

Status of Urial, Ibex and Chinkara at Durreji, Balochistan

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Abstract

A sizeable and stable population of three ungulates, i.e., urial (*Ovis vignei blanfordii*), ibex (*Capra aegagrus blythi*), chinkara (*Gazella gazella benettii*), has been observed in Durreji Game Management Area. Large population of ibex was observed at Obain and Hum mountains, whereas a large population of chinkara was observed at Sorr. Urial was observed to inhabit all mountainous area in the Durrji Game Management Area.

Keywords: Urial, *Ovis vignei blanfordi*, Ibex *Capra aegagrus blythi*, Chinkara *Gazella gazella benettii*, Durreji

Introduction

Durreji Game Management Area is located in Lasbella District of the Balochistan bordering the Kirthar National Park of Sindh Province in the southeast. The area is both rocky mountainous and sandy plain. The Hub River, one of the largest rivers of the Balochistan, passes through the Durreji Game Reserve. Because of the variation between various habitats the area is known for its rich biodiversity. Despite its importance, almost no documented record on wildlife of Durreji is available. Present paper is first attempt to describe the wildlife of the area and describes the status of three ungulates, i.e. urial, ibex and chinkara, in this Game Management Area.

With the exception of Frisina *et al* (2003), no study on the population of urial and ibex has been undertaken in the Durreji Game Management Area. Roberts (1977) and Schaller (1977) indicated the presence of these three ungulates in the areas, yet no work seems to have been done on their populations in the Durreji, Balochistan. This paper presents the report of the survey conducted on the population of ungulates of the Management Area during 2006.

Materials and Methods

Survey for the population of urial, ibex and chinkara was conducted during 7-11 March, 2006 at seven sites, i.e., Hamali, Obain, Hum, Lakkan, Karo, Kato, and Sorr, of the Durreji Game Management Area. Population survey of ungulates is considered to be very difficult, because of the high mobility and cryptic colouration of these human shy ungulates. For the survey two teams scanned the area along the transect line to locate the animals by using binoculars. The relevant data on location, species, group composition, age, sex, time of sighting, date, weather condition and vegetation was recorded. Night surveys were conducted for chinkara in the cultivation tracks within the Game Management Area by using jeep and search-lights.

Results and Discussion

Surveys of the Durreji Game Management Area revealed that Sindh ibex (*Capra aegagrus blythi*), urial (*Ovis vignei blanfordi*) and chinkara (*Gazella gazella benettii*) are present in different locations as detailed below.

Hamali Mountain: This Mountain is located about 40 km north of Durreji town. The mountain is rugged with slopes and rocky in nature. The dominant plant species observed at this site were *Accacia spp.* (Kanor in Sindhi), deodar *Ziziphus jujuba* (Pissi in Sindhi and Brahvi), dwarf palm (Peesh in Brahvi and Sindhi), *Tamarix indica* and grasses (*Saccharum spp.*, *Barleria acanthoides* and *Capris spinosa*). This site is observed to be an important habitat of urial (*Ovis vignei blanfordi*) with a population of about 150. A pair of chinkara (*Gazella gazella benethi*) was also sighted.

Obain Mountain: This Mountain is located at a distance of 45 km in the northeast of Durreji town. The mountain is steep with high slopes and plain at the top. The dominant plant species of this site are *Acacia senegal*, *Acacia spp.*, *Salvadora*, *Euphorbia*, *Prosopis cineraria* and *Ziziphus spp.* along with some grasses (*Asparagus damosus*, *Lasiurus*, *Audrachna aspera*) with an estimated population of some 250. The urial population in this mountain was estimated at about 100.

