

A new look at the Himalayan fur trade

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In late December 1991 and January 1992 the authors surveyed tourist shops selling fur and other animal products in Kathmandu, Nepal. Comparing the results with a study conducted 3 years earlier showed that the number of shops had increased, but indirect evidence suggested that the demand for their products may have decreased. There was still substantial trade in furs, most of which appeared to have come from India, including furs from species that are protected in India and Nepal. While both Nepali and Indian conservation legislation are adequate to control the illegal wildlife trade, there are problems in implementation: co-ordination between the two countries, as well as greater law enforcement within each country, are needed.

Introduction

Since the 1970s Nepal and India have been considered to be among the most progressive of developing nations with regard to legislation and implementation of wildlife conservation programmes. The Wildlife (Protection) Act of India was passed in 1972 (Saharia and Pillai, 1982; Majupuria 1990a), and Nepal's National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act was passed in 1973 (HMG, 1977). Both have schedules of fully protected species, including many large mammalian carnivores and other fur-bearers (Upreti, 1989; Majupuria, 1990b) and both have extensive protected area systems (Seshadri, 1986; IUCN, 1990a; Majupuria, 1990a, Heinen and Kattel, 1992a), with over 3 per cent of the land area of India in several hundred reserves, and over 10 per cent of the land area of Nepal in 14 reserves.

India and Nepal are also Parties to CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Fitzgerald, 1989) and have active law enforcement programmes with regard to violations of their national law and international agreements related to conservation (Thakur, 1990; Heinen and Kattel, 1992a, b). There is evidence from both countries that populations of many endangered species have increased in many protected areas (e.g. Seshadri, 1986).

Enforcement of conservation legislation

In spite of measurable successes with regard to wildlife conservation, there are several obstacles to effective law enforcement in both countries. In Nepal the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), which is the designated management authority of CITES (Fitzgerald, 1989; Favre, 1991), is administratively separate from the Department of Forestry, but both departments are within the Ministry of Forests and the Environment. The DNPWC has jurisdiction over wildlife conservation law enforcement only within parks and reserves, while the Department of Forestry is responsible for enforcing wildlife legislation in the rest of the country (HMG, 1977; Heinen and Kattel, 1992a, b). In India the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 does not apply in the State of Jammu and Kashmir (Saharia, 1982). This state, renowned for its fine handicrafts, is the traditional centre of the Himalayan fur trade; many Kashmiri people are dependent on the trade for at least some income (Kapur, 1980; Pillai, 1982; Cochrane, 1986). The Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Act of 1979 is very similar to the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act but the national government has no power to enforce its laws within Jammu and Kashmir. Furthermore, the State of Jammu and Kashmir

has not adopted the subsequent amendments to the national act, several of which greatly restricted or proscribed trade in animal products from the country (Nichols *et al.*, 1991)

These problems in implementing conservation legislation have many ramifications, one of which is the sale of furs and fur products to tourists. International tourism has been an important industry in Jammu and Kashmir in India and in the Kathmandu Valley and several outlying areas (e.g. Pokhara) in Nepal. The infrastructure and policies supporting tourism have been in place much longer in Jammu and Kashmir than in Nepal (Bamzai, 1973; Kapur, 1980), but since the early 1970s the latter has become a major tourist destination (Richter, 1989). Today tourism is Nepal's largest industry measured in gross foreign exchange (HMG, 1991) and the largest employer of Nepali people after agriculture (Heinen and Kattel, 1992a).

The 1988 survey

In late 1988 Barnes (1989a,b, 1990) did a survey of fur-selling shops in the tourist area of Kathmandu. He and a female colleague posed as American tourists. He counted the number of coats made from the fur of four species: leopard cat, common leopard, clouded leopard and snow leopard and estimated the total number of such shops. He found 50 shops that sold furs, all run by Indian nationals from Kashmir. Many coats were made from furs of endangered species, protected in either or both India and Nepal, and listed on Appendix I of CITES (which prohibits commercial international trade). Barnes noted that the coats were readily available, frequently hanging in shop windows in blatant violation of Nepali and international law; there was obviously no enforcement of fur trade controls.

