

THE MARKHOR

On the 18th June, 1958, Lieutenant-Colonel E. H. Cobb, O.B.E., gave our Society a most interesting lecture on The Markhor, *Capra falconeri*, the Great Goat of the Himalayas. He illustrated his lecture with his own slides and with films most kindly lent by Sir Claremont Skrine and Count Krasicki.

The name markhor, Colonel Cobb told us, is derived from the Persian, "mar" meaning snake and "khor" meaning eater, and he has no doubt that the name is justified.

The habitat of the markhor covers many thousands of square miles along the great mountain chain dividing Pakistan from Persia. In the north the markhor country divides, sweeping westwards through Afghanistan across the Oxus and eastwards through Gilgit and Astor into Kashmir.

All markhor have spiral horns but those in the south are on a straight axis like sticks of barley sugar, whereas northern markhor have curly horns. The southern markhor are of the Sulieman and Kabul races, *C.f. jerdoni* and *C.f. megaceros*. Between the wars great herds of the Sulieman markhor inhabited Kalifat, the Government markhor reserve in Baluchistan. The territory of the Kabul markhor is north of the Gomal river, stretching westwards into Afghanistan.

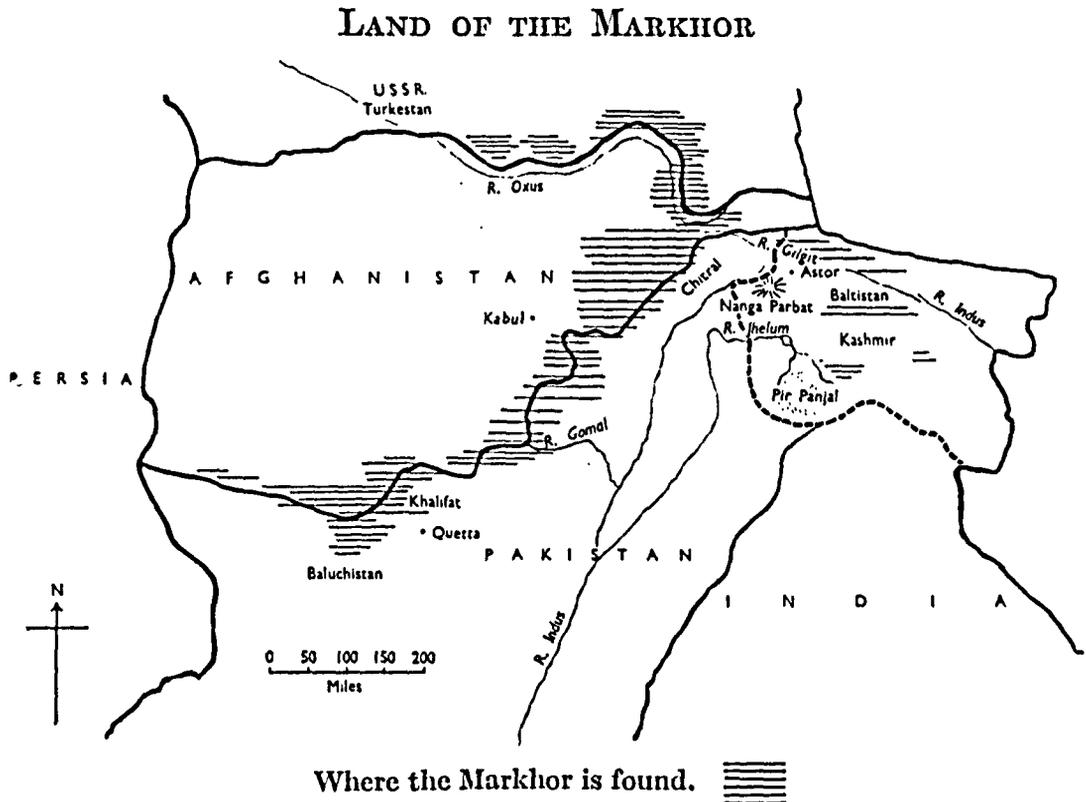
There is a freak variety of these markhor of the south, members of a very small herd which inhabit the isolated feature of Chialtan near Quetta, now a small private reserve. In 1913 Lydekker recognized these as a sub-species, *C.f. chialtanensis*, because of a variation in their horns, but they may be a hybrid with domestic goats.

Though southern markhor indeed inhabit difficult mountain fastnesses, the much bigger curly-horned markhor in the north live in far grander scenery. The Chitral markhor, *C.f. chitralensis*, is a heavy thick-coated animal, with a great shaggy grey mane and black beard, which enhances his majestic appearance. His head and horns are the crest of the Chitral Scouts, that force of mountain cragsmen raised by British officers to police this mountainous region. On the same ground may be found the rare and nocturnal snow leopard, or ounce, and the glorious Impeyan pheasant.

In the north-western part of the markhor's range, Russian scientists report *C.f. heptneri* from the Yakshu area and *C.f. ognevi* from Kuh-i-Tang, both in Russian Turkestan. In the enormous watershed of the Gilgit river is found *C.f. gilgitensis* and here must be some of the finest markhor country in the

world, with precipitous rock faces absolutely inaccessible to man or even to the leopard.

To the east, in Astor and Baltistan is found *C.f. falconeri*, whose great lyre-shaped horns never make three complete turns; their size may be due to heavier rainfall around Nanga Parbat, on the main Himalayan axis and in the Indus basin. In the Pir Panjal and Kajnag ranges, part of the Jhelum river



basin, is found *C.f. cashmiriensis*. The horns of Pir Panjal animals lack all symmetry, appearing like the twisted branch of an old yew tree.

The existence of the markhor is threatened by the advance of civilization, by pressure of population and domestic herds on its grazing grounds and by the uncontrolled use of modern firearms. Their survival within the Commonwealth depends entirely on the preservation and game laws of Pakistan and India, and the implementation of these laws. There is now a realization of the value of nature conservation in these Dominions, but control is very difficult in the vast and rugged country inhabited by the markhor.