

Husain T. 2001. Survey for the Asiatic cheetah, *Acinonyx jubatus*, in Balochistan province, Pakistan Barbara Delano Foundation; 39 p.

Keywords: 5PK/*Acinonyx jubatus*/*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*/action plan/Balochistan/caracal/cheetah/extinction/Felidae/habitat/IUCN/leopard/leopard cat/manul/project/record/report/sand cat/status/survey

Abstract: The cheetah was believed to have disappeared from Pakistan, according to the 1996 IUCN Cat Specialist Group's Cat Action Plan. But in recent years, the author has collected a number of reports and records suggesting the possibility that some cheetah might continue to survive in remote areas of Pakistan's westernmost desert province of Balochistan. A high priority project was started in October-November 2000 on the potential cheetah habitat and data and information about all the different species of cats, especially the cheetah, leopard, caracal, manul, sand cat, fishing cat and the leopard cat has been collected and compiled. The cheetah was common in many visited areas, but, except a not warranted report of a shot cheetah in 1998, from all accounts the cheetah is extinct since at least 20 years in these areas.

SURVEY FOR THE ASIATIC CHEETAH *Acinonyx jubatus* IN BALOCHISTAN PROVINCE, PAKISTAN

FINAL REPORT TO CAT – CAT ACTION TREASURY Project sponsored by the Barbara Delano Foundation

By Syed Tasvir Husain, Lahore, Pakistan

May 2001



From a video taken by Ali Reza Jourabchian, Iran Dept of Environment, January 2001.

The Asiatic cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* is one of the world's rarest and most endangered cats. Iran is the only place where Asiatic cheetahs are known with certainty to exist today in small numbers, the cat having been wiped out from the rest of its vast historical range from the Arabian peninsula through the Middle East into Pakistan and India. The cheetah was believed to have disappeared from Pakistan, according to the 1996 IUCN Cat Specialist Group's Cat Action Plan.

But in recent years, the author, a prominent Pakistani naturalist, has collected a number of reports and records suggesting the possibility that some cheetah might continue to survive in remote areas of Pakistan's westernmost desert province of Balochistan. For example, there have been reports of sightings, of the shooting of a cheetah by a geologist, of the capture of two small spotted cubs in an area known for its gazelle habitat, and sightings of cheetah skins in the black markets in major cities in Pakistan.

No surveys for the cheetah have ever been carried out before in Pakistan. The author put together a team of experienced local Balochi naturalists and guides, and travelled through potential cheetah habitat to interview the locals about this rare cat. This project was ranked as high priority by the World Conservation Union's Cat Specialist Group. Appendix 1 is the original project proposal for this survey.

The following is a report of the survey conducted to determine the status of the Asiatic cheetah and other species of the family FELIDAE, in South Western, South Central and some parts of North Balochistan, Pakistan. The Coastal area (Mekran coast) was studied from one end to the other. Some areas, although not originally included in our plan, like the Cholistan Desert (District Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab) and Kirthar, Mahal Kohistan (District Dadu & Thatta, Sind), have also been surveyed. See Figure 1.

We have covered more area than we had originally planned to. During this trip we have done 4100 Kms by road. More than 80 percent of it was cross country in one of the roughest,

toughest and most treacherous terrains that we have ever encountered, or could have ever imagined.

The group consisted of some very very dedicated and determined bunch of individuals, who have put in their best, throughout the trip. We were 13 permanent members with about 4 or 5 people joining us temporarily in each new camp. We made every attempt to interview all knowledgeable local people along our survey route, and held more than 80 interviews. Data and information about all the different species of Cats especially the Cheetah, Leopard, Caracal, Manul, Sand Cat, Fishing cat and the Leopard cat has been collected and compiled.

This survey was supported and funded by the BARBARA DELANO FOUNDATION, on the recommendation of CAT, through its Director, KRISTIN NOWELL. Mr. PETER JACKSON, Chairman Species Survival Commision, Cat Specialist Group, IUCN was also actively involved in the execution of this project.

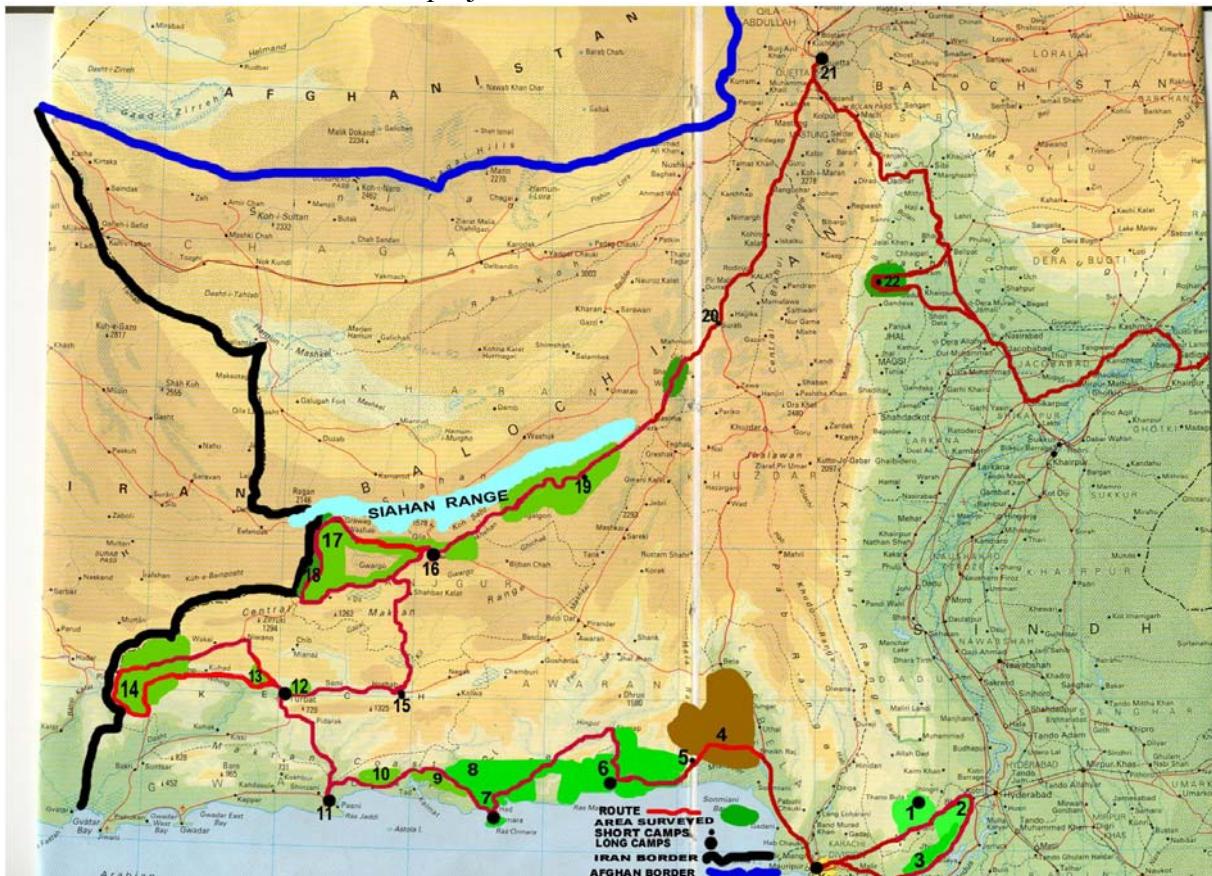


FIGURE 1. MAP OF AREA SURVEYED, OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2000