From 1989 to 1991 and the present study

In the 3 years since Barnes's work, the political and economic situation in the State of Jammu and Kashmir and Nepal have changed drasti-

cally. Numbers of tourists to Jammu and Kashmir have plummeted since the civil war started in 1989. The pro-democracy movement in Nepal limited tourist entries for 1 year, and the new Nepali Congress government has been confronted with a host of economic problems, leading to several devaluations of the Nepali Rupee (see Bhatta, 1987; Shah, 1988; Bista, 1991). Despite these concerns, however, tourist entries into Nepal did not decline appreciably, and are again rising (HMG, 1991).

During this period there were several publicized cases of tourists who were caught in their own or other countries with furs of endangered species bought in Nepal (B.N. Upreti [Former Director General, DNPWC] pers. comm; U. R. Sharma [Assistant Director General, DNPWC] pers. comm.). Barnes's work, cited in several popular articles, also created an awareness of the problem in India (L. J. Barnes, 1992, pers. comm.). Furthermore, many recent tourist guides to Nepal and India have sections on conservation (e.g. Israel and Sinclair, 1989), and there are now signs in the Central Immigration Office in Thamel, Nepal, warning tourists not to buy furs.

Our survey of the Himalayan fur trade in Kathmandu was designed to discover how these interacting factors may have influenced sales in the 3 years since Barnes's work. All other factors being equal, we would have expected more fur trade in Kathmandu given that there were more tourists. Because tourist entries into Kashmir have declined precipitously, we may also have expected more Kashmiri-run tourist shops to be operating in Kathmandu. However, if tourists had become more aware of trade controls and if enforcement in other countries had increased, this would have the opposite effect, as would changes in the fashion industry brought about by anti-fur campaigns.

Methods

One of us (J.T.H.) started on 20 December 1991, by walking through the tourist areas of Kathmandu, especially in Durbar Marg (close to the Royal Palace, offices of airlines, travel agents and five-star hotels) and Thamel (sev-

eral blocks of small streets, to the west of the Royal Palace, with many cheaper guest houses and tourist shops). J.T.H. counted the number of shops selling furs and noted their locations. In most cases, there was no need to enter the shops because most of them had coats or other fur products displayed in windows.

Posing as American tourists, we started the extended survey on 22 December. We entered each shop together, expressing interest in the purchase of furs. While B.L. tried on fur coats and engaged the shopkeepers' attention, J.T.H. (using a small pocket notebook) made inventories of the coats on display, recording separately those made from cats, wolf, and large Indian civet. Wild cat species are more vulnerable, for several reasons, than other fur-bearers (Nichol, 1987; Oldfield, 1989; Kitchener, 1991) and the spotted cats are relatively easy to identify, as is the large Indian civet. Wolves were also recorded separately because they are listed as vulnerable (IUCN, 1990b), and the populations in Nepal, India, Bhutan and Pakistan are listed in Appendix I of CITES (as of 11 June 1992). We also noted the presence of other kinds of furs (e.g. fox, weasel, otter, etc.), and whether the shop sold any other animal products (e.g. fur-lined vests, hats, and gloves; snakeskin wallets, ivory, etc.). Prater (1990) was used to identify species, but some coats were dyed and could not be identified.

In many cases casual conversation with shopkeepers revealed the source of their furs. In all cases, B.L. expressed interest in buying red fox fur (not a Schedule I protected species and hence legally traded with permits). In some cases, we asked shopkeepers what nationalities of tourists were likely to buy some kinds of fur; this was done by expressing surprise at seeing furs of protected species (e.g. spotted cats), and asking who bought them. Because the nature of the study was deceptive, we could not systematically ask all shopkeepers these questions.

