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- *Bones of Contention*, 1996
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Fashioned for Extinction *An Exposé of the Shahtoosh Trade*

Foreword



The herd of Tibetan antelope or chiru poured over a ridge and headed past the turquoise waters of Luotuo Hu, Camel Lake, towards the glacier-capped peaks of the Aru Range. I watched the animals pass, two thousand of them, all females with their month-old young, migrating south in late July after giving birth in the bleak uplands somewhere in north-western Tibet. Here at 16,500 feet (5,000 m), I saw a last vestige of the past when chirus roamed the Chang Tang (meaning Northern Plain in Tibetan) in many hundreds of thousands. British explorers around the turn of the century marveled at the sight of twenty thousand or more chirus dotting the steppe before them.

The chiru is confined to the Tibetan Plateau of China, except for a few animals which seasonally enter the Ladakh area of India. There they occupy the arid, treeless steppe, usually above 14,000 feet in elevation, a harsh environment of bitter winds, -40oF temperatures in winter, and snowstorms even in summer. The southern parts of the Chang Tang have good grasslands, dominated by feather grass (*stipa*) which ungulates, both domestic and wild, favor. Nomadic pastoralists with their herds of yaks, sheep, and goats live throughout that region. However, the northern part is so desolate, high, and remote that it is uninhabited. It remains one of the least known corners of the world: the last Western expedition to collect data in the area was in 1908 and only a few Chinese expeditions have penetrated it. I began research there with Tibetan and Chinese colleagues in 1985 and still visit the Chang Tang almost yearly. Our team surveys wildlife in this vast area - it is about the size of Germany - by driving cross-country at all seasons, usually in a caravan of three vehicles, one a truck to carry gasoline and other supplies.

Chirus are most unusual creatures. The females are rather nondescript, tawny in color, hornless, and with a weight of 55-65 pounds (25-30 kg). But the males have elegant, lyrate horns nearly two feet long, striking black markings on the face and legs that contrast with gray to white pelage, and they are large, weighing 75-90 pounds. Chirus look like antelopes that have strayed from the plains of India or Africa and, like antelopes, they are adapted to plains and rolling uplands. Yet our studies of the chiru's DNA have shown that the species actually represents an early branch of the sheep and goats, sub-family Caprinae, and not the antelopes.

Some chiru populations are fairly sedentary, whereas others, the largest ones, are migratory. We discovered four major migratory populations in the Chang Tang. In winter, the animals are in the southern part of their range where they share the pastures with livestock. In May, with the onset of spring, the adult females accompanied by their female offspring of the previous year, surge northward for 150 miles or so to give birth. For reasons unknown, they leave behind nutritious spring growth to head for barren calving grounds. The males do not join this hurried trek, and instead drift northward slowly, foraging on grasses and forbs. The growing season of plants is a mere three months, and the animals must store fat from this high quality food for the long winter and the rigors of the December rut.



Chirus have another unusual characteristic: they have the finest wool in the world known as “shahtoosh”, the King of Wool. For several hundred years, chiru wool has left Tibet as a trade item for India where Kashmiri artisans weave it into scarves and shawls. But in the past few years shahtoosh scarves have become expensive fashion items in America, Europe, and Japan even though the trade is wholly illegal. China considers the chiru a Class-I protected animal, in the same category as the giant panda, and CITES lists it in Appendix-I. With chiru wool now a lucrative commodity, the animals are being relentlessly hunted. In Tibet, nomads do much of the poaching by catching chirus in leghold traps. In neighboring Xinjiang and Qinghai, chirus are often killed by Chinese gold prospectors who may invade an area by the thousands if a strike is made. Several years ago, wildlife in Xinjiang’s Arjin Shan Reserve was decimated by them; over 600 chiru hides were confiscated from just one truck convoy near that reserve. In Qinghai, motorized Chinese poachers with modern weapons penetrate far into the Chang Tang. An anti-poaching patrol there confiscated over 1,600 hides during two sweeps in the winter of 1995-96. How long can such a slaughter continue? I can only guess at the number of remaining chirus, and all populations are no doubt still in decline. There may now be no more than 50,000 chirus in Tibet and another 25,000 in Xinjiang and Qinghai, for a total of 75,000. The species lives in an extremely harsh environment at the edge of existence. Half the young die within a few months after birth, and a blizzard that covers the ground deeply in snow may cause many adults to starve. Chirus cannot long endure the additional stress of unrestrained killing. If present trends continue, the migration will soon cease and the species will survive as mere scattered remnants.

Fortunately, China is now making a major effort on behalf of the chiru. In 1993, Tibet established the Chang Tang Wildlife Reserve, at 334,000 sq km, the second largest reserve in the world; most of the surviving chiru are in that reserve. Although they have legal protection, the area is so vast that poaching is difficult to suppress. Many middlemen who transport wool have been arrested by the Tibet Forest Department, thousands of hides have been confiscated, and officials who poached have been jailed or transferred. In mid-1996, China’s State Council issued an order that chiru protection be given high priority. But the killing and smuggling continues.

The chiru needs international help to survive. Nepal must make an attempt to halt the wool smuggling through its country. India must prohibit the weaving of chiru wool and the sale of scarves and shawls. And all countries must enforce the CITES regulations.

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A magnificent species has through ignorance, greed, and neglect, declined drastically in the past two decades to satisfy a fashion-craze by the wealthy. By what right and what conscience can we permit a woman to drape the lives of several chiru around her shoulders. It is everyone's duty and an act of conscience to stop this illegal trade and ensure the chiru a future in its remote realm.

Dr. George B. Schaller
Director for Science
Wildlife Conservation Society

New York
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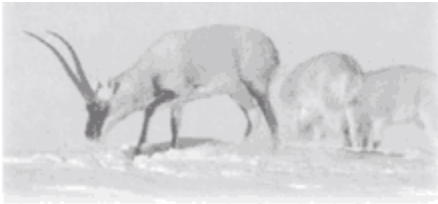


Recognised as the world's foremost field biologist, Dr George Schaller's four decades of field research have shaped wildlife protection around the world. Dr Schaller is the author of over 120 scientific and popular articles. His books include *The Year of the Gorilla*, *The Deer and the Tiger* (the results of research he carried out largely in Kanha National Park in central India between 1963 and 1965), *The Last Panda* and *Serengeti Lion*. Dr Schaller is the Director for Science of the Wildlife Conservation Society, which was founded in 1895 as the New York Zoological Society. Working to save wildlife throughout the world, the Society currently conducts more than 250 projects in 52 countries throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America.

Only recently was the connection between the massacre of the Tibetan antelope or chiru in Tibet, and the highly prized shahtoosh shawls of Kashmir, uncovered. For centuries people were led to believe that shahtoosh came from wool shed seasonally by wild goats or the Himalayan ibex. When the truth emerged that slaughtered Tibetan antelope were the source of shahtoosh and that this precious raw wool is the main barter item for tiger bones from India, the conservation world was stunned.



The Chiru



Male and female chiru after heavy snowfall in the Chang Tang Reserve.

The Tibetan antelope (*Pantholops hodgsoni*) or chiru, as it is commonly known, is endemic to the high plains of the Tibetan Plateau extending from Lhasa in Tibet to Ladakh in India 50, 51. 'Chiru' is the Tibetan phonetic translation of antelope 60, and the name most frequently used in this report. Though the chiru is easily identified by its broad muzzle, high set eyes, dense hair and unique groin glands, there are substantial differences between the sexes 45, 56. The male chiru stands 80cm at the shoulder. It has long, black, ridged horns, measuring up to 60cm in length, which sit erect on the

head, diverge towards the tips, and curve slightly forward. Larger than the female, the male weighs 35-40 kg. The male's grey to fawn coat, white underside, and striking black markings on its forehead and legs, overshadow the smaller, hornless, fawn coloured female 45, 50.

Distribution

Living above the tree-line at 3,700 to 5,500 metres, chiru occur in the Tibet and Xinjiang Autonomous Regions and the Qinghai Province of the People's Republic of China. They roam an area that includes the high pastures of the 334,000 sq km Chang Tang Reserve in northern Tibet and the 44,800 sq km Arjin Shan Reserve in Xinjiang 50, 51, 55.

In the summer months, from late May to early August, small populations are found in the extreme northeastern part of Ladakh in India. They spend this brief summer respite in the remote upper Chang Chenmo valley. Most of the chiru that come to this region are males; the females have been reported to prefer the neighbouring Lingti Tsiang plains in the Aksai Chin region, where they often fawn. It is believed that there is also a small sedentary population that inhabits Ladakh. No more than 2,500 sq km of chiru habitat has been estimated to lie within Indian territory. However, a large part of the Aksai Chin region, where summer populations of chiru occur, is under Chinese control 57. At a meeting called by the CITES Secretariat (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) in Harare in June 1997, the delegate representing Nepal stated that a small population of chiru also occurs in Nepal.



A female chiru suckles her month-old young.

Ecology

Protected from extreme weather conditions by their dense hair, the chiru roam the plains and uplands of the Tibetan Plateau, surviving winters of heavy snowfall and low temperatures. Due to lack of vegetation during the winter months, the chiru move down to the plains. This is the only time of the year that the chiru share pastures with domestic livestock and are found in the vicinity of humans 50.

With the onset of the thaw in May, the chiru migrate northwards to uninhabited areas 51. In three months the vegetation will once again be covered by snow. During this time the chiru, particularly



the bucks, must store enough energy by consuming herbs and grasses, ready for the rut in December 45. Unlike the Asiatic Ibex (*Capra ibex sibirica*), the chiru prefer the plains and valleys, lacking the agility to climb the steep and often rocky mountain slopes. Chiru populations are largely migratory and males and females remain in the same herd for much of the year. Only when the females migrate further north in May to give birth, are males found in herds of their own 50, 51.



In 1903, Captain C.G. Rawling, an early British visitor to Tibet, described herds of chiru migrating across the Tibetan Plateau: “Almost from my feet away to the north and east, as far as the eye could reach, were thousands upon thousands of doe antelope with their young... we could see in the extreme distance a continuous stream of fresh herds steadily approaching; there could not have been less than 15,000 or 20,000 visible at one time” 50, 60. Now there are few herds of more than 2,000 animals 51, 55. In 1995, the remaining chiru population was estimated to be about 75,000, of which 50,000 were found in Tibet. Most of the chiru now survive on the northern limit of human habitation, where the animals spend the winter with adequate grazing, and from where they can retreat into uninhabited terrain 51. With increased livestock production the conflict between people and wildlife is unlikely to diminish.