EXPLANATION OF THE NUMBERS & COLOUR CODES

BROWN SHADING HARA PLAIN

BLUE SHADING SIAHAAN RANGE

GREEN SHADING THE AREAS SURVEYED

RED LINE ROUTE FOLLOWED

BLACK THICK LINE IRAN PAKISTAN BORDER

BLUE THICK LINE AFGHAN PAKISTAN BORDER

NUMBERS 1 TO 22

No. 1: Soda Khans Village, with the Kirthar Range towards its North West and the Sumbak, Hothiano, Eerie, Kamboh mountains also situated in that same direction. This was our first camp. We stayed here from the 21st. to the 23rd. and left for Hingol on the morning of the 24th.

No. 2 & 3, are the areas surveyed during our stay at Haji Soda's village. These are the famous Jhimpur, Bolari and Jungshahi plains, with the INDUS on their Eastern side.

No. 4, is the Hara plain, which we went through our journey. This has the famous Hara range towards its Western side.

No. 5, is the Phor Stream where we spent the night of the 24th, due to a number of tyre flats. The Sangar plain and mountain are located midway between No. 5 and No. 6.

No. 6 was the Hingol Camp. The Haarian plain is exactly to the North of No. 6 and so is the Goran Gutt mountain. The Nani mountain, infact the whole of the Hingol National Park is covered in the green shading around No. 6

No. 7, is our Camp at Ormara, where we stayed from the 29th Of October till the 4th. Of November. No 8 and No. 9 are the Mal Plain and the Basol River. Cheetahs were shot here by one Dad Bux and Faqir Khuda Bux, whom we interviewed personally. These are vast plains and were full of Gazelles till about ten years ago. The details of these killings shall be sent in report No. 2.

No. 10, is a plain where we were told that Chinkaras are still to be found. We surveyed this area before moving on to Pasni.

No. 11, was our Camp at Pasni where we stayed for two days, but moved on to Turbat because of negative reports.

No. 12 was our Camp at Turbat, the Divisional HQ, and the HQs of the Mekran Scouts.

No. 13, was the area where the nephew of the Khan of Kalat, claimed to have shot a Cheetah in 1962. We were able to locate one of the old Shikaris, who had accompanied him then, and interviewed him extensively.

No. 14, is the area along the Iranian border, near the Mand Wing Headquarters. We travelled from one side and came back from the other.

No. 15, was an overnight halt at the Mekran Scouts Post, Hoshab. Other areas being too dangerous, according to the Intelligence Officers of the Scouts. We were also strongly advised not to travel at night, which we could not avoid doing; because of long distances to be covered and the terrible condition of the track.

No. 16, Our Camp at Panjgur, where we spent enough time to investigate the reports about Wildlife.

No. 17, and 18 are the areas along the Iranian border. The Siahán range almost touches the area around No. 17. The last post Grawag is also here.

No. 19, is the Nag valley. Large plains, with typical semi desert plants and grasses. Must have been full of Gazelles at some point of time. This is where the Houbara Foundation has its research centre. As per comments Dr. Paul Goriup, in T.J Roberts book; this is where a Cheetah was sighted in 1991-92. We did not see a single Houbara, nor did we receive reports of their breeding from the locals in the last 4 or 5 years. This also was an overnight stop.

No. 20, Surab is a Sub division, where we spent the night.

No. 21, was Quetta, where we got some very useful information, about wildlife in the province and across the border in Afghanistan also.

No. 22, Was the residence of Mir Yar Mohammed Rind, a Tribal Sardar, who is known for the protection of Gazelles in his area. These are the largest plains in the whole of the Province. Because of their proximity to the Central Brauhi Range, we investigated these also. The route marked in red from there onwards, was our route to Khanpur and onwards to Lahore.

SURVEY EXPEDITION REPORT

PHASE 1 16th. 17th. 18th. October

The party from Lahore, consisting of Tasvir Husain, Afzal Ranjha, Major (R) Tanvir, Mohammed Shafi, Mr. Aziz and Ather Salim left for Khanpur enroute to Karachi, on the morning of the 16th. Of October 2000. See Appendix 1 for personnel details. Jackson, the mechanic had already left on the 15th. with the three Jeeps and one trailer, which had been transported to Karachi by trucks. We reached Khanpur in the evening. Khadim the tracker and Billy the cook were waiting to accompany us to Karachi. We camped at Chak 10, and interviewed some old hunters and guides.

We went to the edge of the desert, where most of the Cholistanis have come with their livestock, because of severe drought inside the desert. I wanted to find out the position of the Caracal, *Felis caracal*, the Jungle Cat *Felis chaus* and the Sand Cat, *Felis margarita scheffeli*, from them.

Most of them had seen the Jungle Cat, *Felis chaus*, called JUNGLI BILLA, which they said was mostly found along the edge of the green belt. We ourselves have seen these a number of times in the recent past. Some of them are really big.

The Caracal was immediately recognized from the photographs as BARANG, the local name. According to them it was found inside the desert, in plains as well as the dunes. Its prey consisted of mice, rabbits and newly born Chinkaras (These are called HARAN, in the local language). These Barangs sometimes kill and carry off newly born lambs also. They claim that these Barangs mostly hunt in pairs, sometimes catching adult antelopes also.

I myself have driven onto a freshly killed male Chinkara, which had not been eaten as yet. Probably the Caracals had walked away from their kill on hearing us approach. On investigating the tracks, we were able to see how one of the Caracals had deliberately driven the Chinkara towards a bend in the sand dune, where its mate was lying in ambush. The Caracal had sprung onto the unsuspecting Antelope, and catching it by the throat, had brought it to the ground after a prolonged struggle.

There has been a steady but rapid decline in the population of these Caracals, in the last decade or so. We cannot blame it on human encroachment, loss of habitat or lack of prey. It is because caracals are trapped, shot and poisoned for their tails, which are chopped off and presented as evidence, to collect rewards from the administration of the Arab Falconers. The falconers have the misconception (or have been deliberately misinformed, because it involves a lot of money) that the Fox, the Jackal, the Steppes Eagle, the Golden Eagle and all forms of Cats, are the enemies and predators of the Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*). The rewards offered by these people are enough of an incentive for the locals (who belong to a low-income group); to ensure the extermination and extinction of the species mentioned above. This should be looked into and measures adopted to stop this destruction.

