

Feeding Ecology and Habitat Preference of Red Panda in Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, Nepal

Authors : Saroj Panthi

Abstract : The red panda (*Ailurus fulgens fulgens*) is distributed throughout the Himalayas and is found in both protected and unprotected areas of Nepal. Loss and fragmentation of habitat threaten red panda population throughout its range, and as a consequence, it is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Despite this pressing situation, data on the ecology of the red panda in western Nepal are lacking. Our aim in the current study was to determine the distribution, associated habitats, and summer diet of the red panda in Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve (DHR), Nepal. Evidence of red pandas was found in all 7 blocks of the reserve, spanning an area of 345.8 km², between elevations of 2800 m and 4000 m and predominantly (> 75%) in forests comprising plant communities dominated by *Abies spectabilis*, *Acer caesium*, *Tsuga domusa*, and *Betula utilis*, with ground cover of *Arundinaria* spp. The dominant plant found in scat of the red panda was *Arundinaria* spp. (81.7%), with *Acer* spp., *B. utilis*, and lichen also frequently present. Livestock grazing and human activities were significantly higher in habitats where signs of pandas were recorded than in areas where they were absent. This habitat overlap between the red panda and livestock potentially poses a major threat to the panda's survival in the DHR, a fact that should be taken into account in devising management strategies for this threatened species.

Keywords : red panda, Dhorpatan hunting reserve, diet, habitat preference

Conference Title : ICWERC 2016 : International Conference on Wildlife Ecology, Rehabilitation and Conservation

Conference Location : Istanbul, Türkiye

Conference Dates : February 15-16, 2016