The chiru that migrate to the riverines and meadow slopes of northeastern Ladakh in India, do not exceed a total population of 200 to 220. As compared to the herds that were frequently seen there early in the century, numbers are declining and have now been reduced to small fragmented populations of no more than six to seven animals 57.

Poaching

The Tibetan antelope has been recognised as a threatened species and protected by law since the 1970s. But it was not until the wildlife biologist Dr George Schaller drew attention to the fact that the luxurious down wool known as ‘shahtoosh’ was a product of the antelope, that the reason for the increase in poaching, and the full extent of the shahtoosh trade, was uncovered.

Since 1985, George Schaller has spent several months each year working in Tibetan antelope habitat in China. He has seen ample evidence of the poaching of chiru 51. Though traditionally hunted for meat 49, the reason for their rapid decline was first revealed to Schaller during a visit to a small town called Gerze in 1988. He “saw herdsman plucking wool from antelope hides to sell to local dealers. In the courtyard of one such dealer were sacks of wool ready for smuggling into western Nepal and from there to Kashmir, where the wool is woven into scarves and shawls” 50. It soon became clear that the chiru were being decimated to fuel a thriving trade in shahtoosh wool. Further evidence of the fate of the chiru was revealed in 1991, when George Schaller visited a camp of hunters in Chang Tang. He saw the hides of 22 chiru “stacked in their tent, the frozen bodies outside; they had also saved the heads of males because the horns are widely used in traditional medicine and find a ready market in Lhasa and Beijing” 50. In 1990 the hide of a chiru was worth about US\$25; by 1992 the price had doubled.

Tibetan antelope horns have been valued and traded for use in Tibetan medicine for centuries. Ancient Tibetan texts list the use of the antelope’s horns in the treatment of a variety of ailments: for diarrhoea, to induce birth, cure ulcers, control outgrowth of certain glands, female menstrual problems, as well as kidney and blood diseases 60. Though this trade has undoubtedly



contributed to the chiru's decline in numbers, hunting to fuel the demand for shahtoosh is now a far greater threat.

Reports from 1992 to 1997 indicate that poaching of antelope has been heavy in all areas of China in which the species occurs - Tibet, western Qinghai and southern Xinjiang^{5, 51, 52, 59}. However, it is difficult to estimate the actual numbers of chiru that are being slaughtered over such a vast habitat. In 1992, a former official of the province of Qinghai estimated that in this area at least 2,000 to 3,000 animals were killed every year^{51, 53}. During the CITES Standing Committee Meeting in Rome in December 1996, China stated that it was losing 2,000 to 4,000 chiru annually to poaching. An Indian official who visited Tibet in 1997 informed the Wildlife Protection Society of India that chiru was being poached and traded by highly organised gangs.

Most of the hunting occurs during the winter months when the chiru's undercoat is at its thickest. Schaller describes the traditional method used to catch chiru: "an ingenious circular foot trap with small pointed sticks projecting toward the centre. The trap is placed on a trail over a hollow, concealed, and tied to a stake. When an antelope or gazelle steps into the trap and tries to withdraw its leg, the sticks dig into the skin, holding the animal fast"⁵⁰. Once ensnared the animal is shot by the trappers.

The increased demand for shahtoosh has provoked the use of more barbaric methods. In the upper Chang Tang Plateau massacres of large numbers of chiru have been reported^{49, 50}. Hunters are said to shoot into herds of chiru from moving vehicles, killing as many as 500 animals in a hunt⁵. A herdsman in the Chang Tang Reserve recounted seeing vehicles with officials from Gerze hunting yaks and antelope with modern weapons during the winter months. He added that, "if the officials obey the law and stop hunting, we will too". Nomadic families have even moved into the reserve with the sole purpose of hunting chiru.

The profits gained by poachers are far more than the amount that can be earned by pastoralists or from local wages. As demand for shahtoosh increased, people from every strata of society became involved - herdsmen, truck drivers, police, county officials - and it has been extremely difficult to control of the illegal trade. Despite legal restrictions, the enforcement of penalties, and a "serious effort" by the authorities to stop or at least reduce the trade, poaching has continued^{13, 51}. A fine of 1000 Yuan (about US\$130) was declared in 1993 in the Qinghai Highlands for hunting chiru. But the lack of protection over such a vast area means that few poachers are actually apprehended. After a visit to China in 1997, George Schaller confirmed that motorised, well-armed poachers continue to decimate the last herds of chiru in the Province of Qinghai⁵².

Schaller reports that although the government is making an "impressive effort", much of Tibet is "so remote that enforcement is difficult, especially in winter when it is bitter cold and most hunting occurs"⁵¹. If large-scale poaching continues the Tibetan antelope "will within a few years be reduced to tragic remnants"

Shahtoosh Wool



In the past, nomadic pastoralists rarely ventured into the antelopes' harsh domain. Hunting, and the demand for shahtoosh, were minimal and had little impact on the vast herds of chiru. However, during the 1980s, demand from the international fashion industry dramatically pushed up the value of the wool^{49, 50}.

By 1992, the price of raw shahtoosh wool in India was Rupees 39,000 (US\$1,115 at the rate of Rs 35 per dollar) per kg. The prices inexplicably dropped again in early 1993 to around Rs 16,000 per kg³⁵. This was believed to be due to political unrest in Kashmir. By 1996, the price had risen again to between Rs 34,000 to Rs 60,000 (US\$43 to US\$86) per kilogram⁴⁷. The price of shahtoosh varies seasonally with most trade conducted in the spring months following the 'winter harvest'.



Frozen antelope carcasses lie stacked beside a poacher's tent on the Tibetan Plateau.

Shahtoosh is the undercoat or down of the Tibetan antelope or chiru. It is extracted by shearing or combing the hides of dead chiru and one animal yields about 125 to 150 gm of shahtoosh^{39, 62}. The colour of the wool varies depending on the sex of the chiru, the season, and the area of the body from which it is removed. Most of the wool is shades of brown, beige and grey. The more valuable white down, found only on the underbelly and throat of the chiru, consists of only 12-14% of the wool taken from a single hide⁶².

Shahtoosh wool is very fine and exceptionally soft and warm. It is the ultimate in wool, the 'king wool', and for centuries it has been spun into luxurious shawls for the wealthy. Though in recent literature it is usually referred to as 'shahtoosh', earlier the words 'shah tush'³, 'toosh'¹⁹, 'tus' and 'asli-tush'⁵⁷ were commonly used.

The trade in shahtoosh from Tibet to India is well established. For three hundred years or more, Tibetan nomads have carried the wool on the backs of yaks across remote Himalayan passes. The Silk Road, a trade route established centuries ago to link China with Persia, still plays an important role in the wool trade.

What is remarkable is that during all this time the source of shahtoosh remained largely a mystery, a zealously guarded secret. It seems that very few people - including many of the Kashmiri wool merchants - actually knew what species the wool originated from, or that a wild animal had to be slaughtered for the wool to be collected^{38, 47}. In the early 1990s, before the full extent of the trade was exposed, the General Secretary of the Jammu and Kashmir Sheep and Wool Development Board even testified in the Supreme Court of India that chiru were not killed for the collection of shahtoosh. He was later shown evidence to the contrary and remarked that he was grateful that he had been made aware of the true facts.

Trade Routes & Smuggling Practices



The cross-border trade between China and India and Nepal has traditionally been a barter trade 33. For the past decade, the preferred barter items for shahtoosh from Tibet have been tiger bones, bear gall bladders and musk pods from the Indian subcontinent, all valued ingredients for traditional oriental medicine.



Nomads in Tibet pluck shahtoosh the soft underfleece from the hides of dead chiru.

Though shahtoosh is still carried over remote Himalayan passes by Tibetan nomads and their yaks, much of the trade is now handled by more sophisticated traders using increasingly innovative methods. In Tibet, the wool has been reported to be hidden in trucks containing sheep-wool which come from distant herders' camps on the Tibetan Plateau 51. The contraband is bartered and taken out of Tibet through a number of border crossings into India and Nepal. In recent times shahtoosh is known to have

been brought across the border into Nepal by road, concealed inside gasoline tanks, and stuffed into sleeping bags, mattresses or down jackets.

North-east of the border with Nepal and approximately 150 km north of the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Tibetan city of Lhasa is thought to be a major centre for wildlife trade, including shahtoosh and tiger bones. There are three known cases where large amounts of shahtoosh wool or chiru hides have been seized either in or en route to Lhasa. In 1993, 1,300 chiru skins were found in a convoy of trucks travelling to Lhasa. A highway connects Lhasa to the borders of four countries - Bhutan, Nepal, India and Pakistan.

The Tibetan border town of Burang (known locally as Tagla Kbar), near Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarowar, is a shahtoosh trading centre. George Schaller reported that in 1988 he saw several sacks of shahtoosh wool in the Tibetan town of Gerze that traders were taking south to Burang, to be smuggled into western Nepal and then on to Kashmir in India 49, 51. There are known shahtoosh traders based in Darchula and Dharchula, two similarly named towns on either side of the Indo-Nepal border south of Burang, where traders barter and buy from the Tibetans.

Nepal, and in particular the capital Kathmandu, is another centre for illegal wildlife trade 58. Kathmandu is linked by road to Lhasa and there is a bus service and air flights between the two cities. Landlocked between India and China, Nepal's porous borders and extensive international airline connections have made it an important conduit. It is believed that a significant proportion of wildlife products from India passes through Nepal for onward shipment to markets in East Asia 54.



Tiger bones are the preferred barter item for shahtoosh from Tibet. With no more than 3000 tigers left in the wild in India, an estimated one tiger a day falls to the hands of poachers.

There have also been newspaper reports that Kashmiri militants have set up commercial bases in Kathmandu 54. They allegedly raise funds for their insurgency activities partly through shahtoosh and other wildlife trade. A large portion of the shahtoosh from Tibet is smuggled to Kashmiri production houses in Srinagar in India through Nepal, sometimes via Pakistan. In 1995, an extraordinary conversation took place between an investigator from India and a trader from Pakistan. The trader told the investigator that he had a close contact who worked for Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) at Kathmandu airport. The



contact allegedly assisted in the smuggling of illegal wildlife products, including shahtoosh, from China and India, to Pakistan. From there the shahtoosh is apparently smuggled over the border to Srinagar in India.