On seeing the photographs of the Sand Cat, most of the locals professed to have seen it occasionally. They were not sure about the hair on its pads. They said that because they had never killed it, therefore they did not have an opportunity to examine its feet. According to them it was an inhabitant of the sand dunes and not the plains. Most of them had seen it at night. They also said that it had an extraordinary large face with even larger ears. This needs to be investigated further.

The Wolf, *Canis lupus pallipes*, is called NAHAR, in the local language. It is close to extinction. Very few people had seen it recently. One very reliable person, Nihal Mahar, told me out of earshot of the others, where he had recently seen a lair of a female with its young. He was afraid that if the others overheard him, they would probably go and kill the entire family. I told him to take good care and ensure that no harm befalls them. These probably might be one of the last survivors of the Desert Wolf. It would be a great shame and loss if

this were allowed to happen. I know it is a species, which is not the direct concern of CAT, but maybe you could pass on this information to somebody who could help. The Steppes Eagle and the Golden Eagle are also endangered.

PHASE 2 19th. 20th. October

We reached Karachi on the morning of the 19th. and spent two days there in buying supplies, contacting people and gathering the latest information. Haji Soda Khan and the driver Siddique joined us there. Captain Nadir Shah of the 14th. Punjab Regiment, who at present is posted in Quetta, and Mr. Farhan also flew into Karachi to join us. We met some very old Shikaris and hunters who gave us some very useful information.

An old Shikari/Guide, Musa Khaskeli related how he had seen a Cheetah called TAAZI CHITTOO, locally (Taazi in Sindhi means Greyhound), hunting Chinkaras, *Gazellabennett* i called HAR in sindhi, in the Jhimpur plains in the mid forties (Jhimpur is a very vast plain, about fifty kilometres west of the Indus and extends upto the Kirthar range). This was the period when this area had Gazelles in the hundreds. We met Mr. Mahmood Rizvi, a very keen sportsman and Trophy hunter. He has hunted extensively in the Coastal region of Balochistan. He was full of information about the wildlife conditions in that area and gave us some very useful contacts. He had also heard about the Cheetah but never seen one. We also met Nawab, Son of Haji Deedak Zigri, and an influential of the Ormara area who was supposed to accompany us; but expressed his inability to do so. But he was kind enough to refer us to the people who mattered in that area.

We also went to see the Director General of the Coast Guards, Brigadier Mahmood, under whose jurisdiction the coastal areas fall. He was kind enough to issue a directive to all his Posts, Companies and Wing HQs, to look after us and also offer help and assistance, if required (Appendix 2). We were therefore, very well looked after, wherever we went in their area.

PHASE 3 21st. 22nd. 23rd. October

On the morning of the 21st. we left for Mahal Kohistan and established camp at Haji Soda's village (Marked No. 1 on the map). Two days were spent in surveying the area and interviewing the elders and the local guides and shikaris. The last time that anyone had seen signs of a Cheetah was 35 to 40 years ago. These had been observed in the plains of Bulari, Jungshahi, Jhimpur and the valleys in the foothills of the Kirthar Range. All these plains are extensive and must have been ideal country for the Cheetah and its prey, the Gazelles. The locals attribute the disappearance of the Cheetah to the near extinction of its chief prey, the gazelles.

Leopards, *Panthera pardus sindica*, called CHITTOO locally (Sindhi) were occasionally seen in almost all the mountains along the Karachi—Hyderabad highway till as recently as the late seventies. Even now there are reports of sightings, especially in the mountains which are connected with the Pab and the Dumbar ranges. Sometimes a solitary Leopard still strays into Ardi, Uth Palan, Mole, Surjana, Eerie, Kamboh, Hothiano, Sumbak and Sarri mountains. These are at a distance of 60 to 140 kms from Karachi (Marked No. 2 on the map), almost bordering Balochistan. These mountains are well stocked with Ibex, *Capra aegagrus*, Urial, *Ovis vignei*, and Chinkaras in the valleys. The Late Dr. Rizvi shot the last recorded Leopard in 1977, in the Kirthar range. Some were shot later on also, but these were not publicised due to fear of legal action. The locals informed us that the Leopards which were fairly common in their area, started killing domestic livestock due to unavailability of its natural prey (It was after the mid seventies that these ungulates started making a come back from near extinction, thanks to the single handed efforts and interest of the Late Malik Sikander Khan of Thana

Bula Khan. This was his hereditary territory and he had asked his clansmen and his tribe, the Burfats, not to let any hunting take place). According to them their prey consisted of Ibex, Urial, Rabbits, Gazelles, Porcupines and even Rats. The domestic animals killed by the Leopards consisted of Goats, Sheep, Dogs, Donkeys, Cattle and rarely Camels. Due to the destruction of the livestock, the locals would poison the kills, lay traps and sometimes track them and shoot them.

Caracals called HARULA(Sindhi) locally, were fairly common in the past in all of Dadu and Thatta district. Today we hardly came across anyone who had seen them in the recent past; except Soda Khan and another Guide, Sattar, who claimed to have seen fresh tracks of a single Caracal in the Malir river bed and in the foothills of the Arrdi mountain. This Caracal was living chiefly on mice and a few rabbits. There have been instances in the past where Caracals killed newly born Ibex called SARRAH in Sindhi and Urial lambs, called GAD in Sindhi. Another old man who was a shikari and guide in the past, related how he had seen two HARULAS together at night. He said that they hunted Rabbits, Lizards, Snakes, Rats and sometimes caught Chinkara antelopes. Aagina Khaskeli, another goatherd of the same locality related how a Harula had caught one of his young goats, when it wandered away towards some bushes, where the Caracal was lying in wait. According to him it made the final dash from about ten feet and caught the goat from its throat.

Nobody has ever seen or heard of the Sand Cat or the Pallas Cat in these areas. The Jungle Cat called JHANG JO BILLO, in Sindhi is still to be found in small numbers. We saw one from about 75 to 100 yards, which ran across our Jeep. We also saw some tracks, both fresh and old. These were mostly present in areas where there was some sort of grass, scrub or shrubbery. The fishing cat is also found in small numbers along the banks of the Kinjhar and Haleji Lakes in district Thatta and along the banks of the Manchar Lake, in district Dadu. These are unfortunately shot or trapped for their skins, which are sold in Karachi. The reasons for the absence or reduction in numbers of the Caracal are not clear to me. As only three or four years ago it was very common to see one or two in a days trip, especially in the Bolari, Jungshahi and Jhimpur plains (Marked No. 3 on the map).

PHASE 4 24th. October

We left Soda Khan's village on the morning of the 24th. at 6 AM, reached Karachi at 8 AM. We waited for the shops to open, as there were still some things left to buy. We left for Hingol via, Hub Chowki, Zero point and reached Lyari at 4 PM. There was a sign displayed at a point from where the new Coastal highway is going to start. It said: Hingol 110 kms, Ormara 235 kms, Pasni 432 kms, Gawadar 520 kms and Jiwani 640 kms. All this information proved to be incorrect later on. The distances were actually much more. We could not travel at speeds of more than 15-20 km/hr due to the terrible condition of the track.

