

Wakhan National Park



General features

Country:	Afghanistan Wakhan District
Date of establishment:	2014
Area:	10,878 km ²
Geographic location:	Latitude: 37°00'N; Longitude: 73°30'E
IUCN category:	NA

Overview

Wakhan National Park (WNP) is home to about 15,000 people. The park borders China, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. It is home to the headwaters of the Amu Darya River and is the meeting place of the Hindu Kush and Pamir mountains. This relatively new protected area is co-managed by the Afghanistan Government and local communities. The park provides ecosystem services and supports livelihoods in one of the world's poorest and most isolated regions. It is in one of the most remote areas of Afghanistan, with soaring mountains, alpine grasslands, and unique wildlife.

People

Wakhi and Kyrgyz

Flora

Primary mountain grazing slopes up to an altitude of 4,000 masl are dominated by perennial species such as *Artemisia spp.*, *Astragalus spp.*, *Ephedra spp.*, *Cousinia spp.*, and *Oryzopsis spp.*, with grasses such as *Stipa* and ephemerals such as *Poa*. Polo 'sedge meadows' on higher valley flats are dominated by *Carex spp.*, *Kobresia spp.*, and *Festuca spp.* Slopes above 4,800 masl have rich alpine flora including *Thymus spp.*, *Saxifraga spp.*, *Aster spp.*, *Potentilla spp.*, *Pedicularis spp.* and *Primula spp.*

Fauna

The park provides protection and habitat for rare and vulnerable wildlife including Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*) and seventeen other mammal species, as well as carnivores like wolf (*Canis lupus*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), stoat (*Mustela ermina*), lynx (*Lynx lynx*), and snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*). Mountain ungulate species include the markhor (*Capra falconeri*) and Himalayan ibex (*Capra sibirica*).

Threats

- Reduced vegetative cover over large areas due to overgrazing, shrub collection, and forest destruction.
- Hunting and trapping are a threat to many large mammals and birds



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Photos: Yi Shaoliang