There are numerous border passes that link India with China and Nepal. Two of these passes, Lipu Lekh (at 6,300 metres) in north-east Uttar Pradesh and Shipki La (at 6,664 metres) in Himachal Pradesh, are open from June/July to the end of October, exclusively for barter trade. Both passes have access, on the Chinese side, to Lhasa. Barter traders obtain passes and customs clearance but their packages are seldom checked. In 1993, 370 Indian traders obtained



For three hundred years or more, Tibetan nomads have carried wool on the backs of yaks across remote Himalayan passes. Now yak caravans also smuggle tiger bones from India into China.

barter passes at Lipu Lekh, and 480 traders crossed over from Shipki La (which is also known as Shipuqi Shankou). Since 1990, sporadic reports have been received that tiger and leopard bones and skins, otter skins, musk and bear gall bladders have been smuggled across these passes on the backs of yaks

and mules to barter with shahtoosh and small amounts of pashmina.

The Lipu Lekh pass, which has been described as the “gateway” to Tibet, is situated where India borders both China and Nepal. To the west of Lipu Lekh there are a number of other vulnerable passes into China - Mangshadhura, Darma, Dung, Niti and Mana, the last two of which are north of Badrinath. Between Lipu Lekh pass and Dharchula to the south there are at least two well-used smuggling routes across the Kali river into Nepal.

Pithoragarh and Dehra Dun in north-west Uttar Pradesh in India, are known to be raw shahtoosh trading centres 37. The only evidence of shahtoosh trade in eastern India is in the town of Darjeeling, near the border with eastern Nepal.

Situated on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau in one of the most inhospitable, desolate areas of the world, is Leh the principal town of Ladakh in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. It has long been an important centre for the wool trade, both for shahtoosh and pashmina. Today it is also a major centre for illegal wildlife trade. There is a large community of Tibetan refugees living 10 km south of Leh, in an area called Choglamsur, who have direct access to the nomads in Chang Tang. Leh is connected by air to Delhi, Chandigarh, Jammu and Srinagar. Goods such as tiger parts, bear gall bladders and musk, are passed to Tibetan nomads who take them to their high altitude camps near Chushul, Hanle and Chumar, and then across the border into Tibet. With the lure of huge profits, shahtoosh is the favoured bartering item. A researcher reported the arrival from Tibet of an astonishing 2,000 kg of shahtoosh in Leh and Srinagar in the winter of 1992 35. Pangong Tso, a lake in the Chang Chenmo Range that stretches across the border of eastern Ladakh and the Tibet Autonomous Region, is an important smuggling route. A road on the Chinese side of the lake is connected to a major highway.



When raw shahtoosh reaches India it is transported by land, rail and air by a network of specialised smugglers either directly to Srinagar in Kashmir or via Delhi, where it is sold to Kashmiri traders⁴. Almost all shahtoosh wool is spun and woven in Srinagar and the finished shawls are shipped to shops throughout India and to fashion outlets worldwide.

Up-Date on Wildlife Border Trade

In order to gather up-to-date information on the shahtoosh and tiger bone trade, in September and October, 1997, WPSI field researchers carried out a survey of the illegal wildlife trade in an area where the borders of northern India meet those of western Nepal and China.

All the information collected clearly indicates that the border trade in wildlife products is still widespread and that more often than not it is allegedly carried out in connivance with the various border enforcement authorities. According to this latest information, the goods are initially taken by road transport to Dharchula, in the far north of the State of Uttar Pradesh. From here there are two routes into Tibet.

The first, along the Indian side of the border, involves a road journey to Tawa Ghat. The road ends here and the goods are loaded onto the backs of mules and taken via Gunji (where it is possible to cross the Kali river into Nepal) to the Lipu Lekh pass on the Tibetan border. The disadvantage of this route for traders is the presence of many different Indian enforcement agencies and check posts at Dharchula, Tawa Ghat, and at the Lipu Lekh pass itself.

However, despite the strong enforcement presence, and aside from the trade in wildlife products, the drug cannabis (from the plant *Cannabis sativa*, and known in India as 'charas') is said to be openly for sale in "unlimited quantities" along the trail. The cannabis is smuggled from Nepal for sale on the Indian market.



Mule trails, used by border smugglers, wind their way through the Himalayan foothills in northern India.

For the second - and preferred - route, the goods are taken from Dharchula across the Kali river into Nepal. Here the goods are carried to the town of Darchula (which is spelt without an 'h') and on to a small market town called Kalang'ghar. The route then heads directly north and ends at a point where Nepal, India and China have a common border, near the Lipu Lekh pass. There is apparently no "checking" along this route. On the border between Nepal and China there are also two more passes that traders use near Lipu Lekh, called Chhyanla Bhanjyan and Tinkar Bhanjyan.

Using yak or mule caravans, shahtoosh wool and other goods are said to be brought by Khampas from Tibet to the Indo-Nepal border. These imposing Tibetans, who can be identified by their trademark red tassels, are a warrior race who originated from the rugged terrain of western Sichuan. They are renowned horsemen and were once notorious bandits. Near the border, on the Chinese side, the goods are bartered and handed over to Bhotias. The Bhotia people originated from Kham. Though many have taken to sedentary farming in Tibet and the border regions of Nepal and India, some cling to their traditional ways of pastoral nomadism and trading over the Trans-Himalayan passes.

Bhotias from India bring the shahtoosh south, using either of the routes described above, to Dharchula and other towns in northern Uttar Pradesh where the shahtoosh is sold to Muslim traders. These traders, some of whom pose as vegetable vendors or meat sellers, are well organised and fairly affluent. A number of them run taxi services between Dharchula and



Pithoragarh. Interestingly, everyone in the area is well aware of the illegal shahtoosh trade, and that the wool comes from Tibet. Many people offered the information that the wool was from the Tibetan antelope, and that it was destined for Kashmir to be made into expensive shawls. For the return run to the Tibetan border, the Bhotias take tiger and leopard bones and skins, otter skins, musk pods and bear gall bladders (known locally as 'bhalu-ka-tita'). Many of the musk pods and bear gall bladders are bought from traders from Nepal. Even if they take the second route through Nepal, most of the actual trading apparently takes place on the Indian side, in the town of Dharchula. The goods are often stored in neighbouring towns and villages.

Traders talked about a "big increase" in the price of tiger bones, and said that it was "very good business, these days". They were in the market to buy bones, rather than sell them. Not all the traders deal in tiger bones and shahtoosh. The main business for the traders remains musk pods and bear gall bladders, of which there seems to be large amounts in the illegal market. Nepalese poachers still use "pipe guns" to kill bears. Musk deer are trapped in foot nooses that are laid out in long lines that often stretch the entire length of a hillside.

In the towns of Pithoragarh, Dharchula and Opla, there are records of at least 23 seizures of wildlife products, most of which were confiscated from Bhotia traders, between 1991 and 1997. "There is such an abundance of scoundrels who are prepared to plunder the most noble and the most wondrous treasures of the planet" (Dr Bill Clark, 1997)

The Tiger Connection

It was not until mid 1993 that the barter trade between shahtoosh and tiger bones was uncovered. Subsequent investigations established details of this astonishing connection 63, 64. In 1994, three shahtoosh traders, who were reported to be also working as informers for Indian intelligence units, were arrested in Ladakh. They are said to have confessed that tiger bones and skins were bartered for raw shahtoosh and that the huge profits were used to buy arms for Kashmiri militants 9. In the same year, an investigator was offered 500 kg of shahtoosh from a Tibetan trader in Kathmandu. He was later allegedly offered a staggering 3,000 kg of raw shahtoosh by a civil servant working in a trade department for the Chinese Government in Lhasa, Tibet. The investigator was told that if he went to Lhasa to collect the shahtoosh, a businessman would also introduce him to dealers in tiger bones and skins. Another trader revealed that for one bag of tiger bones he would receive two bags of raw shahtoosh. In 1996, an American tourist informed the Wildlife Protection Society of India that while travelling in Tibet near Lake Manasarowar he heard his guide speak of the trade of tiger bones for raw shahtoosh 18.

The profit margins for this barter trade are staggering. After the barter of tiger bones in Tibet and the sale of raw wool in India it is estimated that a trader can make a profit of as much as 600% 64. It is the economics of the trade that drives the perpetrators to such extraordinary degrees of cunning, and makes it so difficult for the authorities to expose.

Tiger parts have been valued in the wildlife trade in India for many years. At first tigers were killed for their magnificent striped skins. The more insidious trade in tiger bones reached India only in the 1980's. Far Eastern traditional medicine manufacturers in China, having decimated their own sources, now began targeting India for their supply of tiger bones. The trade started in northern India with the close involvement of Tibetan refugees 64.

One of the earliest confirmed evidences of the trade came from a seizure near Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in the State of Uttar Pradesh in 1988. Four people were arrested by the police in the town of Pallia with 40 kg of tiger bones. The largest single seizure to date took place on 30th



August 1993 in New Delhi, when almost 400 kg of tiger bones (representing the slaughter of at least 33 tigers) and 8 tiger skins were seized. The escalating value of tiger bones has now caused the trade to spread throughout India.

Trade in tiger parts has been banned in China since May 1993⁴². The current extent of the illicit use of tiger parts in traditional oriental medicine is not known. What is known is that tiger parts continue to be smuggled from India to China for processing, and that these products are still available in Japan, Hong Kong, U.S.A., a number of European countries, and anywhere where there are large ethnic communities of Far Eastern origin. Among the major consumer nations,



The bones and skin of a large male tiger that was trapped in a steel snare and beaten to death by poachers in the northern Indian State of Uttar Pradesh.

only in Japan is domestic trade in tiger parts still legal.

Tiger bone is believed to prolong life, improve general weakness, and cure lower back pain, headaches and illnesses such as rheumatism and arthritis. It comes in many forms such as pills, plasters and tiger wine. The skin is used to treat mental illness, the hair (when burnt) to drive away centipedes, the whiskers for toothaches, the teeth for rabies, asthma and sores on the penis, the eyeballs for epilepsy and malaria, the brain for laziness and pimples and tiger fat for vomiting, dog bites and bleeding haemorrhoids. Practically every part of the tiger is valued in traditional Chinese medicine and home remedies⁴².