The first impression on entering this plain with the Hara range one one side, and a semi-desert terrain, which extends right to the coast, on the other is that this is some Savannah land in Africa, and we are about to see all sorts of plains game including Lions, Cheetahs, Leopards, etc. But alas, the Gazelles have disappeared and so have the Cheetahs.

We stopped at a wayside tea shack in the Hara plain at a distance of 42 kms from Lyari (Marked No. 4 on the map, Figure 1), at 6:15 PM. This shack was owned by Abdul Rahim Angario. He strangely enough speaks Urdu, Sindhi and Balochi also. This is the southern side of the Hara range and Plain, called Hara Nakhati. He lives in Kund. He has never seen the Cheetah but has heard from his elders and Shikaris about it. He was able to describe the Cheetah in detail without having looked at the photographs. He also described the habits and methods of hunting of the Cheetah. He immediately recognized the tracks of the Leopard, from photographs, and related how he had seen fresh pug marks in a ravine in the mountain behind his house. He claims to have seen them in the month of July near a water point.

According to him there are a few Leopards surviving in the Hara, which live off the Ibex, Urial and domestic livestock. He says that as long as prey is available, these Leopards do not attack or destroy domestic animals. The few people that we met there, told us that now one could hope to see one or two Chinkaras in a day, and those also in the foothills or Ravines of the Hara range. The Leopard here is called CHITTOO and POULANG both. The first is a Sindhi word and the second a Balochi.

Abdul Rahim described a Caracal in detail, which he had seen from very close, about 10 to 12 years ago. He said it was buff brown in colour, bigger than an ordinary cat, had longer ears, had hair on its ear tips, and tracks that look like those of a leopard except, that they are smaller. Kills small goats in pens also. Was eating a young chinkara when he saw it. He also said that it hunts and seeks its prey at night. He was calling it by the Sindhi name Harula. He mentioned an old Shikari, Ayoob who lives at a distance of 10 to 12 kms from his shack. Another hunter he mentioned was Dad. Both these hunters were supposed to have killed numerous Leopards in their time. Maybe some of these were Cheetahs. The sole motive in killing these predators was for their skins, which were sold in Karachi for a few hundred rupees.

We failed to make it to Hingol National Park that same day, because of numerous tyre punctures. We halted for the night at the bank of the Phor stream (Marked No. 5 on the map). Next morning we left for Hingol at 6:30 AM. After travelling for 20 to 25 kms, we stopped at Sangar, at a wayside shop/hotel owned by an old hunter, named Hasan. He is a very experienced and knowledgeable person. He was confused between the tracks of the Leopard and the Cheetah, but insisted that he had seen the Cheetah about 25 yrs ago under the Dandel Mountain. Now he is about 75 years old. Claims to have shot many Leopards in his younger days, with a muzzleloader. Says that the Cheetah was taller in the legs, had a small head and ran very fast. It would run after its prey to catch it whereas the Leopard was shorter, bulkier and would ambush its prey.

While we were showing the photographs, an onlooker (Very old man), named Moula Bux, on seeing the photograph of the Cheetah, immediately said that it was a HONZ, the Baluchi name for the Cheetah. On enquiring from him how he recognized it, he said that he had seen a number of them in his younger days in the Saput plain and the Hara plain. He was able to clearly differentiate between the pugmarks of the Leopard and the Cheetah. He has never seen a Cheetah female with cubs, but claims to have seen female Leopards twice, with two cubs each. He also described the PHUL GOSH, the Balochi name for the Caracal, perfectly, although hasn't seen one recently. Says that there are very few Chinkaras now in Saput and Pachani. Says the Honz is an animal, which is faster than a SHAHIN, *Falco perigrinus* (Peregrine Falcon). Last Cheetahs he saw were about 30 years ago. Has never seen a Sand Cat, Manul or a Goitered Gazelle.

PHASE 5 25th. 26th. 27th. 28th. October

We managed to reach Hingol in the afternoon, and established camp near a water point along the bank of the Hingol River (Marked No. 6 on the map). We stayed in Hingol from the 25th till the 29th. The members of our team during this period were assigned different areas to survey. Three four people each would go into pre selected areas in vehicles, and the more physically fit would hike into the mountains, namely Capt Nadir, Shafi, Afzal Ranjha, Yaqub and one local guide, Badal and tracker, Rasool Bux. The vehicles would go into the plains around Hingol, one being led by Maj Tanvir and the other by myself. Noku would accompany one Jeep and Soda Khan, the other.

On one occasion, we took all three Jeeps and managed to get to the Harian Plain, where I years ago had seen Chinkara Gazelles in the hundreds. This we were able to accomplish by travelling in the dried up bed of the Hingol River and later going into smaller streams. The

last 5 or 6 kms. were covered on foot. We saw three gazelles during that time, but it was obvious that the numbers had declined rapidly in the last fifteen years. From the tracks that we saw there, our estimate was that now there were no more than 25 to 30 gazelle in that area. This population, in my opinion would not be sufficient to sustain a Cheetah.

Noku was of the view that there were 55 to 60 Chinkaras still there. Haarian is the place where most of the Cheetah sightings were reported from. This was the same place where I had seen Cheetah tracks in 1976, and signs of two kills in 1980-81. The presence of the Cheetah must have been so strong that even today everyone recognizes this name including children aged 8 to 10. We interviewed a number of people who had seen the Cheetah and would describe it in detail. They could differentiate between the photographs of the Leopard and the Cheetah. Some of them would immediately recognize the pug marks, especially the old timers. The younger interviewees would sometimes confuse it with the tracks of a Hyena, because of the claw marks left by both. The Baluchi (language spoken in this area) name for the Cheetah is HONZ or HOONZ. The name for the Leopard is POLANG or POULANG.

The name for the Hyena is AAPTAR or AAFTAR. The name for the Wolf is GURK.

In all about 27 people were interviewed in the Hingol area and conversations regarding wildlife were held with numerous other locals. Everybody was of the view that the last sightings of cheetah were 15 to 20 years ago. We could not get a piece of skin or bones.

According to the locals, the skins of any cats shot by them were sold in Karachi. One person narrated how he had spent 4 days in travelling to Karachi to sell two skins, one of a Cheetah and the other of a Leopard, which he sold for a paltry sum of 550 rupees (\$10).

There have been no rains in the whole of Baluchistan in the last four years. Most of the water points have dried up. Water is only available in the Hingol River and that also in the few deep depressions in the bed of the river. This is where the few surviving Crocodiles are to be found. The Crocodile is called WAGHOO.

We saw some Ibex called BUZ for a female and PACHIN for a male, on the mountains that we climbed, but they too were in very poor condition. There were no Leopards in any of these mountain ranges. We did not see a single track, nor did we receive any reports of sightings or signs from the locals. The last authentic sighting was three years ago, by a Park ranger, when he was accompanying some wildlife official in the Nani Mountain. These are the same Mountains that were full of Leopards till the late eighties.