Unlike Barnes (1989, 1990), we took no photographs inside shops. We were cautious, finishing sections of neighbourhoods on one day, and not returning to that area. Despite these efforts, several shopkeepers were very careful not to talk about fur sales, and two

said that they didn't believe we were interested in buying fur when we began such lines of questioning. We refrained from direct questioning after the second day of the survey, because our main goal was to obtain a general idea of the extent of the trade.

We surveyed the Durbar Marg area on 22 December 1991, several five- and four-star hotels distant from the town centre on 23 December, part of Thamel on 24 December, and the rest of Thamel on 14 January 1992. We also visited all three-star hotels in Kathmandu separately in mid-January, and J.T.H. visited the tourist area of Lakeside, Pokhara, in the mountains of western Nepal in early January. We believe we covered the extent of the fur trade for tourists in Nepal as far as the number of businesses engaged in the activity is concerned. However, our estimates of the number of furs may be low if shopkeepers regularly keep some stock hidden (L. J. Barnes, pers. comm., 1992). Furthermore, we did not estimate the amount of fur used in smaller products such as hats, vest and gloves; such assessments would have evoked greater suspicion on the part of the shopkeepers.

Results

We visited 76 shops, of which 75 were Kashmiri-run shops and one Tibetan-run; 65 sold fur coats and seven sold some fur products. The Tibetan shop sold rabbit skins and yak tails (used in religious ceremonies) of domestic origin, and hence was not in violation of wildlife legislation. Of the three Kashmiri-run shops that sold no fur products, one sold snakeskin products, which were also on sale in all the shops that sold fur (see Andrews and Birkinshaw [1988] for a discussion of the trade in snakeskin in India), and another sold the only ivory we located. Of the 28 shopkeepers who were asked about the origin of their furs, all said they were from India except one who said his furs were from Nepal. However that shop had fur of species not naturally occurring in Nepal (e.g. desert cat) and his claim was discounted.

The shops were mostly in the Durbar Marg (26 shops) and Thamel (43 shops) areas, with

Table 1. Species identified from fur coats for sale in Kathmandu

| Species | No. of coats | Protective status‡ | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------------|-------|------|-------|
| | | India | Nepal | IUCN | CITES |
| Small cats: <i>Felis chaus</i> , <i>F. viverrina</i> , <i>F. libyca</i> | 225 | I | II | – | II |
| Asiatic golden cat <i>Felis temmincki</i> | 9 | I | II | I | I |
| Leopard cat <i>Felis bengalensis</i> * | 7 | I | I | – | I |
| Lynx <i>Felis lynx</i> | 21 | I | I | – | – |
| Clouded leopard <i>Neofelis nebulosa</i> | 1 | I | I | V | I |
| Leopard <i>Panthera pardus</i> | 25 | I | II | T | I |
| Snow leopard <i>Panthera uncia</i> | 4 | I | I | E | I |
| Wolf <i>Canis lupus</i> † | 20 | I | I | V | I |
| Large Indian civet <i>Viverra zibethica</i> | 7 | II | II | – | III |
| Red fox <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> | NA§ | II | II | – | III |
| Indian fox <i>Vulpes bengalensis</i> | NA | II | II | I | III |
| Jackal <i>Canis aureus</i> | NA | II | II | – | III |
| Otters <i>Lutra lutra</i> and <i>L. perspicillata</i> | NA | II | II | V, K | II |
| Weasels <i>Mustela altaica</i> , <i>M. erminea</i> and <i>M. sibirica</i> | NA | II | II | – | III |
| Binturong <i>Arctictis binturong</i> | NA | I | II | – | III |
| Civets, possibly <i>Viverricula indica</i> and <i>Paradoxiurus hermaphroditis</i> | NA | II | II | – | III |
| Mongoose, possibly <i>Herpestes edwardsi</i> <i>H. vitticollis</i> and <i>H. urva</i> | NA | II | II | – | III |
| Barking deer <i>Muntiacus muntjak</i> | 1 | III | II | – | – |
| Rabbit (domestic?) | NA | – | – | – | – |

* Only the non-Chinese populations (those in South and South East Asia) of *F. b. bengalis* are listed on Appendix I of CITES. Other populations are listed on Appendix II.