The authors have no doubt whatsoever that it will be impossible to control the tiger bone trade if the shahtoosh trade is not brought to a halt. Few people know the true story of shahtoosh. It is the intention of this report to bring together all the known facts and to raise public awareness about the crucial connection between shahtoosh with the fate of the Tibetan antelope, and the tiger. "Every shahtoosh shawl has the blood of a tiger on it!"

Shahtoosh Identification

When the CITES Secretariat was informed in February 1994 that shops in France were selling shawls made from the wool of the Tibetan antelope, they requested the French CITES Management Authorities to initiate an investigation. It was not an easy task. Knowledge of the relationship between the trade name 'shahtoosh' and the Tibetan antelope or chiru, and criteria to identify the wool, was then in its early stages. The investigation in France was carried out with the assistance of the French Customs Investigation Department, the French Natural History Museum, and the Management Authorities of India and Nepal.

After a seizure of 42 shahtoosh shawls from a famous boutique in Milan in 1995, further research was carried out by the Scientific Criminal Police forensic laboratories in Italy which revealed that shahtoosh could be identified by determining the cuticular and modular structure, and the mean fibre diameter (MFD), which are unique for each species¹². Reputedly five to seven times thinner than human hair, earlier research had established that shahtoosh down fibres have a MFD of 10 to 12 microns. The MFD of the wool fibre of Ibex is 14 to 17 microns, which is as fine as cashmere [premium grade pashmina]⁶⁵. The results were passed on to the relevant countries through Interpol and the World Customs Organisation and an information sheet was prepared for the CITES Identification Manual.



Apart from the work being carried out by the forensic laboratories of the French Customs and the Italian police, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service laboratories in Oregon, and the Wildlife Institute of India in Dehra Dun, have been investigating identification techniques for shahtoosh. Using stereoscopic microscopes and the 'standard techniques of mammalian hair identification', scientists have compared 'woolly' (down) and 'bristle' (guard hair) fibres of chiru and other species of the Camelidae order (guanaco, vigugna, camel) with those of the Bovidae order (mohair, cashmere, merino). Three aspects under different mediums have been examined: the hair profile to compare down with guard hair fibres, the 'scale' pattern on the surface of the hair, and the cross-section. The external and internal fibre structure of each species is unique, thus making it possible to identify individual species. The guard hair of shahtoosh is not difficult to distinguish as it is of a larger diameter, ovoidal in shape and fairly brittle 12.

The Scientific Criminal Police laboratories in Italy reported that the majority of the raw shahtoosh fibres examined had an apical point. This provided evidence that the animals had never been sheared before and were probably killed before the wool was removed. They also reported that most of the fibres were very fine, leading them to the conclusion that they came from younger animals 12.

Using hair identification techniques, the unique characteristics of shahtoosh wool have now been established, making it possible to identify shahtoosh in a laboratory. Tests carried out in Europe, the U.S. and India, from samples from several hundred shahtoosh shawls, have also established beyond any doubt that this wool is the product of only one species, the Tibetan antelope (*Pantholops hodgsoni*) 12.

Unfortunately, laboratory identification is time consuming and largely impractical for initial identification. Despite the existence of these laboratories, and those of the British Textile Testing Centre and the Forte Cashmere Company in Rhode Island, USA, it is on site identification that will probably play the most important role in stopping the trade in shahtoosh. The human skin can sense the difference of one micron and with minimal training and experience it is possible to identify shahtoosh by touch 4. The finest natural wool available 49, shahtoosh has a unique feel, it is exceptionally soft with a feather-light quality absent in any other traditional wool. However, when it comes to distinguishing between shahtoosh and fine cashmere, which is also fairly soft, or shahtoosh blends, on site identification becomes more difficult.

A combination of awareness, training in on-site identification, and the development of a systematic identification process, is urgently required if the illegal trade in shahtoosh is to be eradicated.



Shahtoosh Shawls

The word shahtoosh comes from the Persian word shah meaning 'king', and toosh meaning 'wool' or 'wool shawl'. The rare, luxurious shawls that are produced in Kashmir from this 'king of wool' have been prized by the royalty and the rich for centuries 55.

History of Shahtoosh Shawls

The Chinese explorer, Hsuan Tsang, spent sixteen years in Central Asia and India between 629 and 645. Though the authors of this report have been unable to find the original reference, he is said to have written in admiration of the delicacy and softness of shahtoosh. In the 1660s, Francois Bernier, a Frenchman and the first European to visit Kashmir, also recorded his admiration of shawls he found there which were made from exquisite wool "from the breast of the wild goat". From about 1770, it became fashionable for European women to wear fine woollen shawls over their shoulders and shawls from Kashmir were coveted possessions 2. In the late 1790s, Napoleon is said to have presented a shahtoosh shawl to his beloved Josephine. She was apparently so delighted that she ordered four hundred more 62.

The East India Company, whose aim was to develop trade in the Eastern Hemisphere and gain commercial supremacy, soon became interested in the pashmina and shahtoosh trade. In 1821, William Moorcroft, a "compulsive" Himalayan explorer and British trade officer with the Company 60, reported that "Asli-tush" amounted to less than one-sixth of the shawl wool imported into Kashmir, and that there were only two looms in Kashmir that specialised exclusively in the weaving of shahtoosh 57. Moorcroft commented that if British India could retain the Chang Tang, the "Honourable Company" would benefit from access to the source of the finest wool 60.

The Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 caused a decline in the European demand for shawls from Kashmir. Exports collapsed in the subsequent famine in Kashmir in 1877-79. By the time the industry revived, India and Pakistan had become the primary markets. In these two countries a shahtoosh shawl has long been sought after as an heirloom and exclusive wedding gift. A shahtoosh shawl is particularly prized in the State of Punjab, in northern India. A family will often spend years saving up to include a shawl in their daughter's wedding dowry; for such families it is a once-in-a-lifetime purchase.

Passing a sari through a ring was a legendary sign of excellence once applied to muslin from Dacca (the capital of Bangladesh, now called Dhaka) in the 18th Century 35. A shahtoosh shawl is so fine that it too can pass through a finger ring, and thus they are known as 'ring shawls' 3, 35. The shawls are also exceptionally warm and there is a belief that if a pigeon's egg is wrapped in a shahtoosh, the egg will hatch. Another version of this story is that the egg will cook 3, 62.

A large market for shahtoosh shawls still exists in India and Pakistan, but over the last ten years this market has been outstripped by demand from the international fashion industry 15. The fashion press has described shahtoosh as the "ultimate" clothing accessory, remarkable for its simplicity and for being immediately recognisable to connoisseurs 10. Large numbers of these expensive shawls are now illegally exported from India to Europe, North America, the Far East, Asia, Australia, and the Middle East. However, few consumers know the true source of shahtoosh.



Some shawl traders appear to genuinely believe the illusory stories that are so enticing to their customers. Over the years they have claimed that the fibres come from the wool of the Tibetan or Himalayan ibex (*Capra ibex*)⁴ (which is also listed as a threatened species under Schedule I of The Wildlife (Protection) Act, as well as Appendix I of CITES), the wild goat (*Capra hircus*), the domestic pashmina goat, and even from the under-feathers of a bird, the “Siberian goose”. They claim that wisps of shahtoosh are painstakingly collected from thorny bushes and rocks in the remote Himalayas, where the animals have rubbed themselves during their moult¹⁴. However, it has now been conclusively established that shahtoosh is a product solely of the Tibetan antelope or chiru, and that the only way to collect the wool is to kill the animal first. There are also no bushes taller than a few centimetres on the high plateau where the chiru occur and most of the animals are not found anywhere near human habitation when they moult in the summer⁵¹.

Undoubtedly, a number of Kashmiri traders have long been aware of the connection between shahtoosh and the Tibetan antelope. A glossy leaflet advertising “Legendary Shah Tush and Pashmina Shawls” was published some years ago by the Kashmir Government Arts Emporium. It states that shahtoosh shawls come from “a rare Tibetan antelope which lives at a height of over 14,000 ft in the wilds of the Himalayas. A rarely seen animal which survives a temperature of -40 degree in winter. To protect itself from cold, God has endowed it with a special Wool - the Shah Tush..... Shah Tush is not a shawl. It is an heirloom that gains value from generation to generation.”³ This leaflet is still being handed out to tourists in India to this day.

How the Shawls are Made

Shahtoosh shawls have been made in and around the city of Srinagar for centuries. Following a tradition of over four hundred years, a few Kashmiri families have developed a skill level, that does not exist outside the Kashmir valley. Even for the most experienced artisans, preparing the wool is time consuming and laborious. The women do all the de-hairing and the spinning⁴⁷. In an art that has been passed down from mother to daughter for generations, only the most skilled are allowed to spin the precious shahtoosh³¹,⁴⁷.

The raw wool or yarn of shahtoosh is too expensive to sell in the open market in Srinagar, and for the most part the trade and manufacture of shahtoosh is tightly controlled by a few wealthy traders. The raw wool is given, on a consignment basis, to the most experienced de-hairers, spinners and weavers who belong to a handful of families, including those of the traders themselves.

Much of the mystique and value given to shahtoosh originates from the time and skill involved in making a shawl. First the guard hairs and dead hairs are removed from the down to produce fine, soft strands of similar length. A pedestal with a hand-made comb is used to pull the fibre through the comb to ‘parallel align’ the yarn. The yarn is then guided by a woman’s big toe while she twists and winds it on to a ‘charkha’ or spinning wheel. The spinning of the wool is an extremely important part of the process and the number of “twisted rounds” or “singles” in the yarn determines its value. Removing the yarn from the charkha, it is twisted into a figure of eight, or ‘hank’. The yarn is now ready to be woven⁴⁷.

Kashmiri men are the weavers of the complex, fine worsted yarn. Using hand looms they carefully create the lightweight shawls and scarves⁴⁷. There are two types of weave, ‘plain’ weave and the ‘bird’s eye’ weave (which is also referred to as ‘chashme bulbul’ or ‘eye of the bulbul’), whereby crossing the woollen strands creates an interconnected pattern of small diamonds within the weave of the cloth. A shahtoosh shawl in the ‘bird’s eye’ weave is generally more expensive



than a 'plain' woven shawl. As a finishing touch, the skilled weaver traditionally embroiders his initials in a corner of the shawl.

