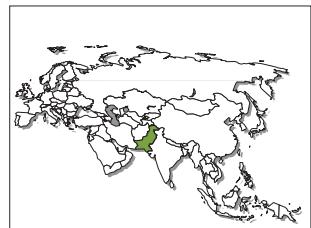


## **SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION AND GRASSROOTS REALITIES LESSONS FROM THE CONSERVATION PROGRAMME IN TORGHAR, BALOCHISTAN, PAKISTAN**

(Case Study)



**Luc Bellon**

*STEP (Society for Torghar Environmental Protection)*

**Abstract.** Many aspects of the conservation programme in Torghar run contrary to the accepted wisdom by which sustainable conservation interventions are usually designed and implemented. Yet, it remains one of the most successful programs of its kind in Pakistan. The success of the programme lies mainly in the fact that the seeds of conservation were planted, both, by the inhabitants of the mountain themselves, and by concerned outsiders. The case of Torghar shows that sustainability, even when set as a goal, should primarily be regarded as a process, rather than an achieved outcome. The Torghar Conservation Programme was founded on the principle of sustainable use of natural resources, which was immediately seen as the only viable way to save the two species – Suleiman Markhor (*Capra falconeri jerdoni*), a wild goat and Afghan Urial (*Ovis orientalis cycloceros*), a wild sheep. Through regulated trophy hunting, the project was to achieve substantial resources and to create incentive for the local population to protect their animals.

**Key words:** Torghar, Pakistan, ungulates, conservation, sustainable use

### **1. General presentation of the programme**

This article focuses on the achievements of a sustainable use programme called the Torghar Conservation Programme (TCP), implemented by the Non Governmental Organisation named Society for Torghar Environmental Protection (STEP).

#### **1.1 The programme area**

This programme takes place in Torghar, a mountain forming the northern most part of the Toba Kakar Range. It is situated in Killa Saifullah District, Balochistan Province, Pakistan.

The project has a “core” area, which is directly protected under the programme, and a surrounding “buffer” area, which hosts human settlements and domestic herds. The project area is a rectangle approximately 35 km long by 20 km wide. The altitude varies between 2,500-3,300 meters.

#### **1.2 Basic aims of the programme**

The programme aims at safeguarding from extinction two animal species: one of wild sheep known as the Afghan Urial (*Ovis vignei cycloceros*); the other of wild goat known as the straight horned/Suleiman Markhor (*Capra falconeri jerdoni*). Both species inhabit a limited area that ranges from the mountains of north western Balochistan, Pakistan (Takatu and Toba Kakar Ranges) and some parts of Afghanistan (Roberts 1997).

The wilderness of northeast Balochistan has long been famous for its abundant and diverse wildlife. Its mountains once contained abundant populations of Sulaiman Markhor, Afghan Urial, leopard, and, in some

places, black bear. Torghar was considered one of the most important wildlife areas of the District. Since the late 1970s, the Afghan war initiated a steady flow of refugees, weapons, and ammunition. With modern weapons (mostly Kalashnikov) and, the ready availability ammunition, seasonal migrants and local residents increased their hunting of local wildlife. By the early 1980s; the Sulaiman Markhor and Afghan Urial populations were drastically reduced, while species like leopards became extinct in the region.



*Afghan Urial (Ovis vignei cycloceros), (Photo: SUSG-CAsia)*

### 1.3 Socio-economic context

The northern part of Balochistan is for the most part inhabited by Pashtuns. The Pashtuns of Torghar are members of the Kakar tribe.

The population living in the project area ranges from 2000 to 4000 individuals. The people are, for the most part, semi-nomadic pastoralists tending large Herds of sheep and goats. In Tanishpa where limited cultivable land and perennial water is available, people have small agricultural fields and orchards.