† Only the populations of wolves in Nepal, India, Bhutan and Pakistan are listed on Appendix I of CITES.

‡ The listing of each species in India refers to the Schedule of the Wildlife (Preservation) Act of 1972 on which the species appears (from Saharia, 1982 and Majupuria, 1990b). The listing for Nepal refers to the Schedule of the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1973 on which the species appears (from Heinen and Yonzon, in prep). The IUCN listing refers to the species's status internationally (from IUCN, 1990b), and the CITES listing refers to the CITES Appendix in which the species appears as 11 June 1992.

§ NA, not available (furs of these species were not counted)

the rest being located in or near five- and four-star hotels in other parts of the city. There were no fur-selling shops in or near any of Kathmandu's three-star hotels and none in the Lakeside area, Pokhara, western Nepal. Individual shops displayed between two and 80 fur coats. In addition, all the Kashmiri-run shops had large stocks of shawls, embroidered jackets, silk carpets, wall hangings, wood carvings and lacquer-ware bowls.

The seven shopkeepers who provided information about the citizenship of people who buy spotted cat coats all said that such customers are from Spain and Italy; two also mentioned France and two Japan. Three said that American, British and Canadian nationals

cannot or do not buy spotted cat furs.

We counted 1225 fur coats in the course of the survey (Table 1). Of these, 255 were made from fur of medium-sized and small cats of three species: fishing cat, jungle cat and desert cat. McMahan (1986) estimated that it takes an average of 12 skins to make a coat from jungle cat, and up to 15 skins to make a coat from smaller species (e.g. desert cat). Barnes (1989b) estimated that it takes at least 30 skins to produce full-length coats of small cat species. Of CITES Appendix I species, leopard-skin coats were the most common (25), although the leopard cat would appear to be more affected because it would take an estimated 105 animals to provide fur for the seven coats

counted (from McMahan's estimate; the leopard cat coats we saw were not full-length), compared with 75 leopards for 25 coats. The non-Chinese populations of leopard cat, of the subspecies *Felis b. bengalensis*, are included on CITES Appendix I; these occur in South and South East Asia (Kitchener, 1991).

We found one genuine clouded leopard coat and seven fakes; clouded leopard markings had been printed on fur we believed to be jungle cat. We found four coats made of snow leopard, a species that is believed to be severely affected by the fur trade (e.g. Hillard, 1989). We also counted nine coats made from furs of the Asiatic golden cat, a species about which little is known.

The data for lynx are uncertain; we counted 21 coats, but were told by shopkeepers that other fur coats, which had been dyed black, came from this species. We saw 12 such coats but did not record them as 'lynx' because we could not rely on the identifications of shopkeepers (e.g. many told us that certain coats were 'opossum', which occur nowhere in Asia). Similarly, the data for wolf are uncertain; we counted 20 coats made from the fur of wolf, but fur of this species is highly variable in colour and texture, and other furs were identified to us as 'wolf' but not counted (e.g. some jackal). Barnes (1989b) also discussed mis-identifications by shopkeepers, many of whom may not know what species they sell.

Among the remaining coats (Table 1) were: foxes of two species; jackal; otters of at least two species; weasels of at least three species (frequently identified as 'mink'); mongoose (some identified as 'opossum') of several species, which we were not able to identify; civets of several species, also unidentified; deer of one species, identified to us as 'tiger'; some binturong, also identified as 'opossum'; and rabbits, probably of domestic origin.

