in the ecosystem.

The trophy hunting programme was introduced to address these issues and to restore the ecological balance in HKPL. Hunters were willing to pay large amounts of money for the privilege of hunting trophy animals and the aim was to use this to conserve the populations from which the trophies were taken and support development interventions and environmental conservation in collaboration with local communities.

Although, China did not support trophy hunting and Afghanistan's stand is still unclear, Pakistan and Tajikistan have promoted trophy hunting programmes.

A shift to community-based trophy hunting

In Pakistan and Tajikistan, trophy hunting with community participation was introduced in the late 1990s, primarily as a conservation tool, to combat illicit hunting and poaching of wild animals by locals for meat, pelts, and trophies. With a larger part of the trophy hunting fee (80%) going directly to the local communities, CTHP has become a significant source of revenue (>30%) for conservation and management of wildlife populations and their habitats (>30% of the landscape area of 72,496 sq. km). The CTHP has emerged as a successful conservation tool in Pakistan and Tajikistan. Pakistan's CTHP offers financial incentives to local communities for the protection and conservation of key wildlife species in their respective CCAs. The CTHP is a provision made in CCAs for selective culling of "over mature" or less productive male animals, which constitute less than 4% of the herd/group. Unlike traditional trophy hunting, CTHP can only be carried out at designated CCAs.

The CTHP has three main objectives. The first is to help maintain a viable population of prey and predator species in a habitat as per its carrying capacity; the second is to maintain the ecological health of habitats and ecosystems; and, the third is to recognize the contribution of local communities in preventing poaching, as it would be impossible for government alone to manage wildlife

populations in remote and rugged areas, and use a part of the revenue earned for social and economic development of disadvantaged communities.

The CTHP is specifically designed to strike a balance between conservation needs of mountain ecosystems and the livelihood and development needs of local people.

Success of community-based trophy hunting programmes

There have been several tangible benefits from sustainable community-based trophy hunting. These are presented below using markhor population trends and the revenue generated from CTHP of markhor in Pakistan.

FIGURE 1 INCREASE IN MARKHOR POPULATION IN GILGIT-BALITISTAN AND KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

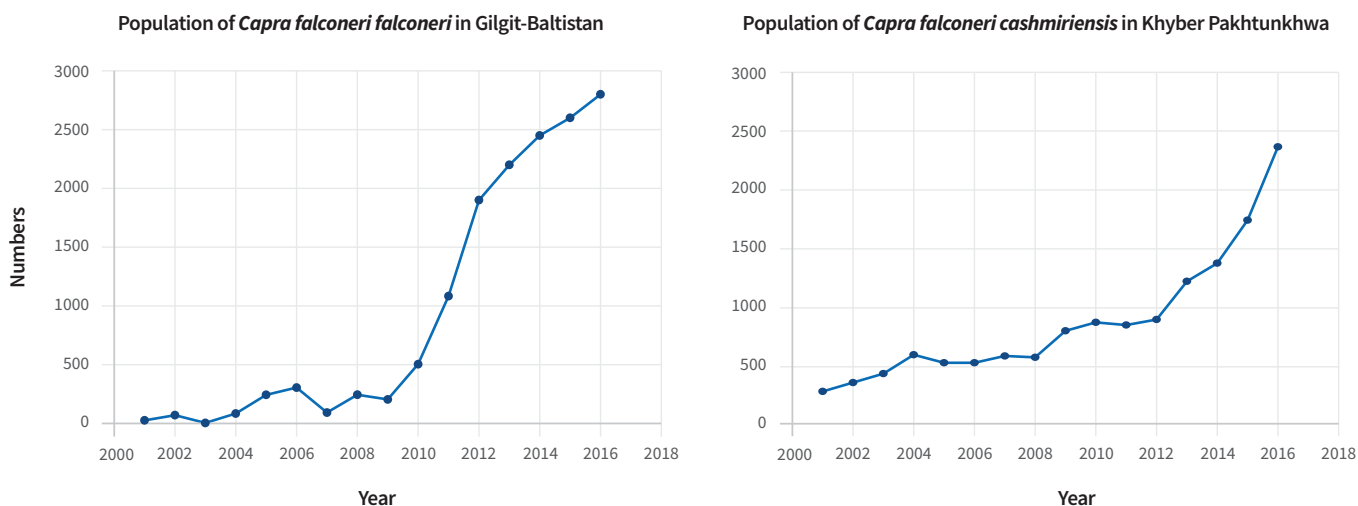
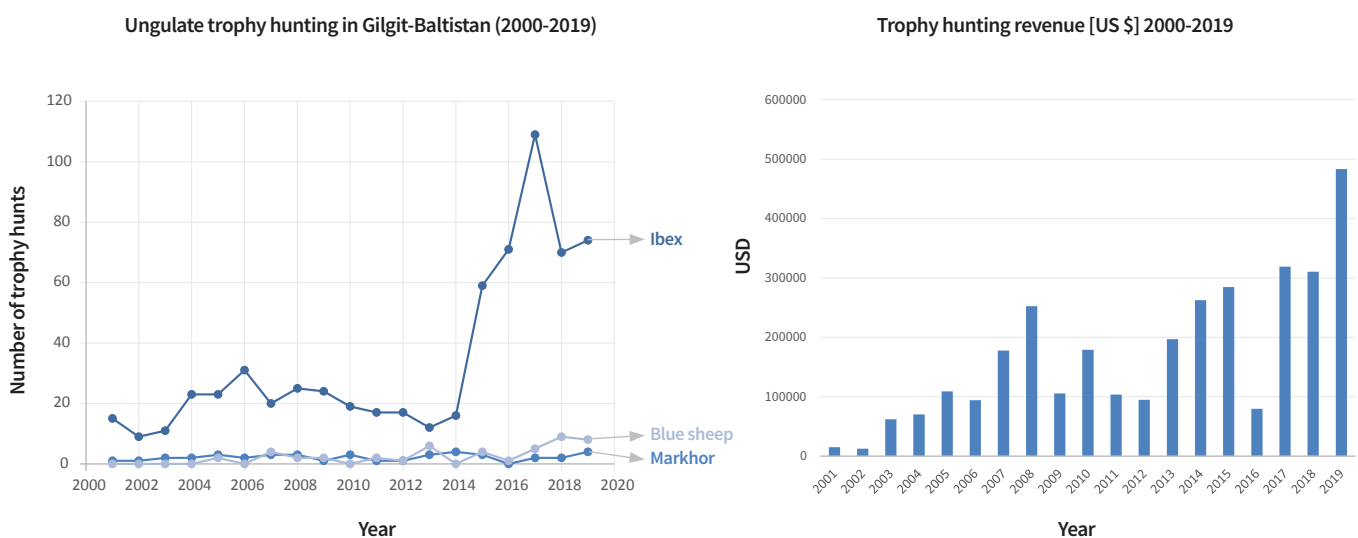


