

Interaction or Conflict: Addressing Modern Trans-Himalayan Pastoralism and Wildlife

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Abstract : Equus kiang kiang is an indigenous large-bodied herbivore species, and in India, it is restricted to limited geographies of Ladakh. One of such areas is the Tsokar Basin. With the rise in global pashmina demand, the livestock numbers have grown significantly. Previous studies have reported conflict between a nomadic pastoral community, the Changpas, and kiang. Absentee pastoralism (in lieu of pure pastoralism) and tourism are two major economic activities among the local people. However, the social, economic, political, and ecological changes are inevitable in such a contemporary system. The study examines several factors influencing the local pastoral economy and focuses on the presence of two non-human cohabitants, kiang, and the wolf. This study used semi-structured interviews and vehicle count method in four different seasons. The results show that people perceived kiang as a threat but also reveal a level of tolerance towards them. The locals predicted high kiang numbers ranging from 200-3000 in the basin and contrastingly ranked them behind wolves, which are very few in numbers. Due to a lack of scientific pieces of evidence, the kiang population status remains obscure, and local peoples' concerns remain unaddressed. But how this competitive dysfunctionality does take place? On one side, the rural development or the animal husbandry department aims at developing the area by providing stall-feed and tourism, whereas, on another side, the wildlife department emphasizes wildlife conservation. Therefore, the managers and planners may need to be cautious about the local socio-ecological complexities and may require inter-departmental communications. The study concludes that an interdisciplinary inquiry may be an important tool in understanding such a precarious situation and may be used in the policy-making processes.

Keywords : coexistence, human-livestock-wildlife interactions, interdisciplinary approach, kiang, policymaking, tsokar.

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