We saw no coats made of marbled cat *Felis marmorata*, rusty-spotted cat *F. rubiginosa*, spotted linsang *Prionodon pardicolor*, red panda *Ailurus fulgens* and tiger *Panthera tigris*, all of which have potentially valuable fur and are protected in India and/or Nepal. One shopkeeper told us he could get a tiger-skin rug if we placed an order. He told us the skins came

from India, that he sold at least one per year, and his last customer for this product was an Italian national. Prices for most of the fur about which we inquired (especially red fox) ranged from \$US450 to \$US700. The clouded leopard coat was offered at \$US600. Some rabbit and jackal fur coats sold for under \$US100.

Discussion

CITES export permits are required for international trade in species listed on Appendices I, II, and III (Fouere, 1988; Favre, 1989). The National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act of Nepal also requires permits for trade involving legally obtained specimens of any Schedule I or Schedule II species (HMG, 1977). Permit requirements were not mentioned by any shopkeepers during our survey, so we assume that most of the furs found here, including many made of non-endangered wild furbearers, were illegal under existing Nepali law. Furthermore, 27 of the 28 shopkeepers who were asked where the coats came from readily admitted that they were from India. Thus the furs of species listed on Schedules I and II were in violation of the Indian Wildlife (Preservation) Act of 1972 (Saharia and Pillai, 1982). The trade is also in violation of CITES for two reasons: the furs crossed an international border without CITES permits and they were offered for sale to foreign tourists without mention of CITES requirements (see Favre, 1989).

Comparing our results with those of Barnes (1989b) revealed that since 1988/89 the number of Kashmiri-run shops in Kathmandu had increased by 50 per cent and the number of shops selling fur coats or products had increased by 44 per cent. Many shop owners told us that their businesses were new and that they had moved to Kathmandu because of civil war in Kashmir.

Barnes (1989b) did not count the total stocks of coats encountered during his study, so overall sale trends cannot be estimated for the time period. Of the species he counted, he found 60 leopard cat coats (we found seven), 19 common leopard coats (we found 25), four

clouded leopard coats (we found one), and four snow leopard coats (we also found four). Apart from our finding fewer coats made from leopard cat, there were no obvious trends.

Indirect evidence suggested that demand for furs was lower than during Barnes's study. First, the price for some furs had declined appreciably, e.g. Barnes (pers. comm.) found one clouded leopard coat for sale for \$US1200 in 1988; the only coat we found of that species was half the price. Secondly, throughout our stay in Kathmandu we saw only two tourists wearing any fur (Indian fox). Thirdly, throughout our survey of the shops themselves, we saw no other tourists looking at fur coats. Lastly, many of the furs inspected were old, with some beginning to lose hair. These last three observations are subjective and cannot be compared with the earlier survey because Barnes did not discuss such details.

Our brief attempt to discover the nationality of tourists most likely to buy furs of spotted cats was not adequate to address the question for several reasons: only seven shopkeepers gave any response, and the procedure assumes that the shopkeepers know the nationalities of their customers. However, all respondents named Spain and Italy, although the numbers of tourists visiting Nepal from these countries are quite low (in 1986 for example, 2.5 per cent of the total were Spanish and 5.6 per cent were Italian [HMG, 1991]). France, which supplies more tourists to Nepal (9 per cent of the total in 1986 [HMG, 1991]), was also mentioned twice. These countries have large fashion industries dependent on at least some wild animal products (Prescott-Allen and Prescott-Allen, 1986). Two shopkeepers also said Japanese tourists buy spotted cat furs; of industrialized countries, Japan is the largest consumer of illegal wildlife products (Porter and Brown, 1991), and it supplies a regular flow of tourists to Nepal (7.2 per cent of the total in 1986 [HMG, 1991]).

No shopkeepers reported English-speaking tourists buying furs of spotted cats, and three stated quite directly that American, Canadian, and British nationals do not. This may indicate greater enforcement in those countries and/or greater awareness of fur trade issues on the

part of their citizens. Several factors could be at work here: the anti-fur animal rights movement is most active in Britain and the USA (Jasper and Nelkin, 1992); there is decreasing demand for fur in those two countries, which supply the greatest numbers of tourists to Nepal (14 per cent of the total were American, and 10.5 per cent of the total were British in 1986 [HMG, 1991]). Also, most of the guidebooks and signs in South Asia are written in English, which may limit the information available to non-English speaking tourists.