Another strange phenomenon was that there was a total absence of any other members of the Cat species. The Caracal, which is called PHUL GOSH (Phul means Flower and Gosh means ear) and the Jungle cat called FISHIE or GURBA , in the local language are both missing in these areas, although there was a strong presence here of both these species, till very recently. We did not see any signs or tracks in the mountains, plains, valleys or the riverbeds and streams. The locals could not offer any explanation for their disappearance. The Sand Cat and the Manul are not known here. But there were reports of some Fishing cats from near the river and the marsh areas along the coast.

There is a mountain, alongside the Haarian Plain, towards the north east of Hingol, which has not been climbed so far because of its unusual formation. This is called GORAN GUTT . Because of its inaccessibility, it is supposed to be full of Ibex and Urial (Mountain Sheep), locally called GADD. Locals belonging to areas near that mountain claim to have seen Leopards in its ravines and nullahs. They also offered to take us there but it would have entailed a journey of three days on Camel back. Therefore we declined their offer. This is one place which should be investigated thoroughly and in detail at some later date. As far as I know, no one has been on top of this mountain. We also went and camped there for four days in the eighties, but failed to locate a route that would take us to the top. The only possible way to get onto the top would be by Helicopter. I am sure that whatever few animals are found on

the mountains surrounding Goran Gutt, basically are the result of the overflow from this safe haven.

Pir Bux of Sangar and Mohammed Khan of Nani were two others that came to our camp. They were bringing Phish (Local name for the dwarf palm) from Dandel. They said that before Hingol became a National Park, someone from their area shot a Leopard, which had killed his goats. They did not see the Leopard, but saw the skin. Know of the Cheetah and the Caracal, but cannot recognize them from photographs, or the pugmarks. Made positive identification of the Leopard, and its pugmarks, but say that now there is none in the immediate vicinity.

Noku, who is one of the most experienced and knowledgeable guide/shikaris of this area, stayed with us throughout the Hingol Ormara area. He is also employed by the Wildlife department as a game watcher. He says there was the Leopard in the mountains and the Cheetahs in the plains. He claims to have seen Cheetah in Haarian about 15 to 20 years ago, the last time. He says, as a young man he once saw a female with four cubs. He is about 70 years old now. He talks of the speed of the animal. Says he once saw it catch an Ibex on one of the mountaintops, GARRI, which is flat at the top. He says this was the time when there were gazelles everywhere, but there are next to none now.

He hasn't seen Leopards recently. He says sometimes a loner strays into the National Park area. He saw tracks at Ali Al Qum (a water point on top of the Nani Mountain), 4 months ago in the summer, but hasn't seen tracks since. He reports a lot of human activity in the National Park. Hasn't seen a Caracal for quite some time. Hasn't seen or heard of the Sand Cat or the Manul. Only saw Goitered Gazelle once, when the Late Jam of Lasbela, shot a pair, near the Ras Malan area. The Jam told him that he had shot a number of these near the Iranian border, in the sixties. According to his estimate, there are 250 to 300 Ibex in the NP area and about 25 to 30 Urials.

Qamru, was another source of information, but was given to exaggerating things a bit. He says that he saw a number of Cheetahs and Leopards in his days. Says the Cheetah is very dangerous to humans. His account of how his Camel was attacked and killed by one, seemed rather untrue. However, he recognized the tracks of the Cheetah and the Leopard immediately. Gave good, detailed and accurate descriptions of both. Has definitely seen the two species. Says last time he saw a Cheetah was near Maneji, about 20 years ago. Claims to have seen Leopard last year in one of the Goran Gutt ravines. Also says that there are many there. Has never seen a Caracal, nor the Sand Cat or the Manul.

Badal of Dandel, is another young guide and hunter of this area. He too is a game watcher. Has never seen Cheetah. Knows of it from his father who lived and grazed his goats near Haarian. Went with Mr. Gul Mohammed to show him a Leopard, which had taken residence in Nani, about three years ago. They were able to spot it but Gul Mohammed could not take photographs. He also says that there are Chinkaras in Haarian, but not as much as they used to be. Never seen Goittered gazelle. Never seen Caracal. When asked whether goatherds had reported any Leopard track recently in the NP area, we were told that goat and sheep grazing are banned there. But strangely enough there is a great amount of human activity going on there. Buildings are being constructed, generators are being run and vehicles are plying to and fro.

No presence of Hyenas or Wolves was observed or reported. No damage to livestock reported, except by two crocodiles near the Coast guard camp.

We also interviewed the local Coast guard commander, Captain Afsar Shah, who is a keen sportsman and knows his area very well. He has never seen any big or medium sized cats during his posting here. He has seen the Fishing Cat three or four times along the banks of the Hingol River. He warned us to be careful of the Sand Fly, which is very common in this area. He says that he patrols his area regularly, but has only seen Chinkaras two or three times in

Sapat. According to him a lot of hunting takes place inside the NP, with the connivance of the game watchers and their bosses.

A party headed by Capt. Nadir went up the Nani Mountain. They saw 3 Ibex in one place and 2 more in another. They saw a number of Ibex tracks near the water point, Ali Al Qum. They also saw a full grown dead male near the water point. The watchers said that it had died of drinking too much water, but our team members were able to find a small calibre bullet hole in the stomach. Possibly a .22 rifle bullet.

Strangely enough, no tracks of Jackals, fox, or any other Cat species were observed during this 11-hour trip.

Another party headed by Maj. Tanvir had gone into the nullahs and ravines to look for any signs of wildlife. They too did not turn up anything.

Ali son of Babu, a Jamadar in the local levies narrated how the shoots for the Jam Sahib were arranged. Animals from all over would be driven into mountains, which were blocked from all sides. These drives would sometimes last for several days. When the animals were finally trapped, the Jam along with his guest would sit at the exit point and shoot. The bags would sometimes exceed a hundred animals. I asked him if Leopards, which were very common then were also shot? He said that very rarely. Normally the Leopards would hide in caves and not expose themselves. This was all the area of the Lasbela State, ruled by the Jam Sahib.

Qadu a resident of Haddi claims that the biggest concentration of Gazelles is still in the plains of Haarian, Dalui and Kuli. All these are joined together with small streams separating them. He thinks the population of Gazelles in these three is above 60.

He says the Cheetah exists no longer. The Leopard is also very rare.

Khuda Bux claims to be above a hundred years of age. Remembers the 1st. World War and the 2nd. one also. Says the soldiers had to come round the Goran Gutt mountain as there was no Pass on the Buzi top. Says his goats used to be regularly eaten by Wolves, Hyenas, Leopards and Caracals. He says he owned 1500 goats. Has very weak eyesight and therefore cannot see photographs. Is full of stories of days gone by. Says he saw numerous Cheetahs and Leopards in his time. A number of times he saw Cheetahs make a kill. He described it in exact detail. He was also talking of the speed and agility of the Cheetah. Last time he saw one was thirty years ago. Since then he has grown old and does not go out much.