Finally the shawls are put through a series of treatments, applicable to all Kashmiri shawls, to produce additional softness. The fibres are raised by combing and brushing the shawls with the cores of husked corn and specially developed brushes. Further softening is achieved by applying detergents and conditioners to the fabric. These are traditionally made of herbs, such as 'ritha' (which comes from the pod of *Acacia concinna* and the fruit of *Supindus trifoliatius*), but synthetic substances are also used. The more attention applied to the shawl at this stage, the better its quality and the higher its value 28.

Shahtoosh shawls are made in a variety of sizes. A lady's shawl is generally two metres long by one metre wide and weighs about 100 gm. A larger shawl of three metres by one and a half metres, called 'doshala', is usually made for men 47. Longer pieces are also produced. These are either cut into smaller sections after weaving, or sold as fabric lengths for the European market. To make a lady's shawl about 300 to 400 gm of raw shahtoosh wool is required 10, representing the lives of about three chiru 62. A doshala shawl would represent the lives of around five chiru.

Natural colours are the most popular; brown, beige, grey, and almost white. Only 12-14% of the chiru's coat consists of white down from the underbelly and throat, hence this is the most expensive 62. White shawls are generally worn by men 28. In recent times there has been an increasing demand, both in India and abroad, for dyed and embroidered shahtoosh shawls. In another break from tradition, some wool is now dyed before weaving to produce woven patterns with coloured squares or a 'tartan' design. There were many such examples among the shahtoosh shawls seized in Delhi in December 1995 11 and November 1996 16, and in London in February 1997 25.

Because of its rarity and rising price, shahtoosh is now also being blended with silk and other quality wools, such as cashmere (premium quality pashmina) and Angora. Though trade in these domestic species is sustainable and legal, if a shawl contains even 1% of shahtoosh it is still an illegal product. In the profession these mixed wool shawls are called 'semi-shahtoosh' 28. There are reports from Srinagar that fine, brown, Tibetan de-haired cashmere is being used as a substitute or mixed with shahtoosh and of traders misleading buyers into believing such shawls are pure shahtoosh 48. With a lower content of shahtoosh the cost of a shawl decreases considerably but these slightly heavier but still soft shawls are increasingly finding a larger market. The finest cashmere wool comes from Tibet and Mongolia (which produces the longest hair). Centuries ago the wool was first worked by the dexterous fingers of Kashmiri weavers and was thus named after the historical spelling of 'Kashmir'.

The size, colour, embroidery, and purity of shahtoosh greatly varies the price of a shawl. In India, pure shahtoosh shawls can cost from Rs 28,000 to 1,85,000 (US\$800 to US\$5,280). Prices are much higher on the international market. In February 1997, the price tag on shawls seized in a raid in London 25 began at £800 (US\$1,280) and climbed to £11,000 (US\$17,600) for a triple length off-white shahtoosh shawl.

The Kashmir cottage industry in woollen shawls is largely in the hands of about a hundred families who in turn employ at least 80,000 people in small, household units. The industry is worth an estimated US\$160 million per annum 47. The shahtoosh trade is said to be controlled by only 12 to 20 "major players" from some of the best known and most powerful families in the State. It is a lucrative business, referred to by other wholesale traders in Srinagar as "minting money". Only a few Kashmiri shawl traders who purchase the finished product invest in expensive shahtoosh.



It is not known how many shahtoosh shawls are produced each year but the number must represent an annual slaughter of thousands of Tibetan antelope.

The Illegal Trade

Shahtoosh shawls are sold illegally wherever there is a market for this rare and expensive fashion accessory. Despite the ban, shahtoosh shawls are available, sometimes openly, in practically every major city in India. They are exported and marketed illegally in Nepal, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Germany, United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Mexico, South Africa, Australia, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, and Hong Kong 10, 21. In all these countries there appears to be a rising consumer demand. Only in Switzerland and the State of Jammu and Kashmir in India is the trade legal.

Some raw shahtoosh is also smuggled to Italy for the fashion industry. In 1992, 500 kg was known to have been imported into Italy by the biggest dealers of exotic wool in the world. This was allegedly wool taken from chiru hides seized by authorities in China. Two large consignments of raw shahtoosh are also believed to have been shipped from Tibet in the mid 1990s. Italians are masters at processing fine raw wool into de-haired fibre. Italy is also thought to be the only country which has the facility to mechanically weave shahtoosh.

Shahtoosh shawls are smuggled out of India in a variety of ways. Since they are light and compact, they are sent by post or by courier mail. More often than not they are hidden in a shipment of other shawls and described as "woollen goods". A larger order of shahtoosh shawls is usually taken abroad by a trader or his representative, packed amongst other items in a suitcase.

When the French Customs began their investigations in 1994 into the sale of shahtoosh in France, they found that the shawls were being imported directly from India or via Hong Kong, often with false customs declarations regarding their value and description 21. Information they passed on to the relevant authorities resulted in further seizures in Europe, and in Hong Kong. The number of shawls that have been seized by authorities in Europe over the past three years is believed to total over one thousand. Market surveys in 1995 in the United States determined that shahtoosh had been available in top-end American boutiques and stores for the previous two years. Store owners claimed to have been misled by Kashmiri traders as to the true origin of shahtoosh 55. Despite ample evidence of the trade, no case against shahtoosh has yet been made in the United States 26.

Investigations in India in 1993, 1995, 1996, and 1997, revealed that the shahtoosh trade is widespread and flourishing. Shawls have been found in the principal cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Calcutta, and Srinagar. They are available in all the Kashmir Government Arts Emporiums throughout the country 3, and in many shops and exclusive boutiques, including those in five-star hotels 16. House visits by well-to-do Kashmiri vendors are also common practice 35. Apart from actual seizures (for details, see page 26 in the section entitled Enforcement and Protection), the surveys have revealed details of the large numbers of shawls that are available in India. As a result of increased publicity on the illegal shahtoosh trade and a few well-covered seizures of shawls, traders have become more wary. A few shops still openly sell shahtoosh shawls, while others store the shawls in suitcases, or hide them behind sales counters and partitions.

Twelve shahtoosh shawls were seen in a shop in a five star hotel in Delhi in November 1995. Another shop offered to supply the shawls in "large quantities" and provided evidence that shipments were sent to Toronto, Canada "to prove that export was possible" 15. A year later, in



November 1996, a shop in a five star hotel offered a staggering 200 shahtoosh shawls, with prices ranging from US\$550 for a “natural” or darker shaded shawl to US\$1,200 for a white or “baby colour” shawl. Two shops in another 5-star hotel had a total of 71 shahtoosh shawls in stock.

In Mumbai (Bombay) in November 1995, a Kashmir Government Arts Emporium openly advertised shahtoosh for sale and said they could supply 50 shawls every three months “without difficulty”. At the time they had seven shawls in stock with prices ranging from US\$1,085 to US\$1,285, less a 15% “export discount”. They offered a Kashmir Government certificate of authenticity and said they could issue an undervalued invoice, describing the shawls as “handlooms” to facilitate customs. A private shop in Mumbai offered shahtoosh shawls in natural and brightly coloured dyed shades for US\$630 each. The salesman said they could supply 200 to 300 shawls every three months but were not prepared to export the shawls 15.

In September 1995, a Kashmir Government Arts Emporium on Gariahat Road in Calcutta offered 24 shahtoosh shawls 63. Two months later, in November 1995, the manager of the same Emporium told investigators that they could “easily” supply ten shahtoosh shawls a month and that there would be no problem with the export of the shawls. He offered to under invoice the goods to minimise export problems and said that the Kashmir Government stamp on the shawls “assured their security” and that they could be shipped as “handicrafts”. The Emporium openly advertised the availability of shahtoosh and quoted a price of US\$805 each shawl for a bulk order 15. A shop in Lindsay Street in Calcutta offered to supply “in bulk” with prices ranging from US\$630 to US\$715 for each shawl. In August 1997, two Kashmiri shops in Calcutta were found to be openly advertising the availability of shahtoosh.

In December 1995, a shop in Bangalore had 28 shahtoosh shawls in stock. The shawls, with prices ranging from Rs 30,000 (US\$860) to Rs 100,000 (US\$2,860), were hidden behind the wooden panelling of a large shelf displaying pashmina shawls. The salesman said that they were already exporting shahtoosh to U.K. and Switzerland. The information was passed on to wildlife enforcement authorities but little interest was shown in taking action against the shop 41.

Despite recent media attention in India, it is still not a well established fact that trade in shahtoosh is illegal. In a December 1996 issue of one of India’s leading fashion magazines, “Society”, a four page spread was published showing models draped in shahtoosh shawls designed by Rifath Badar 19. The Wildlife Protection Society of India informed the magazine’s editor and the Press Council of India that the sale of shahtoosh was illegal and asked that the magazine publish a rejoinder, which it did 46. Legal Notice has since been served to the editor by the Press Council of India.

A number of the major traders and exporters of shahtoosh own large businesses with impressive showrooms in the major cities of India. They target the tourist industry. Often they act as middlemen to traditional traders whose families have been trading in Kashmiri handicrafts for over a century. With the right connections their lucrative business continues without hindrance. Sources have claimed that behind the scenes, a Kashmir lobby continues to try and persuade the Government of India to be restrained in their actions against the trade in shahtoosh.

Just as the ivory trade is responsible for the dramatic decline in elephant numbers, and the use of horns and bones in oriental medicine is responsible for the increase in poaching of the Asiatic rhino and tigers, the illegal trade in shahtoosh shawls is responsible for the decimation of the Tibetan antelope. Carvers, pharmaceutical manufacturers and shawl makers, who follow the decline of the species by the rising prices of the scarce raw products, are not only putting themselves out of business, but readily annihilating the species they depend on.



Enforcement and Protection

The Tibetan antelope or chiru (*Pantholops hodgsoni*), is listed under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals 24. It has been included in Appendix I of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) since its inception in July 1975 30. Covering species that are threatened with extinction, Appendix I prohibits international trade and commercial trade. The Tibetan antelope is listed as a Class I protected animal in the Law of China on Wild Animal Protection. In India the species is listed under Schedule I of The Wildlife (Protection) Act, making any harm to the animal, or trade in its products, an illegal act 7. The State of Jammu and Kashmir (of which Ladakh is a part) is the only State in India which has a separate Wildlife (Protection) Act. Here the Tibetan antelope appears in Schedule II and its trade is still legal 1.