Conclusions

Estimating the magnitude of fur sales in Kathmandu would be impossible without the full co-operation of the shopkeepers because annual rates of stock turnover would be required. It is highly unlikely that such co-operation could be achieved. However, we believe that the findings of our study indicate that demands for furs may have declined in Kathmandu between 1988/89 and 1992 despite the fact that the number of Kashmiri-run shops selling furs increased appreciably and the number of tourists also increased. Most of the stocks in these shops consist of legal Kashmiri handicrafts, world-famous for their quality, and we do not advocate a boycott of such businesses. If the vast majority of sales in these shops are of legal products, as we would suggest, we would hope that Kashmiri-run shops in Kathmandu could financially withstand enforcement of the ban on fur sales and other animal products.

The larger question to address is the effectiveness of CITES implementation within the region. This Convention was the first international agreement related to wildlife conservation with 'both strong legal commitments and an enforcement mechanism' (Porter and Brown, 1991; it remains 'the only example of an internationally organized system of economic sanctions in which a large number of states participate' (Birnie, 1988). However, the Convention can only be effective if individual member states adhere to its Articles, and this brief study points out obvious problems in

this regard in both India and Nepal. In the case of the Himalayan fur trade, both the letter and the spirit of CITES are in violation by two countries that have been considered to be rather progressive in other areas of conservation legislation. Nepal, unlike India (Cochrane, 1986), is apparently not even benefiting economically from the fur trade because furs are processed in India and sold exclusively by Indian-owned businesses.

Of immediate concern now is how to stop illegal trade of CITES Appendix I species in the region, many of which are also Schedule I, protected species in India and/or Nepal. The simplest way to address the problem would be to increase efforts to make tourists aware of the law. Such efforts have just started; for example the newly built Central Immigration Office in Thamel has notices informing tourists of the law, but only tourists who wish to extend their visas usually enter this office, so the information is limited in its effects. One of us (B.L.) has attempted to expand these efforts by designing brochures and fliers for tourists; if such information were made available to all tourists upon entry into Nepal, educational efforts alone (e.g. by advertising penalties) may prove effective.

In Nepal a more forceful solution would involve amending the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1973 to create a law enforcement unit, within DNPWC, with power to operate in Kathmandu. The 1973 act provides for the power to arrest without warrant and to confiscate illegally obtained animal products (HMG, 1977). As discussed earlier, the DNPWC has no jurisdiction outside the parks and reserves in Nepal despite the fact that it is the country's Management Authority for CITES. The Department of Forestry is responsible for enforcing wildlife legislation outside protected areas (HMG, 1977), but it has no special enforcement unit for this purpose, and has taken no action to date on fur sales in Kathmandu (B. N. Upreti [former Director General, DNPWC], pers. comm., 1992). This has probably been the biggest factor in allowing the illegal fur trade to continue. Trade in species listed on Schedule II in Nepal is legal under a permit

system but no quotas have been set for most of these species, and enforcement of the permit system has been generally lax to non-existent (Heinen and Kattel, 1992b).

The legal situation in India is much more complex, especially since the beginning of civil war in Kashmir, and due also to the fact that the State of Jammu and Kashmir is exempt from the Indian Wildlife (Preservation) Act of 1972. Viable economic alternatives to the fur trade are needed in Kashmir because of its importance to the economy (Cochrane, 1986). Nepal and India are both state members of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and there is potential and a great need within this framework to address regional co-operation on trans-boundary wildlife and other conservation issues in the region (Pradhan, 1989). Because the legal, and much of the institutional, structure is already in place in both countries, enforcing a ban on the illegal fur trade, including confiscation of the products at all points of entry, would be an obvious place to begin. This is especially important for CITES Appendix I species, and species listed on Schedule I in India and/or Nepal (Heinen and Kattel, 1992a).

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