

Conclusions of the Third World Conference on Mountain Ungulates

The First World Conference on Mountain Ungulates was held in Camerino (Italy) in 1989. The primary goal of the meeting was to launch the writing of the IUCN Action Plan for Caprinae, to survey the global status of all species in the family Caprinae and to provide practical guidelines for the conservation of mountain ungulates. The Second World Conference was in St. Vincent (Aosta, Italy) in 1997, the year of the publication of the Action Plan. During the four years since the last conference, much has changed in the conservation status and in our knowledge of Caprinae. It has become more and more evident that the conservation of mountain ungulates depends on the conservation of mountain ecosystems and must include habitat protection, international co-operation and new ways of looking at the economic and social implications of different types of wildlife and habitat management. Caprinae specialists from different parts of the world have much to learn from each other.

From the 10th to the 15th of June 2002, 168 delegates of 28 countries, have met in Saragossa (Aragon, Spain) in the Third World Conference on Mountain Ungulates. The aim off the meeting was to meet specialists working on mountain ungulates, and to discuss scientific, management and conservation problems as well as recent technological advances regarding these species and their habitats. During the meeting four sessions (Taxonomy and Genetics, Conservation and Management, Ecology and Behaviour and Pathology) and four open workshps (Trophy hunting in Central Asia, Caprinae infectious deseases, Chamois, Iberian wild goat) were held. A total of 128 communications were presented, including 38 talks and 76 posters, on more than 40 species and subspecies of Caprinae and other wild and domestic ungulates living in mountain environments. The conference was organized by the Caprinae Specialist Group of UICN; EGA, Wildlife Consultants; the Regional Gornvernment of Aragon; the Pirenean Institute for Ecology; Safarilife-Nicolás Franco and the Faculty of Veterinary of Saragossa University. It was supported by the Faculty of Biology of Alcalá University; the Large Herbivore Initiative of WWF; Lotek Wireless Inc.; Natural History Book Service; the Spanish Hunting Federation; Televilt; Ibercaja.

The multidisciplinary and internationality of the meeting was shown by the wide range of topics discussed by scientists, managers, consultants, environmentalists, hunters, radiotelemetry companies, tourist operators and other interest groups.

These are some of the most relevant conclusions from the conference:

- Genetics is now an increasingly important tool for taxonomic research in Caprinae, providing new insights into their phylogenetic

relationships. Molecular techniques are also assisting in the identification of specimens in the international trade.

- The main conservation problems that affect Caprinae are habitat destruction, fragmentation and degradation resulting from human activities, overgrazing and disease transmission from domestic livestock, and poaching.
- Trophy hunting of large males is a relevant international trade as well as an important opportunity for local development and the conservation of endangered species and their habitats.
- Local participation in population monitoring, management and sustainable use of Caprinae is an important tool for conservation.
- There is a large overlap of interests among all groups devoted to Caprinae conservation. Researchers, hunters, environmentalists and managers have established effective contacts, share experiences and information that favour positive actions and information exchange for the conservation of these species and their habitat.
- In developed countries, human disturbance of Caprinae is a matter of increasing concern for the scientific community.
- Long term monitoring is a basic tool for managing populations. It gives relevant scientific results on which to base sustainable exploitation.
- Scientific knowledge of Caprinae has considerably increased in the last years. Much current research is focused towards solving conservation and management problems.
- Multidisciplinary research, including new technologies and disciplines such as sociology and economics, provides new opportunities to solve the conservation problems faced by mountain-dwelling ungulates.

Several delegates from developing countries faced serious difficulties to obtain visas to attend this conference, a problem that may worsen in the next few years. Most Caprinae species live in countries in Asia that also present the greatest challenges to conservation. Consequently, it would be an important contribution to these countries, their species and habitats, to hold the next meeting in Asia. Delegates to the Third World Conference on Mountain Ungulates therefore warmly endorsed a proposal by the Nilgiri Tahr Foundation to host the Fourth Conference on Mountain Ungulates in Kerala, India, during 2006.

The Organizing and Scientific Committees of the Third World Conference on Mountain Ungulates.

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