Once a Leopard killed his Camel, and they poisoned the kill. The Leopard was found three days later near a water hole, nearly dead. So they hacked it to pieces with axes.

The Chinkara gazelle is called SAAID, in Balochi.

We were taken to numerous places to see tracks, but these invariably turned out to be either dogs or jackals or fox tracks.

From all accounts the Cheetah is EXTINCT in this area. The Leopard is also ENDANGERED. Maybe there are a few still left in the Goran Gutt Mountain where ample prey is available, and there is no human activity. The Caracal, if not Extinct is certainly on the verge of extinction. The Sand Cat and the Manul have probably never existed here.

Disheartened and depressed, we left Hingol for Ormara the next morning, the 29th. of October 2000.

PHASE 6 29th. October ORMARA

We left Hingol, on the 29th. morning at 11 A.M for Ormara which is 140 Kms from here. We are still travelling in three Jeeps. The condition of the track is very very poor. It would be inadvisable to travel in anything other than a 4x4 vehicle. We have a trailer behind us, which is loaded to more than its maximum capacity(since we are carrying the luggage, bedding, tents, foodstuff, fuel, some water of all the 14 people of the team and the generator also). There are 7 people in my Jeep, 4 in Mr. Aziz's Jeep and 3 in Maj. Tanvir's Jeep. Ther are

some very steep climbs and hairpin bends before reaching the BUZI TOP. Our average speed has worked out to be 17 Kms. per hour.

As we left Hingol River and travelled about 4 Kms, we came to some very large valleys. There were numerous plains along the way. There is hardly any vegetation and no cultivation at all. A few Acacia trees could be seen, spread over the plains. The Mekran Coastal Range is on our right. First we come to the RAS MALAN Mountain (which slopes into the sea on its southern side, to our left). Here, Ibex are not common but we saw a few tracks of URIAL (MountainSheep). We did not see any signs of any other form of wildlife. Although, Leopards used to be quite common, in this part of the Coastal Range, in the past.

3 P.M, we are on top of the GOMAZI PASS (Buzi Top). It is a beautiful sight from here. You can see the GORAN GUTT mountain on the north western side in the far distance. The climb has finished and the route is now constantly sloping towards the Ormara plains. Right on the top of this pass, we saw the tracks of a lone Chinkara female. We don't know what it was doing on the top of the mountain. The tracks were made the previous night. We also saw the tracks of a lone Cat. These seemed to belong to the Jungle Cat. It must have been a resident as the tracks were regular and spread over a period of at least 4, 5 days.

After travelling for about 4 Kms, we saw an IBEX female with two young six, seven month old males. These were about 70 to 80 yards from us. They did not seem to be bothered and just stood there. It seemed that they were used to seeing vehicles passing by on this track.

Another 2 Kms. further, we came across four more Male Ibex. This time they were about 200 to 250 yards away. One of them was a big male with horns about 41 or 42 inches. These were standing under a ledge in the shade, as it was still quite hot. They also did not react much to the sight of our vehicles. We were wondering what their fate would be once the Coastal highway was opened, and the area more easily accessible to hunters. Later on we were informed that lately, there were regular parties of hunters coming to this area and hunting these magnificent animals from vehicles.

4 P.M, we are now about 55 Kms from Ormara but have still not cleared the mountain range. Another 15 Kms. further the terrain started changing and we emerged out of the mountain. The view was as though out of a story book. The area in front (eastern) and towards the right was open savannah land, with a few Acacia, Date Trees and some Dwarf Palms. On our left (southern), was the sea and further south east, one could see the Ormara Mountain itself, gently sloping into the sea (covered on three sides by the sea). On our immediate right (northern) was the foothills of the Coastal range extending right upto the Goran Gutt mountain.

This plain is called MANEJI, and used to be a famous spot for Chinkaras. Now there are hardly any. Later during our stay in Ormara, we came back to this spot, to investigate it thoroughly. We saw tracks of a single male Chinkara near the foothills towards the southern side. Closely following this Chinkara was a Caracal. These tracks were about two days old. We were able to take photographs also. Strangely enough, none of the locals had seen the Caracal.

We wanted to reach Ormara before dark, but got into Town at around 8 P.M (Marked No. 7 on the map). We drove straight to the Company H.Qs of the Coast Guards, where dinner had been prepared for us. Later we were taken to the Civil Rest House where we had been provided accomodation, by the Civil Adminstration. Ormara Town is a developing fishing village, with a population of about twelve to fifteen thousand people. It is also the Tehsil (County) H.Qs. It has recently seen a lot of activity because of the Naval base being established here, and also because of the upcoming Coastal Highway project.

Incidentally, this is the land route, which was followed by Alexander the Great on his return journey to Persia. He is supposed to have lost more than half of his Army in the desert, due to shortage of food, water and Malaria. The name of Ormara in those days was BAAGSIRA. He travelled from the Indus delta along the Coast, to Sonmiani, Hingol (Angkor, was the name of

one of Alexanders Generals, who died here), Ormara, Pasni, Gwadar and then onwards into Persia.

PHASE 7 30th. 31st. 1st. 2nd. & 3rd. November

We requested the Civil authorities and the Coast Guard officers to pass messages to the well known Guides/Hunters/Shikaris, that we wanted to see them. Some of these people were already known to us, as we had been told about them in Karachi and Hingol.

The first person to be interviewed was: Mir Dad Bux, Ex Chairman, Ormara: Son of Roudin Bizenjo. We had been told that he was a knowledgeable hunter who had once killed a Cheetah, a long time ago, and shown it to lots of people. We had to approach him with great care so as not to scare him off, for fear of prosecution. Once he was assured that we meant no harm, he was very frank and honest in his narration.

On being shown prints of Leopard and Cheetah tracks, he immediately recognized which one was which. He correctly pointed out the difference between the two. He says the Cheetah leaves claw marks in the ground and the Leopard does not. The claws of the HONZ are like those of a big dog. His exact words were, " The Honz has longer legs, is also longer in body length, but of slight built compared to the POULANG. They are very difficult to differentiate, because both have the same body colour. Spots are different". On being shown photographs, he made positive identification.