## 2. Trophy Hunting and Self-Sufficiency

As said in the previous section, the Torghar Mountain is situated in the Provincially Administered Tribal Area (PATA). Hence, local tribal leaders have considerable power. The TCP itself was initiated by one of the most charismatic leader from the region: late Nawab Taimur Shah Jogizai.

Himself a hunter, Nawab Taimur Shah Jogizai became a privileged witness to the depletion of wildlife. After noticing the near extinction of Markhor and Uriel in many of the adjacent mountains, the Nawab decided to ban the hunting of animals in Torghar, one of the last strongholds of these species. The TCP was born under his auspices. The initial enforcement of the ban was enabled by both his tribal authority as well as his administratively recognised powers.



*Late Nawab Taimur Shah Jogizai*

### 2.1 Official institutions and hunting permits

The tribal leader enforced his decision without any contribution from government institutions. That itself induced a drawback when it came to hunting permits: the administration not being involved, did not initially deliver any official hunting permits to the interested Trophy hunters.

In 1986 TCP applied to the Government of Balochistan (GoB) for Urial hunting permits. These permits being mainly destined to foreign hunters, TCP suggested raising the fees from the original Rs.750 (equivalent to less than USD 100 at that time) to USD 1000. TCP's main argument for doing so was to curtail the well known trafficking of local permits being ceded to foreign hunters without any official permission. The suggestion to create a specific permit destined for export would enable a check on this practice. Yet, the request was rejected by the then Minister of Forest & Wildlife (GoB).

Between 1987 and 1989, in the absence of government permits, hunts were conducted through "tribal permits"; *i.e.* a letter signed by Nawab Jogizai certifying that the trophy animal had been hunted in "his" area. At that time, permits were not needed to export trophies to Europe; while the United States Fish and Wildlife Services (US-FWS) agreed to make an exception, by accepting the validity of the Nawab's letter. It was only in 1989 that the procedure for official permits was re-established. 10 Urial permits were issued to TCP for the first time. As per suggestion of TCP, USD 1000 fee was paid to the Government for each Urial permit. The 10 permits issued by the GoB were not utilized in one go due to TCP's policy of limiting the number of hunts. As a result this quota was extended over a period of several years.

In legal terms, issuing hunting permits is the prerogative of the Provincial Government. But **export permit** can only be granted by the Federal Government through its Scientific Management Authority called the National Council for Conservation of Wildlife (NCCW).

After years of meetings and discussions, NCCW finally agreed, in 1998, to issue export permits for Urial trophies.

The hunting of Markhor remained banned because of it being listed on Appendix-I of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora). The situation only changed in 1997 during a Conference of Parties of CITES, held in Zimbabwe. There, the Government of Pakistan, supported by SUSG-CAsia petitioned for allowing a limited quota of Markhor trophies to Pakistan. The citing of Torghar as a successful example of conservation through trophy hunting played the leading role in convincing the delegates.

CITES eventually granted Pakistan with six permits for sport hunted Markhor trophies. Out of these, NCCW of the federal government granted 2 permits to Torghar and the rest to the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Northern Areas. This quota of two permits to Torghar continued for four years until 2003 when CITES increased Pakistan's quota from 6 to 12 Markhor hunting permits. These permits both facilitated the export of the trophies for foreign hunters, and created an opportunity for direct involvement of the Pakistani government at the federal level.

The trophy fees have increased, between 1988 and 2006, from USD 15,000 to USD 40,000 for Suleiman Markhor, and from USD 8,000 to USD 10,000 for Afghan Urial. The rates are agreed upon by NCCW. Out of the fee, 20% is paid to the Provincial Government, while the remaining is used to fund the programme. A successful hunt has to be reported to the Provincial Wildlife Department, which then approaches the NCCW; it is only then that the latter provides the export permits.