In the past six years at least 12 seizures of shahtoosh have been carried out in India, and a number of enforcement operations carried out in China, France, Italy, Belgium, United Kingdom, Hong Kong and Nepal. These are discussed in further detail below.

CITES & International Enforcement

It is illegal to import Tibetan antelope wool, or shahtoosh, in all but one of the 142 member countries and territories of CITES. In the United States the ban on the import of shahtoosh is also covered by the Endangered Species Act (through which the United States implements CITES), and the Lacey Act. Even if a shawl is found to contain only a small percentage of shahtoosh its sale is illegal. However, the ban has had little impact on the trade. Even the connection between shahtoosh and the tiger bone trade is virtually unknown. The difficulties in stemming the trade in shahtoosh has been discussed a number of times by the Wildlife Crime Sub-group of ICPO-Interpol, the Enforcement Committee of the World Customs Organization (WCO) 21 and, more recently, at the CITES Conference of Parties in Harare in June 1997.

CITES is the principle international conservation agreement. However, the CITES Secretariat in Switzerland has limited enforcement authority and the treaty's weakness is that it cannot implement or enforce its resolutions. Each member state is responsible for enforcing CITES decisions and are obliged to penalise violators, but the commitment and ability to do so varies widely. CITES does play an important role communicating information from one country, or international enforcement agency, to another. When the Secretariat was informed in February 1994 that shops in France were selling shahtoosh shawls, it requested the CITES Management Authority in France to investigate the matter 21.

The customs authorities subsequently confiscated 283 shawls that were being sold at prices ranging from US\$8,000 to US\$30,000 21, 29. To date the French Customs have seized a total of 404 shahtoosh shawls in France and 213 further shawls have been withdrawn from the market. The total domestic trading value of these shawls is a staggering FF 5 to 6 million [US\$785,000 to US\$942,000] 29.

Information gathered during the investigation in France on trade in shahtoosh was given to the CITES Secretariat which passed it on to the relevant Management Authorities and international enforcement agencies. This resulted in further seizures in Italy (42 shawls), Belgium (31 shawls), the United Kingdom (34 shawls) and Hong Kong (100 shawls). Investigations have also been initiated in the United States, Australia, Canada, South Africa and Mexico 21, 29.

CITES allows Parties to enter reservations to certain aspects of the treaty at the time a country ratifies CITES, or within 90 days of the notification of an adopted amendment 30. Switzerland entered many such reservations, including one for the Tibetan antelope, when they ratified CITES



in July 1975, making it the only member country where trade in shahtoosh is legal. Intrigued by this fact, the Wildlife Protection Society of India recently made informal enquiries in Switzerland. Unattached to the European Union, Switzerland has strict border restrictions in a number of goods, but it was found that there was no information available on shahtoosh with the border police. In June, 1997, Switzerland's representative at the CITES Conference of Parties in Harare requested more scientific information on the trade in products of the Tibetan antelope. It is hoped that Switzerland will soon remove this reservation.

Reservations appear to defeat the primary objective of CITES which is to conserve endangered species, and are a way for member countries to avoid trade restrictions. It would seem that the elimination of such reservations would result in better implementation of CITES regulations throughout the world.

Records compiled by the Trade Monitoring Unit of the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge, U.K., document all legal exports and imports of wildlife products protected under CITES. Under the listing for *Pantholops hodgsoni* (Tibetan antelope) are the following entries 22:

Export Route

1983 1 live (?) specimen Great Britain to the Netherlands

1989 horns China to Canada

26 specimens China to Canada

12 teeth China to Canada

1992 5 bones China to Japan

1993 6 carvings Japan to China

1 specimen China to the United States

1 trophy China to the United States

1994 1 gm specimen [wool] United States to India

40 gm [wool] India to the United States

[Click Here](#) to look at the MAP

China

The chiru is a Class I protected animal in the Law of China on Wild Animal Protection (1989) but it was not until 1994 that a serious effort was initiated to curb the illegal trade in shahtoosh. George Schaller reported in 1995 that "every person, from official to herdsman, now knows the law and the penalty for killing an antelope (a fine of 1000 yuan = about US\$130, and loss of rifle)" 51. In 1996, the Government reported that poaching of the Tibetan antelope and trade in shahtoosh were "very serious in China" 20. In the same year, China's State Council issued an order stating that chiru protection should be given high priority.

The well organised trade in shahtoosh in Tibet has now gone underground. Protection agencies lack funds and guards to patrol the vast areas of chiru habitat and populations continue to decline. One such area is the Arjin Shan (Altun Mountain) Reserve, which was established in 1983 to preserve some of the largest herds of rare ungulates in China, including perhaps the greatest concentration of Tibetan antelope 60. In 1993, there was only funds available to employ 17 staff for ten months of the year for the reserve which covers an area of 45,000 sq km 59. Local governments of the Tibet Autonomous Region, and the Provinces of Qinghai and Xinjiang have recently attempted to strengthen wildlife protection.

During the CITES Standing Committee Meeting in Rome in December 1996, the Indian Government impressed upon China to enhance staff to protect the chiru - "the poaching of the Tibetan antelope and the tiger is a common cause of frustration for the countries." 53 The CITES Management Authority of China has recently been enlarged. Apart from the head office in Beijing, there are now seventeen regional branches, and an effort is being made to strengthen



enforcement and awareness, to pursue action against poachers and to increase international cooperation. The CITES Secretariat has had discussions, principally in 1995, with the Management Authority of China, to seek ways of stopping the poaching of Tibetan antelope and the smuggling of shahtoosh. A CITES workshop between “range, smuggling transfer, and main consumer countries” has been proposed and in mid-August, 1997, China’s Ministry of Forestry held a special internal meeting on shahtoosh 52.

In recent times, there have been a number of publicised cases involving the poaching of chiru and the shahtoosh trade. In 1992, while investigating illegal winter hunting in the Arjin Shan Reserve of Xinjiang Province, officials of the Public Security Bureau and the Environmental Protection Agency were intercepted by an organised gang of 27 armed poachers. The officials were released after the poachers escaped with their haul of 168 Tibetan antelope hides 59. In April 1993, the Environmental Protection Agency seized 1,300 chiru skins from a convoy of trucks coming from Xinjiang. The trucks were on their way to Lhasa, where the skins were to be sold for 700 yuan a piece, before apparently being smuggled to Nepal 59.

In 1996, a seizure of chiru hides took place in the month of February after a tip-off that someone had been offering “large amounts of antelope skins for 800 yuan a piece” in Golmud in Qinghai Province. It was thought that the skins came from the Arjin Shan Reserve in neighbouring Xinjiang, and that a number of the poachers were still inside the reserve. From an account by Wong How Man, Chief Advisor for the reserve, the Director, Song Binqian, quickly put together a patrol consisting of 25 people from the local police and militia and entered the reserve. East of Tufangzi, Song’s team “came across a large convoy of cars with poachers. Armed and defiant, the gang opened fire to face off arrest. After a long duel, they finally surrendered under superior fire power from the militia. More than twenty poachers were apprehended. In all, they had twelve jeeps and seven trucks, bagging over 1,100 antelopes. Seven rifles were confiscated with over ten thousand rounds of ammunition. All were convicted, with the stiffest sentence of seven years imprisonment to the head culprit” 60.

Wong How Man commented that “while the Altun [Arjin Shan] Reserve staff may have won a battle, they may be losing a war. Each case of recovered animals, dead ones, means we are one step closer to wiping out the entire herd. Though the Altun is one of the few wildlife habitats which are not penetrated by roads, lucrative economic incentive will continue to lure poachers into the most inaccessible places. It is difficult to develop an effective way to protect these last remaining herds of antelope” 60.

In December 1996, the CITES Management Authority of China reported that wildlife protection agencies and the police in west Qinghai, had seized about 3,000 Tibetan antelope skins and arrested 65 poachers, in ten confrontations with poachers that year. Two poachers were shot dead and a deputy country magistrate killed by poachers while “protecting Tibetan antelope” 20. In July 1997, George Schaller reported that he had heard that 400 kg of shahtoosh wool had recently been confiscated in Tibet 52.

Despite paucity of funds, authorities in China are clearly making an effort to curb poaching of the Tibetan antelope and the trade in shahtoosh. It is imperative that their efforts receive both international support and closer cooperation from neighbouring countries such as India and Nepal, where market forces drive this trade.

Nepal

Much of the shahtoosh trade is routed through Nepal, which has a large Tibetan community and an extensive border with the Tibet Autonomous Region. For the last ten years Nepal has been known to be an important centre for illegal wildlife trade 58. The capital, Kathmandu, is still believed to be one of the largest ‘underground’ trade centres in the region - for shahtoosh, the fur



trade, musk, bear bile, tiger and leopard parts, and the live animal trade - with a well-connected smuggling network linking Nepal with both China and India. Many wildlife traders based in Nepal have commercial interests in Delhi and Srinagar and are believed to operate under the umbrella of registered Nepalese fur trade organisations.

The chiru or Tibetan antelope is listed as an endangered species under Schedule I of Nepal's National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1973. Various amendments to the Act have added stiff punishments and a generous reward scheme making Nepalese wildlife protection laws among the most stringent in the region. Although enforcement has been greatly enhanced in the areas administered by the Department of National Parks, enforcement outside the national park network is the responsibility of the Forest Department and police, who take little interest in controlling the illegal wildlife trade. Prominent traders are known to be protected by influential people and smaller traders take advantage of the laxity of the authorities. All the raw shahtoosh wool that comes into Nepal is smuggled on to Kashmir in India for processing. Shawls are smuggled back into the country for sale to tourists and dealers and are available in Kashmiri shops in the main tourist centres.

Despite ample evidence of the trade, there has been only one known seizure of shahtoosh in Nepal. In December 1994, a sackful of raw shahtoosh wool was confiscated by Nepalese police from a truck en route to India. The Forest and Soil Conservation Department sent a sample of this wool to the Wildlife Institute of India in Dehra Dun in January 1995, for analysis. The samples proved to be genuine shahtoosh.