About how he had shot the Cheetah: " We were going to PASNI, and then onwards to TURBAT to perform the annual pilgrimage at the Shrine (we are Zigris). I had my entire family including small children with us. The family of Pir Daulat Shah of BASOL, was also with us. We were travelling in two vehicles. This is about 20 to 25 years ago, when there were hardly any vehicles. It used to take us two days to travel to Turbat, which is about 300 Kms from Ormara. After crossing Basol (Marked No. 8 on the map), as we entered the Basol Nadi (river), I saw two Poulangs crouching behind a mound on the far side of the Nadi. They seemed to be concentrating (looking) at 6 or 7 small calves, which were grazing in a flat area about 60 to 70 yards away. I thought that these must be the same Poulang, which had attacked and injured a village woman of Basol, in the Mountain a few days earlier. These animals had probably never seen a vehicle before and just stood there watching us. I aimed and fired at one of them with my .303 Enfield. It was hit and we saw the other one running away at great speed, in the distance. The bullet had broken the spine and the animal in its agony was biting at stones, plants and shrubs. I circled it and approaching very near, shot it in the head to put it out of its misery. I am a hunter and one of my principles is that no animal should suffer unnecessarily. I saw that it was a bigger Poulang than any, that I had shot so far. On closely examining it I realized that it was somehow different. It was a male, longer in the body and had longer legs. Meanwhile the other vehicle also arrived and Ghulam Mohammed was in it. At that time he was one of the best Shikaris (now he is dead), he said you have shot a Honz. I told him that I had never seen one before. He said that since I had only hunted in the Mountains for Poulang, Ibex and Uriel, I had not seen this animal, because this animal is mostly found in the plains. We skinned it and I showed the skin to a number of people who confirmed that it was a Honz. I later sold the skin along with two Poulang skins in Karachi for 700 rupees. This was a lot of money for me then".

"Only once later about 15 to 20 years ago I saw a Honz again, in the plain at the foothills of the TULLO mountain. I saw it from 100 to 150 yds. He ran away either because he smelt us or saw us. No I did not take a shot because I knew that it was not a Poulang. I have never seen Honz since that time. The Tullo mountain is joined with Goran Gutt and the Haarian plain. The animals from one cross into the other very often. No I have never been on top of the Goran Gutt mountain, but people say that there are still a number of animals there including Poulang. Poulang will be there because there is food for it in abundance in that mountain".

"No, I have not seen these PHISHIE (cats) in these parts (On being shown photographs of Manul, Sand Cat, Jungle Cat) in these parts. Yes, I know that this is a PHUL GOSH (Caracal). Although it is not seen now, but this used to be fairly common. It hunted rabbits, birds, mice, young Gazzelles and sometimes killed domestic goats also. I think these things have disappeared due to there being nothing for them to eat".

"Poulang was so common that there was one male in this very Mountain (Ormara) that you see in front of you, till as recently as 7,8 years ago. There used to be a lot of Ibex and rabbits in this mountain. The rabbits and the Ibex were hunted to extinction and therefore the Poulang died of hunger. He was discovered in a ravine one day and its body brought to town. Some say that it had fallen off a cliff while chasing Ibex, but I know it died of hunger".

"There are no Poulang anywhere except in Goran Gutt, sometimes there is report of a Poulang seen in Tullo, which has probably strayed from Goran Gutt or is looking for a mate. They call frequently when looking for a mate. Ibex and Urial are fast disappearing. No there are no more GURKS (Wolves) and hardly any AAPTAR (Hyena). AASIK (Gazzeles) have become very rare, there were hundreds in the past. The Motors, Motor Cycles and the Spotlight have greatly contributed to their decimation. There are a few WAGHUS (Crocodiles), where there is water".

It is to be noted that Gazzelle here is called 'Aasik', whereas it was called 'Saad' in the Hingol area.

Hasan Baluch of GORAT KI DAAT, North western side of the coastal range.

"I am a livestock owner and mostly graze my goats in the plains and sometimes in the mountains, depending on where there is grass. We have the Fox, the Jackall, some cats, 3 or 4 Aasik(Gazzelles), some rabbits, and Ibex and Urial in the mountains, in my area. I sometimes act as a guide for hunters also. There are a few, maybe 2 or 3 Poulangs in the mountain behind me (Eastern end of the Goran Gutt).

The most common Phishie (Cat) is this one (Jungle Cat). No I haven't seen Phul Gosh (Caracal) for a long time, although these used to be fairly common.

This is a Honz (upon seeing the photographs of the Cheetah). I have seen a number of them in the past. No, they did no harm to my livestock normally. I only lost one goat to them, which had strayed too far from me. Yes I have lost a considerable number to Poulangs, especially in the mountains. The Polang usually hunts at night.

The Honz hunted Aasik, rabbits and sometimes caught an Urial in the lower hills. I have never seen an Ibex kill made by a Honz.

This is the track of a Poulang, and this is the track of a Honz (made clear identification of the rear and front tracks).

The Poulang holds his head low when walking but the Honz holds his head high when walking. The Honz usually trots, whereas the Poulang walks. The Honz is very fast, like lightning. I haven't seen Honz in the last 20 years. I do not know where they have gone. I can show you fresh tracks of Poulang whenever you want to, in the mountain. I saw a Poulang about a year ago. Compared to the past there is hardly any wildlife left".

A lot of people came to see us during our stay in Ormara. Most of them had the same story to tell. We interviewed about 20 people besides gathering information from anybody that we came across.

We went to MAL, which is about 40 Kms. from Ormara, to see the area for ourselves, and also to meet Faqir Khuda Bux, who had shot quite a few Cheetahs and Leopards. He is the same fellow who reportedly saw the Cheetah female with three cubs. The Mal area is a flat open plains area and used to be full of Gazzelles in the past. It also has a number of small streams and small low hillocks, interspersed with sand dunes. Faqir Khuda Bux is about 85 years of age now, but fit as a fiddle, with a very sharp mind and very shrewd. He is also a very respected elder of his area who still acts as a hunting guide to parties, that come to his area. His Tribal Chiefs are the Deedaks, and we had been referred to him by Nawab Deedak.

Therefore, once he was sure of our credentials, although cautious in his statements; he turned out to be full of information and interesting stories.

The account he gave is as follows:

"I have seen and hunted a lot of animals in my days. There were a number of animals in the past, but now there is hardly anything left. Now mostly the animals will be found on the other side of the Tullo Mountain. There are a few Poulangs in Tullo also. This is the track of a Poulang (on being shown Photographs of Leopard tracks). This is also Poulang, no maybe this is Honz (on being shown photographs of Cheetah tracks). Yes I know Honz, I have seen plenty in my time. I have shot a number of Poulangs, (very reluctantly) I only shot two Honz in my lifetime. The Honz was common in our area of Mal, Basol and the plains around Ormara. It was also common beyond our area towards Pasni. I was told by hunters from Turbat and Panjgur in those days, that it was common in their areas also. It was found where ever there were Aasik (Gazzelles)".

About how he shot the first of the two Cheetahs:

"A Honz had been preying on domestic goats in our area about 30 years ago (Marked No. 8 on the map). Normally they do not molest domestic livestock, but since there had been no rains in our area therefore there was a shortage of the natural prey. The people of my village approached me to rid them of this menace. I was on the lookout for this Honz. It was the winter months when I came across fresh tracks and started following them. The Honz was travelling upwind from me. After about 2 Kms, I came upon it in a clump of Dwarf palms in a dried up river bed. I managed to get to within 25 yds of it before he saw me and was about to run when I fired with my shotgun loaded with S.G pellets. It dropped there. I left it there, and came back to the village. We went back and skinned it. It was a pregnant female with 4 unborn kittens, the size of small mice inside it".