Hum Mountain: This Mountain is also located in the northeast of Durreji town, adjacent to Obain Mountain. This mountain is steep with high slopes and stony. The grasses were totally absent. The dominant vegetation includes *Salvadora oleoides*, *Ziziphus ssp.*, *Acacia spp.* and *Prosopis cineraria*. This mountain is also habitat of Sindh ibex, whose population at this mountain was estimated to range between 100 to 120. Because of bad light due to rain and chilly weather, this site could not be adequately surveyed, therefore, it is safe to believe that the actual population of ibexes is more than that estimate under present study. Few urials were also observed at the lower slopes of the mountain.

Lakkan Mountain: This Mountain is located at a distance of 110 km in the southwest of Durreji town. The mountain is stony with lower slopes. The dominant plant species found on this mountain are *Acacia spp.*, *Salvadora oleoides* (Jarr in Sindhi) *Ziziphus jujuba*, and dwarf palm. This mountain is also an important habitat of urial with a thick population of about 200.

Katto Mountain: This Mountain is located at a distance of 110 km from Durreji town in the west. The Hub River is located at the east of this mountain. This mountain is stony with low ridges. The main vegetation cover of the site are *Acacia spp.*, *Ziziphus jujuba* and *Prosipus cinerari*, etc. This site has a population of approximately 60 urials.

Karo Mountain: This Mountain is located adjacent to Katto Mountain in the southeast. This site is an important habitat of urial with about 80 individuals. This Mountain could not be adequately surveyed owing to limited time. Only 60 urials were actually counted during the survey.

Sorr: This is a sandy and rocky plain area located west of Hub river and northwest of Karo and Katto mountain. At this location 18 chinkaras were sighted during the survey.

During the survey Asiatic jackal (*Canis aurius*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), striped hyaena (*Hyaena hyaena*) and crested porcupine (*Hystrix indica*) were observed. The locals of the area mentioned that Indian wolf and caracal are also frequently observed in the Game Management Area. Among birds, seese partridge (*Ammoperdix grasiogularis*), grey partridge (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) black partridge (*Francolinus francolinus*), sandgrouse (*Pterocles sp.*), spotted dove, blue rock pigeon and sunbirds were sighted. Marsh Crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*) was seen in Hub River at Arypir, Gut and Guhar.

Table-I. Population of different ungulate species in Durreji Game Management Area.

| Area | Urial | Chinkara | Ibex |
|--------------|-------|----------|------|
| Hamali | 150 | 2 | - |
| Obain | 100 | - | 250 |
| Hum | - | - | 100 |
| Lakkan | 200 | - | - |
| Katto | 60 | - | - |
| Karo | 80 | - | - |
| Sorr | - | 18 | - |
| Total | | | |

The survey revealed that Durreji Game Management Area harbours a stable population of the ungulates, i.e. urial, ibex and chinkara. It was observed that the population of these animals is well protected. The population seems to be stable, yet drought (2000 to 2005) in the area is reported to have severely affected the population. During the survey, a few carcasses of urial and Sindh ibex were also observed, mainly of old males, possibly surviving in harsh drought conditions.

A survey conducted in the Durreji Game Management Area the population of urial was estimated of 858 in April 2001 whereas during the present study a total of 590 urials were observed. If it is extrapolated for the entire Durreji Game Management Area, the population would be much larger than that observed in 2001. Similarly 403 ibexes were reported from the Durreji Game Management Area in 2001, whereas during the present survey the population of ibexes in Obain and Hum Mountains was around 350. If this estimate is extrapolated for entire Game Management Area the population of ibexes in Durreji will be much larger than those observed in 2001. However, it would require further studies to verify the population of these two ungulates. If there is a substantial increase in the population then it can be attributed to strict management measures taken by the local Sardar and Wildlife Department.

Considering frequent drought, it will be advisable to construct water pools at some important sites in the Game Management Area. In the Chiltan Hazar Ganji National Park and Kirthar National Park, construction of such water pools has reported to bring stability in population of ungulates. It is worth mentioning that in the Durreji Game Management Area hold a sizeable population of Chinkara (*Gazella gazella benettii*), which is heavily hunted in the other areas of the country.

References

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