The trade connection with Nepal was also revealed in a case in India in 1993. Two men of Tibetan origin were apprehended at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport with a large package containing 107 kg of shahtoosh wool, addressed to "Sonam Norbu, Cabinet Minister, Ganchen Kyishong, Lower Dharamsala". The consignee's details were given as "Karnor Carpet Manufacturers (P) Ltd., Boudhanath, Kathmandu (invoice no. 01/93 dated 22nd May, 1993) 32. Valued at over three million rupees (US\$92,000), the haul represented the death of about 780 Tibetan antelope. The following day the Bureau of the Dalai Lama denied the existence of a Cabinet Minister of that name and issued a statement condemning "any kind of activity which harms any living being" 6. A sample of the wool was sent to the forensics laboratory of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service who confirmed that it was shahtoosh. The case is still pending in court. In 1996, Nepal's Director General of the Department of National Parks visited China. The shahtoosh trade was discussed, and better communications established between the two countries.

India

The Tibetan antelope or chiru is listed in Schedule I under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 7. All hunting and trade in any part of the species is banned in India and by the letter of the law the chiru has the highest degree of protection; trade in shahtoosh is as serious an offence as trading in tiger bones. However, in clear violation of the Act, shahtoosh shawls are still available in private and government outlets throughout the country. (For details, see page 22 in the section entitled Illegal Trade).

It is incomprehensible how the trade in tiger parts is going to be brought to a halt if the government can not curb the trade in the primary barter item, shahtoosh. In the State of Jammu and Kashmir, where the shawls are made, trade in shahtoosh is still legal 1.

The earliest known seizure of shahtoosh in India was in June 1993 when 100 kg of raw wool was confiscated by Customs authorities at Raxaul on the Indo-Nepal border. At this stage little was known about the trade, or the origin of shahtoosh, and the wool was brought to Delhi and stored in a customs warehouse.



The Ministry of Environment and Forests took samples of the wool and sent them to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service laboratories in Oregon, and later to the Wildlife Institute of India, for analysis. In the meantime, the Kashmiri importer petitioned the Jammu and Kashmir High Court on the plea that it was not shahtoosh wool but hair from a mountain goat, and that he should be allowed to take repossession of the goods. Through an interim order, the High Court directed the customs to release the consignment, prima facie holding that there was no grounds to establish that the wool was a product of a specified animal. An appeal by the Customs failed; the courts upheld the original order.

A third party petition challenging the order was then filed in the Supreme Court on the grounds that the wool was from a protected species and that it was imported into India in violation of CITES. Relying on a report from the Wildlife Institute which verified that it was shahtoosh, the Supreme Court set aside both previous orders and directed the High Court to decide the writ



Pashmina goats being tended by Tibetan nomads in the windswept plains of Ladakh. These domestic goats are easily bred and their wool can be combed out annually.

petition. They also ordered that the goods should not be returned to the accused without the permission of the Supreme Court. The case is still pending.

In January 1994, the customs authorities seized a shipment of wool totalling more than 3,350 kg, from a godown in Lawrence Road in Delhi. The wool was packed in 39 bales. Nine of these bales, with a total weight

of more than 400 kg, proved to be shahtoosh. The wool had been brought from Nepal, through the border post at Raxaul, and described in customs documents as "Nepali Mountain Goat Hair". The accused stated that eight more bales of shahtoosh had been sold to an unknown buyer one week before the seizure. This fact was corroborated in the import documents that were made out for 47 bales of wool, weighing 3,490 kg. The two Kathmandu-based traders who had arranged the shipment have never been apprehended. Nor have the consignees, "A to Z Handicrafts", who have their headquarters in Srinagar. In August 1994 this company wrote a letter to the Collector of Customs in Patna claiming ownership of the seized bales. The fate of this case - that represents the lives of perhaps as many as 4,000 chiru - is not known.

After a spate of shahtoosh shawl seizures in Europe, representative of the CITES Secretariat travelled to New Delhi to meet the Minister of Environment and representatives of the shahtoosh traders, to discuss the complex issue. "Much heat" was apparently generated in a meeting on 21 February, 1995. The CITES officials "regretted that India had failed to stop shahtoosh sale and trade". The traders responded by saying that Tibetan antelope lived in high altitude caves in winter and that shahtoosh was the shed "underfleece" of the antelope that was collected in summer. A representative of the Kashmir Handicrafts Traders Welfare Association is reported to have told the officials that "China was demanding a ban on shahtoosh trade at the behest of the ISI [Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence] which was interested in ruining Kashmir's economy". The CITES officials "refuted these charges and persisted with their demand for strict implementation of the ban on shahtoosh trade" 66.

Though the government still seemed unwilling to directly cross-swords with the Kashmiri traders, the shahtoosh trade was a problem that could no longer be ignored.



Tibetan Antelope Survey, 1995 57

After the February 1995 meeting, the Ministry of Environment and Forests established a committee to look into the matter. A survey was ordered, involving representatives of the Shahtoosh Traders Association, to determine the conservation status of the Tibetan antelope in India, and the trade in its wool. The objectives were to: identify areas in India where the species occurred; to roughly estimate its population; to identify locations in Ladakh of the border barter trade; to verify the area “where Shahtoosh is found on the forest floor, from where it is collected by local people” as claimed by the traders; and to identify the Tibetan antelope breeding farm that the traders said existed in Ladakh.



Tibetan nomads receive supplies by truck in a remote corner of Ladakh

The survey team comprised of the Chief Wildlife Warden of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the Wildlife

Warden of Leh, a scientist from the Wildlife Institute of India (an autonomous institution, set up by the government in 1982), and a representative of TRAFFIC India. They assembled at Leh on 17th July, 1995. Two days later they were joined by a team of traders, with whom details of the survey were finalised. Using vehicles and an Air Force helicopter, the survey team spent the next six days looking at chiru habitat and interviewing “knowledgeable persons”. The traders, however, chose to accompany the team for only one full day.

Two adult male Tibetan antelopes were sighted during the survey and evidence was confirmed of small groups, with a total population of not more than 200 to 220 antelopes, that migrate into Indian territory from July to September. Although numbers were reported to be “declining rapidly”, there was no evidence of poaching of chiru within Indian territory. The team also found no evidence “of any kind” of the collection of shed wool and their report stated that this “does not seem possible” in “such remote areas completely devoid of civilian population”.

Captive Breeding - Not An Option

The traders were “unable to indicate the location of a breeding farm of the Tibetan antelope in Ladakh” and the survey team found no evidence of the existence of such a farm. The feasibility of commercial farming was however explored, and though the traders initially stated that about 3,000 kg of shahtoosh was used annually, they later expressed their “inability” to confirm this, saying that “accurate figures” were not available. The report of the survey team concluded that “if the actual figure is anywhere near the initially stated 3,000 kg and considering that only about 150 gm of Shahtoosh wool is produced by one animal, it is calculated that approximately 20,000 Tibetan antelopes will be required to produce the current market demand” 57.

To farm such large numbers of a species that is not kept or bred in captivity is clearly not a viable alternative. Such a project would also involve intensive management of a vast area of wintering and summer feeding grounds in a high altitude region of extreme low productivity. Moreover, any legal trade in shahtoosh could be used as a cover for illegal trade in shahtoosh and in tiger parts 9.

It may be interesting to note here that in 1996 an Italian businessman apparently approached the



Mongolian Government with a proposal to set up a collaborative captive breeding project for the Tibetan Antelope 28. The fate of this proposal is not known.

While investigating the issue, the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) contacted the IUCN/SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group in the United States. In February 1997, a letter was received saying that as far as Dr Jim Dolan, General Curator at the San Diego Zoo, knew "this species has not been kept in captivity nor has anyone attempted captive breeding". Dr Dolan commented that "if this species is related to the Saiga, shearing for wool most likely could not be done" 27.



Sorting through the 172 shahtoosh shawls seized by authorities in the heart of Delhi in December 1995. It was the largest haul on record.

The only example of a captive Tibetan antelope that WPSI has been able to unearth is recorded in Mammalia of India and Ceylon. The author, R. Sterndale, extensively quotes an accurate description of the Chiru, *Pantholops hodgsoni*, written in 1830 apparently by Brian Hodgson himself. Sterndale added that "Mr Hodgson had the advantage of drawing from life, he having had a living specimen as a pet" 56.

Chronology of Events Since 1995

In July 1995, a series of workshops were organised by WPSI in collaboration with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police at key posts along the remote western border line. Cross-border barter trade has been

carried out for centuries and the aim of the workshops was to curb the illegal smuggling of wildlife products, in particular shahtoosh wool from China and tiger bones from India. The border police were shown how to identify various wildlife products. An identification manual and books on the subject were distributed and large illustrated all-weather boards erected at important border check-posts 61.

On 2nd November 1995, WPSI served notice to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, under Section 55(C) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, of their intention to make a legal complaint against the government's inaction in controlling the shahtoosh trade. Referring to the Shahtoosh Committee Report, WPSI asked the government to "take urgent and immediate steps to bring this illegal trade....under strict control" and to initiate prosecutions "against parties from whom seizures have been made already" 36.

A few weeks later, on 23rd December 1995, 172 shahtoosh shawls were seized from a young Kashmiri businessman in Lajpat Nagar in New Delhi 34. It was the largest haul on record. Representing the slaughter of about 320 chiru, the shawls were valued at ten million rupees (US\$285,700). Three days later the Indian Government issued a statement to remind the public that the sale of shahtoosh was illegal and would be met with strict penalties 8. The statement, released by the Ministry of the Environment and Forests on 26 December, read:

IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is reliably learnt that clandestine sale of shahtoosh shawls is being carried out by some unscrupulous persons. Shahtoosh products are manufactured from a wool which is obtained from an endangered wild animal called Tibetan Antelope or Chiru through killing of this species. Tibetan Antelope is protected under the Wildlife Act. The Act provided for an imprisonment up to 7 years and a minimum fine of Rs 5000 for trading in parts and products of the animal or for their possession apart from mandatory confiscation of the article/ product.



So next time you see a shahtoosh article or product, simply say a firm NO. Also bring the trade to the notice of the nearest wildlife authorities, or police stations.

On 3rd January, 1996, WPSI again wrote to the Ministry of Environment and Forests urging them to prosecute offenders and offered to give them information on the availability of shahtoosh shawls in Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and other cities 37. No response was received and the authorities seemed reluctant to do any further cases.