### **3. Torghar Biodiversity and Sustainable Use**

#### **3.1 Sustainable use**

The TCP was founded on the principle of **sustainable use of natural resources**. This concept was defined by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) as follows:

Sustainable use of natural resources as defined by IUCN:

*IUCN recognizes that the economies, cultures, and well-being of all human societies depend on the use of biodiversity. Conservation must address the way that we use biodiversity, rather than construct artificial distinctions between people and nature.*

*The concept of sustainability is central to conservation but it embodies social dimensions – including distribution, values, and equity – as well as an understanding of the intrinsic limitations on the supply of biological products and ecological services.*

*The goal is to adopt uses of biodiversity that are sustainable.*

The concept of sustainable use initially faced opposition by many conservation organisations, as it meant killing the species which were the subject of conservation. Yet, after many years of gradual implementation, sustainable use is now recognised world wide as one of the most effecient means to save the Biodiversity. In the Case of the TCP, the idea was immediately seen as the only viable way to save the two animal species. Through **regulated trophy hunting**, the project was to achieve substantial resources and create incentive for the local population to protect their animals.

### 3.2 Trophy hunts

The hunting season for Markhor and Urial starts in November and goes on until March. The animals sought by hunter are exclusively older males with the largest horns. Hunting those animals means leaving the female and younger males at peace, therefore not interfering in the reproduction cycles. The growth rate is thus undisturbed. It is the responsibility of the game guards to identify the appropriate animals. However, the hunter is free to select the animal to be hunted.

### 3.3 Surveys

The sustainability of Trophy hunting is dependent on the allocations quotas for each species and ensuring their enforcement. Hence, the first requirement to initiate such projects is to survey the animal population and assess the maximum number of specimens that can be harvested without disrupting the reproduction cycle. The final figures in 1988 survey stood at observation of 56 Markhors and 85 Urials.

Further censuses were conducted in 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002 and 2005. They include surveys of Urial and Markhor population, range conditions, livestock, diseases, small mammals, and flora.

### 3.4 Sustainable harvest

The main characteristics of Markhor and Urial are: relatively long life span, relatively high reproductive rate for a species of its body size, polygynous mating system, relatively high survival of adult age classes, relatively low susceptibility to predators, and adaption to rugged and fluctuating conditions. These suggest that the Markhor and Urial populations are relatively tolerant to conservative harvest rates and have the capacity to rebound from overharvest. In such species there is normally an “excess of males whose loss has little effect on population levels” (SCHALLER 1977).

According to JOHNSON (1997), the limited trophy hunting has not affected the increase in the population of Markhor and Urial. As he states himself: “*The simple fact that both populations have continued to grow steadily while subject to a strictly controlled trophy hunt is ample evidence that harvest levels have been conservative*”.

FRISINA (2000) recommended that “*Trophy hunting has not impacted the ability of Markhor and Urial population to increase. For the male population segment a sustainable annual trophy harvest for Markhor should be up to 18. A sustainable trophy harvest for Urial should be up to 13.*”



*A hunter with his Afghan urial trophy. (Photo: STEP)*

Despite these recommendations, TCP has allowed an annual trophy hunt of only 1-2 Markhor and 4-5 Urial until 2004, even though the estimated “sustainable harvest” based on surveys would allow many more for the first the trophy hunt was increased to 5 animals in 2005-2006.

#### **4. A Gradual Implementation**

##### **4.1 A self run project: the Game Guard Programme**

The Game Guard Programme (GGP) stipulated that tribesmen were to be recruited from the local population as game guards. It recommended that wildlife surveys be undertaken regularly, establishing the number of Markhor and Urials that could be hunted. The hypothesis was that the development of local livelihoods based on trophy hunting would demonstrate to the local tribesmen that managing the area for wildlife protection could be an economically viable use of the land and its resources.

The GGP was launched in 1985 and seven local tribesmen – former hunters – were hired as game guards to control illegal hunting and to assist in wildlife surveys. Since then this number of gameguards has increased to 93 in 2007.



*The hunter with his trophy, a Sulaiman Markhor (*Capra falconeri jerdoni*), members of STEP and game guard. (Photo: STEP)*