FIGURE 2 REVENUE GENERATION FROM MARKHOR TROPHY HUNTING IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA



What beyond trophy hunting?

Although CTHPs have been effective conservation tools in some parts of the world, benefiting both wildlife and local communities, there has been much debate about the morality, economics, and efficacy of trophy hunting for conservation. Critics argue that conservation policies and actions that are not based on scientific evidence and rigorously monitored have threatened critical habitats and biodiversity. Other criticism revolves around malpractice, weak governance, corruption, and lack of institutional capacity and monitoring in some of the hunting areas.

Then there are global instability and security challenges. For example, the events following 9/11 severely impacted CTHP in HKPL. Since trophy hunters are mostly from the West, any global instability or changes in the security situation can reduce the number of hunters coming to the landscape. Unexpected and sudden events such as the COVID-19 pandemic crippled the travel and tourism industry across the world and also severely impacted CTHP and associated livelihoods in HKPL.

Therefore, it is imperative to identify ecologically feasible, socially acceptable and economically viable alternatives to trophy hunting that can contribute to wildlife conservation, support livelihoods and be sustained through local tourism. One such is the idea of biodiversity credits. Biodiversity credits is a novel conservation approach which acknowledges local communities for protecting rare and endangered wildlife against poaching and creates opportunities for conservation where wildlife thrive, and people prosper. However, this has not been explored or implemented in the HKPL. There are a few successful examples from Africa, but a thorough review of their applicability in the context of HKPL is needed.



MARCO POLO SHEEP (*OVIS AMMON POLII*) ARE A FLAGSHIP SPECIES IN THE HKPL
Photo: A.Rajabi/Wildlife Conservation Society



AN IBEX HUNTED IN A COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED HUNTING AREA IN THE QURUMBER VALLEY OF THE HINDU KUSH MOUNTAINS, 2009.
Photo: Doug Kuzmiak/ICIMOD archive

“Biodiversity credits is a novel conservation approach which acknowledges local communities for protecting rare and endangered wildlife against poaching and creates opportunities for conservation where wildlife thrive, and people prosper.”

For further information

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Cover photo

M Zafar Khan/WWF-Pakistan

ICIMOD gratefully acknowledges the support of its core donors: the Governments of Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Sweden, and Switzerland.

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