

working in the Sub-Himalayan grasslands of Nepal and Bhutan.

As part of this partnership, the National Park authority has adopted a Grassland Management Action Plan. The Plan was finalized in November 2021 and all the major action points have been incorporated in the National Park's working plans, including the Tiger Conservation Plan. Thus, the broader grassland habitat restoration initiatives, which were initially started by conservation partners, have now been embedded by the Forest Department in their management process. This is a unique collaborative approach for the conservation of tall grassland and the model could be adopted for other protected areas in which habitat restoration is needed.

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## Markhor *Capra falconeri* monitoring in Tajikistan shows population recovery

The markhor *Capra falconeri* is categorized as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and included in Appendix I of CITES but is a lucrative species in the international trophy hunting market (Broghammer et al., 2017, IUCN SSC & Caprinae Specialist Group Report). Trophy hunting is contentious, despite its role in conserving species and habitats and the benefits for rural communities when well-managed (Dickman et al., 2019, *Science*, 365, 874).

In this context, the Committee for Environmental Protection of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan asked the IUCN Caprinae Specialist Group to help improve monitoring protocols and develop a preliminary conservation strategy for mountain ungulates in Tajikistan. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in August 2021, and in October 2021 Caprinae Specialist Group experts visited southern Tajikistan for reconnaissance and to train local experts in monitoring techniques. In March 2022, the Caprinae Specialist Group delegation assisted the Committee for Environmental Protection in conducting surveys of the markhor. The Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, Department of Forest and Protected Areas, and rangers from markhor conservancies also participated.

Working simultaneously across 10 markhor conservancies, five teams completed the survey, covering c. 2,000 km<sup>2</sup>, in 15 days. The Caprinae Specialist Group team

noted the strong commitment of the administration, hunting conservancies and local communities to the conservation and sustainable use of the markhor and its habitat. The rangers, drawn from the local community, are well-equipped and trained for monitoring and protecting the markhor. The Committee for Environmental Protection and the conservancies share benefits with the local communities and have invested in infrastructure such as improving water catchments, education, libraries, health facilities, and sport camps. Analyses are ongoing, but it appears the markhor population is > 5,000 individuals and has recovered well since the 1990s, when the population was < 500.

The Caprinae Specialist Group team will make recommendations for improving markhor monitoring protocols and for conserving the markhor population of Tajikistan under an integrated conservation plan. This will encourage improved focus on socio-ecological research, better benefit sharing with stakeholders, and continued capacity enhancement of the relevant personnel. Depending on the findings, the current annual trophy quota of 15 large males may be reconsidered.

The survey results will be shared with CITES and other relevant stakeholders.

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## The Whitley Awards 2022

The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) have announced the six conservation leaders receiving the Whitley Awards 2022. After a 2-year hiatus because of COVID-19, the awards ceremony returned to the Royal Geographical Society for this flagship event of the UK-based charity. The ceremony was also broadcast online.