In the meanwhile, the December 1995 shahtoosh seizure was becoming embroiled in controversy. After considerable pressure from the leader of a political party in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, all but four of the 172 shawls were returned to the accused on 19th February, 1996, on the written direction of the Minister of Environment and Forests. The shawls were to be kept in steel trunks "under seal". Samples of 168 of the shawls were sent to the Wildlife Institute of India for analysis. When they certified a few months later that 68 of the shawls were genuine shahtoosh, the wildlife authorities moved the court to have the shawls returned saying that "the very possession of those articles is an offence" 43.

In a surprise manoeuvre on 21st September 1996, the trader denied in court that the shawls were even made of shahtoosh and stated that "till today no complaint has been filed" against him. He also questioned whether the authorities were "serious about the trial and the case property". When the wildlife authorities attempted to inspect the shawls they received considerable resistance. The accused demanded that they issue a certificate to say that the seals on the locks of the two steel trunks in which the shawls had been kept were intact. Suspecting that the hinges had been tampered with, the authorities countered this by lodging a police complaint against the accused for "obstruction in the performance of official duties" 43. There was another court hearing on 21 October, 1997, but again the accused failed to produce the shawls. This case, representing the largest haul of shahtoosh shawls ever to be seized in India, remains unresolved.

On 11th November, 1996, twelve shahtoosh shawls were seized at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport. According to a newspaper report 17, documents showed that the consignment marked "woollen items", was being exported to the United Kingdom by a reputed handicraft company based in Delhi, the "Cottage Industries Exposition Limited". The consignee on the documents was listed as the "Renaissance Corporation Limited in London through UK Barclay Bank PLC" 17. Investigations were carried out by the wildlife crime branch of the London Metropolitan Police, under 'Operation Charm', which traced the consignee to an exclusive shop selling Kashmiri goods in Mayfair, London. Suspecting the London shop to stock more of these illegal shawls, the police carried out a raid on 21st February, 1997. To assist in the identification of the shahtoosh shawls two representatives from WPSI were asked to accompany the police. In all 138 shawls were seized by the authorities. With prices ranging from £2,000 to £11,000 each, the shawls had an estimated value of £353,000 (US\$564,800) 25.

The initial case of November 1996 is pending in the Delhi High Court. In one of the longest known examples, the two people accused in the case still enjoy anticipatory bail. In their petition they have claimed that the Tibetan antelope is not killed for the collection of shahtoosh.

In June 1997, the CITES Secretariat circulated a 'Review of Alleged Infractions and other Problems of Implementation of the Convention' at the Conference of the Parties in Harare. The section on 'Trade in Shahtoosh' stated that "The Secretariat has not been informed of any measures taken by IN [India] to stop these activities although they had been informed of a confiscation there in December 1995 of wool with a value of 300,000 USD" 21.



India's Wildlife Acts

Apart from the State of Jammu and Kashmir which has its own Wildlife Act 1, wildlife laws in India are governed by the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 7, to which significant amendments were made in 1986 and 1991. Schedule I of the Act accords the highest degree of protection and includes such species as the tiger, Indian elephant, musk deer, Indian one-horned rhinoceros, and the snow leopard. The Tibetan antelope was included in Schedule I of the central Act in a notification published in the Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part II, Section 3 (i), dated 5th October, 1977 7.

A person trading in parts derived from a Schedule I animal, such as shahtoosh wool from the Tibetan antelope or chiru, violates Sections 39, 44, 49 and 49B of the Act. The penalties are specified under Section 51, whereby the offence is “punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than one year but which may extend to seven years and also with [a] fine which shall not be less than five thousand rupees” 7.

In the State of Jammu and Kashmir wildlife laws are governed by The Jammu and Kashmir Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1978. Here the Tibetan antelope is listed under Schedule II which permits trade; it is “controlled” rather than “banned”. Under Section 8 of the Jammu and Kashmir Wild Life Act, a “Special game hunting license” can also be given for any Schedule II species 1. State wildlife officials, however, have said that they have not issued a license to hunt the Tibetan antelope or any other “big game” since 1989. They attributed this to the ongoing militancy problem in Kashmir.

When The Jammu and Kashmir Wild Life (Protection) Act was promulgated, a licensed dealer with stocks of Schedule II species was entitled to apply for a trade license under Section 43, within 45 days from the commencement of the Act 1. It is not known if any such trade licenses or manufacturing licenses have actually been issued for shahtoosh.

Apart from the Tibetan antelope, there are a number of other species in the illegal wildlife trade that have a lesser degree of protection in the State of Jammu and Kashmir as compared to the rest of India. These include the Himalayan brown bear, Himalayan black bear, sloth bear, Indian elephant, leopard, Himalayan ibex, desert fox, desert cat, ermine, and otters 1. Many of these endangered species do not even occur in Jammu and Kashmir. Their products include bear bile, ivory and numerous types of skins. This has created a critical loophole in the effective control of the region's wildlife trade; many wildlife products can be smuggled into Jammu and Kashmir and legally traded there.

In February 1997, WPSI issued a notice “in public interest” to the Government of Jammu and Kashmir 40. The differences between the central Wildlife (Protection) Act and the State Act were discussed and the State was asked to modify their Act to incorporate all the Amendments that have been added to the central Act. Specifically, WPSI asked that the Schedules in the State Act should include all endangered species along the lines of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, that hunting be banned for all species listed in Schedules I to IV, that trade be banned in all species listed in Schedule I and Part II of Schedule II, and that punishments be increased. Trade in shahtoosh figured prominently in the letter. A few weeks later, there was an announcement in the press that the Government of Jammu and Kashmir had constituted a committee to recommend changes to the State's Wild Life (Protection) Act. WPSI is following the matter closely.

Conclusion

With the current lack of knowledge and enforcement, insufficient resources, and dearth of political support, the future of the chiru, and other threatened wildlife of the region, looks bleak indeed. The State of Jammu & Kashmir in India continues to be a major stumbling block in efforts to stop



the illegal wildlife trade. The Tibetan antelope or chiru, is listed in Schedule II of the State's Wild Life Protection Act, despite its threat of extinction, and the State still permits trade in shahtoosh.

The key to halting the trade in shahtoosh shawls is to prohibit their manufacture. To this end, in April 1998 WPSI filed a public interest petition in the Jammu and Kashmir High Court.

The governments of India, Nepal and China must take urgent and committed steps to stop the trade in wildlife products, if species such as the chiru and the tiger are to survive. Lastly, it is unrealistic to believe that the illegal trade in shahtoosh - which is so closely tied to the fate of the tiger - can be curbed unless consumer nations world-wide increase public awareness and enforcement efforts.

[Click Here to Know about the Known Shahtoosh Cases](#)

Recommendations

Alternative to Shahtoosh

Using the expertise of skilled spinners and weavers in Kashmir, extremely fine, soft shawls can be manufactured without the use of shahtoosh. An ancient craft and tradition will be sustained using wool from a domestic species. To encourage this certain steps need to be taken:

q The Indian government should reduce the high import duty on de-haired cashmere (graded, premium quality pashmina) from China and Mongolia 47. Ladakh, in India, does not produce sufficient quantities of fine wool for market demand.

The development of a mechanical method to separate pashmina hair of a lesser micron should be encouraged, thereby making it possible to manually produce yarn of a quality similar to that of shahtoosh.

A prominent wool trading company in Delhi has spent many years developing a shawl called 'shahmina', that has virtually the same weight, texture and warmth as a shahtoosh shawl. The company has used wool - "the best cashmere that money can buy" - from pure strains of high-altitude goats from Mongolia, China and Ladakh. The domestic pashmina goat is easily bred, can be combed out annually, and their natural colours - brown, beige and white - are similar to that of shahtoosh. Cashmere wool can be twice the weight of shahtoosh and special processing methods have been developed to make shahmina. Though the shawl is time-consuming to produce it costs considerably less than the price of a shahtoosh shawl 28. The Wildlife Protection Society of India would be pleased to forward any enquiries regarding shahmina.

Public Awareness

The motivation behind the trade in shahtoosh, or any illegal wildlife trade for that matter, is consumer demand. Field surveys have shown that the majority of consumers are not aware of the origin of shahtoosh, nor indeed the plight of the chiru and the trade's connection to the tiger bone trade 55. Awareness campaigns are urgently needed. Publications such as this report, must be directed towards informing the public, the authorities, and those in the illegal shahtoosh trade.

The government of India should make it compulsory for every shop selling shawls in India to display a notice about the illegal shahtoosh trade (see "Important Notice" in section entitled 'Enforcement Protection; India').



Political Will

Support from the governments of the consumer nations of shahtoosh, in Asia, the Far East, Europe, North America, and the Middle East, is essential. Political will to save the chiru, the tiger, and other species effected by the illegal trade in wildlife products, must urgently be generated. Particular attention must be given to the State of Jammu and Kashmir in India, where trade in shahtoosh is still legal.

Enforcement

Wildlife authorities in China should be offered international financial support to assist in the protection of the unique wildlife of the Tibetan Plateau. Enforcement measures against shahtoosh traders urgently needs to be improved, particularly at the border crossings of China, Nepal and India. The government of India must rigidly enforce the law against trade in shahtoosh and the governments of the range and consumer nations, should make a concerted effort to work together to curb the shahtoosh trade.

Shahtoosh related cases must be pursued with the utmost vigour. Traders should be encouraged to shift to alternative high-quality shawl production, using wool from domestic species.

Awareness and the identification of shahtoosh should be promoted in the consumer nations. Particular attention should be given to customs control at air, sea and land ports - especially in India - and the authorities made aware of known 'hot spots'. In 1997, the Indian State Government of Jammu and Kashmir announced that they intended to open Srinagar, Leh and Jammu to international air traffic. This will add new elements to the problem.

Many of the actions required to curb the trade in shahtoosh, and thus protect the chiru, would also act as a deterrent to other illegal wildlife trade.

Court Cases

Wildlife cases in India often languish in the courts for ten years or more. Bail is easily granted and the conviction rate is low. There is evidence that some of the accused continue their illegal trade while out on bail. The courts must be encouraged to treat shahtoosh cases as a priority.

This report documents the truth behind the trade in shahtoosh, and its critical connection to the smuggling of tiger bones. Such knowledge of the illegal wildlife trade will help to save endangered species, such as the chiru and the tiger, all of which enrich our lives.

We would be grateful if you could acknowledge the Wildlife Protection Society of India if material is extracted from this publication for further use.

November, 1997



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