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Status, distribution and conservation of large carnivores in Nepal

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Mammalian large carnivores (LC) are wide ranging and play a crucial role in ecosystem structure and function. Most LCs have experienced decline in population and shrinkage of range throughout the globe and Nepal is not exception to such trend. Nepal is inhabited by eleven species of LCs, of which five are felid (tiger, leopard, snow leopard, clouded leopard and lynx), three each canid (gray wolf, dhole and striped hyaena) and ursid (brown bear, Himalayan black bear and sloth bear). I review the status of these carnivores, map their distribution, documents current threats to these taxa, and make recommendation for their conservation. These taxa have localized distribution mainly in the protected areas (PA) and the majority PA is unable to sustain viable populations of LCs under current conditions. Population size is yet to be estimated except tiger and snow leopard. Large carnivores are highly threatened and the primary threats to the persistence of these taxa include habitat loss and degradation, small population effects, lack of connectivity between populations, prey depletion, poaching/persecution, intra-guild predation/completion/displacement, conflict with humans, and climate change. Red list of Nepal's Mammal categorized two of these taxa as critically endangered, seven endangered and remaining two in the vulnerable list. Current conservation actions are extremely limited focusing on tiger and snow leopard. It is often necessary to develop national strategic plan for large carnivore conservation incorporating elements like habitat connectivity, explicit public policies on conflict resolution, land-use and sustainable development, public awareness campaigns, transboundary cooperation among the nation in managing shared population and continuous scientific research and monitoring.

Biography

Thapa Tej Bahadur has been involved in research, teaching and management planning of biodiversity. Broadly his research area aims to understand how human activities influence ecological systems and the services they provide and then to apply that knowledge to conservation and management. His research touches conservation biology, landscape ecology, community ecology, population demography, behavioural ecology, and ecological restoration.

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