

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 km², 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.

The awards provide funding of GBP 40,000 to each project over 1 year. The 2022 Whitley Award winners are Emmanuel Amoah, Ghana (Tales from the riverbank: safeguarding the last stronghold of West African slender-snouted crocodile); Micaela Camino, Argentina (Empowering communities to defend their human rights and conserve Argentina's Dry Chaco); Pablo Hoffmann, Brazil (Rooting for the future: nurturing wild plant diversity in the Araucaria Forest region); Sonam Lama, Nepal (People and red pandas: mutually beneficial conservation in the Himalayas); Estrela Matilde, São Tomé and Príncipe (Stemming the tide of plastic pollution: an island-wide effort to save sea turtles); and Dedy Yansyah, Indonesia (Last stand for the Sumatran rhino: looking out for Leuser's ecosystem engineers).

In addition, the 2005 Whitley Award alumnus Charudutt Mishra of the Snow Leopard Trust received the Whitley Gold Award in recognition of his outstanding contribution to conservation. This GBP 100,000 top prize was presented to Charu for his work training conservationists to implement locally led, equitable practices that place communities at the centre of conservation, using principles distilled from collaborations to conserve snow leopards across all 12 snow leopard range countries. Charu's Whitley Gold Award will enable him to roll out these principles with the help of WFN's alumni network.

To date, the charity has given GBP 19 million in conservation funding to more than 200 conservation leaders in over 80 countries. As the UN resets the environmental goals for 2030, the need to preserve the natural world has never been stronger and WFN supports emerging country

nationals working in regions where biodiversity is rich but resources for conservation are lacking. They lead projects that are rooted in community involvement and are pragmatic, science-based and impactful.

The Whitley Fund for Nature has a long-term commitment to conservation leaders: winners can apply for continuation funding to scale up their work or respond to new threats. As part of this, WFN supports nature-based solutions that address climate change and biodiversity loss in consultation with communities and Indigenous people. Winners also become life members of the global network of Whitley Award alumni, giving them access to like-minded leaders and opportunities to foster collaborations. Over half of Whitley Award winners go on to receive Continuation Funding grants, worth up to GBP 100,000 over 2 years. For the first time, the charity awarded over GBP 1,000,000 in Continuation Funding in 2021, including GBP 340,000 in nature-based solutions projects. Many winners become influential conservationists, with projects making an impact from the grassroots to the national and international levels.

For more information on the Whitley Fund for Nature, the Whitley Awards, supported projects and how to apply, visit whitleyaward.org.

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