About the second of the two:

"Some friends had come from Turbat and Pir Daulat Shah's father, who was the Pir (Spiritual leader) then, had asked me to take them for shooting Aasik. We were hunting on a Jeep with the spotlight, in an area beyond Basol near MAKOLA (Marked No. 9 on the map). I was behind the driver, guiding him. We saw eyes brightly shining in the spotlight and drove towards them to see what it was. On approaching we saw that it was a large cat. The fellow hunters were afraid and said it was a Poulang, but I told them that it was Honz. It was only 30 to 35 yards away and clearly visible. I took the rifle from one of them and shot it through the heart. It was a male. We skinned it in the morning, and my friends took the skin with them to Turbat. It was very big".

About Poulangs and Honz that he has seen:

"I once saw a Honz female with three cubs that were running along with her. They were almost half the size of their mother. I saw them under the Tullo Mountain about 18 to 20 years ago. I saw a number of other Honz in the plains. I have twice seen Poulang females with their young. Once there were two small cubs and the other time there was a lone cub".

Description:

"The Honz is much faster compared to the Poulang. It races after its prey and catches it and brings it to the ground, the Poulang hides, crouches and sneaks upto its prey and then springs on it. The colour of both is the same. It takes somebody with a lot of experience to differentiate between the two. The Poulang has a much bigger head than the Honz. It (Honz) is longer in body length than Poulang. The belly of the Honz is tucked up like a Greyhound, but the belly of the Poulang is thick. The Honz mostly hunts Aasik in the plains and sometimes catches a hare, but the Poulang kills domestic livestock, Ibex and Urial; mostly in the mountains".

About other wildlife:

" There has been a great decline in the numbers of all the species. The Honz has dissappeared, the Poulang is only 10% of what it was, there are hardly any Aasik left, the Ibex and Uriel are very few. There are no GURK (Wolves), hardly any AAPTAAR (Hyena), and very few Rabbits. No I haven't seen Phul Gosh recently (made positive identification from photographs, and described it in detail). They used to be quite common. No I have never seen these two (when shown photographs of Manul and Sand Cat). I have recently seen (three months ago), pug marks of Poulang near Gorat, which is joined with Goran Gutt".

It is obvious from the comments and observations of these three abovementioned Guides/Hunters that:

- 1, The Cheetah existed in all the plains in and around Ormara.
- 2, That it is extinct now since the last 15 to 20 years.
- 3, The numbers of Leopards has declined considerably.
- 4, The Leopard is certainly endangered.
- 5, There are a few Leopards remaining in and around the Goran Gutt Mountain.
- 6, The Caracal is on the verge of extinction in this area, although there is no obvious reason. Maybe this is also prey related.
- 7, The Sand Cat and the Manul probably never existed here.
- 8, The overall situation of wildlife is rapidly deteriorating.
- 9, Even now, there is no preservation or conservation plan or effort being made.
- 10, The Goran Gutt Mountain and adjoining areas have to be studied in detail, and some sort of plans made and implemented to save the wildlife there. Especially the few remaining Leopards.

Badal Bux Son of Kauda Haji. Fisheries Officer, Ormara. District Gawadar. Age About 55 years.

He is a very knowledgeable gentleman, whose special intrest is in Birds and Marine Life. He is the local expert on Green Turtles. He probably knows more than a few so called experts put together. A very practical, self-educated fellow. He is well aware of the happenings and events that take place around him.

" In my younger days it was a common sight to see 4 or 5 or 6 Gazzelles together just outside Ormara. There were no Motorcycles or other vehicles. We did not know of the searchlight then. There were so many that one could have shot maybe 20 or 30 in a day. The severe drought in the last 4, 5 years has also contributed to the decline in their numbers. The Arabs come here for hunting Houbara with their Falcons, but they shoot everything that they see. They have a lot of weapons, equipment and transport. Nobody ever checks them, they have permission from the centre, Islamabad".

" There is an Island, called ESTOLA IN LINE, about 4 hrs. journey by launch from here. Most of the local birds lay their eggs there. It is 6 Kms. by 3 Kms. in size. Now some people have made small huts there for the purposes of fishing. They have taken domestic cats with them and let them loose. They have caused great damage, especially to chicks in the breeding season".

" I have heard of the Honz, but never seen one. There was a Poulang right in this Ormara mountain, till about 8 or 9 years ago. At that time there were Ibex here also. We used to hear it calling at evening time right in the Bazaar. He lived here for 3, 4 years. One day someone discovered its decomposed body in a ravine. They say it had fallen off a cliff while chasing an Ibex. I do get reports about Poulang from the mountains, from Shepards who graze their goats there. I saw a Phul Gosh once at nighttime when we were hunting Gazzelles in Maneji about three years ago. No, I have not seen it after that. No I have not seen these other species".

During our stay in Ormara, half the day was spent in surveying different plains in the 40 to 50 Kms. circle. The whole area would have been ideal for the Cheetah, with plains streams, small hillocks, sand dunes and mud flats. There is hardly any cultivation and very little vegetative growth, probably due to no rainfall in the last four or five years.

What was surprising was that throughout our survey of this area, we did not see the tracks of any species of Cats, except the tracks of the lone Caracal (mentioned earlier) in the Maneji plain.

One party headed by Afzal Ranjha spent the entire day from sun up to sunset in the lower part of the Buzi top, without seeing any signs of Cats. They saw Ibex at three different places. Captain Nadir and Mr. Farhan, took the flight from Ormara to Karachi on 4/11/ '00. Captain Nadir was to take a flight to Quetta where he is an Instructor in the Infantry School, and Mr. Farhan was supposed to fly to Lahore. Captain Nadir had to report back on the 5th. but Mr. Farhan seemed to be plain homesick (or maybe he had not spent so much time in the outdoors, and was simply tired of the whole thing).

We left Ormara on the morning of the 4th. of November, at 7 A.M, for Pasni.

PHASE 8 4th. 5th. November PASNI

This is the 4th. of November, we are on our way to PASNI (Marked No. 11 on the map), another Coastal (Fishing) town. The approximate distance is 160 Kms. The condition of the track hasn't improved, in fact has got worse. We have travelled almost along the coast, with the Sea on our left (south). The Mekran Coastal range is still continuing along our right, although the height is somewhat considerably less. The terrain has not changed much, it has been the same after entering the plains of Maneji (Ormara). We have skirted the Mal plain (home of Faqir Khuda Bux), and have crossed the Basol Plain and the Basol River from its center. One of the Jeeps is giving engine trouble.

11 A.M, we are now about 55 Kms from Ormara. Here the terrain has changed to quite some extent. We are crossing a desert now. It starts from the foothills of the Coastal Range and goes right upto the Sea. It is about 12 Kms in breadth and about 25 Kms. in length. There is very little vegetation in it. Probably if it were to rain, it might be green all over. There are some species of grasses whose seeds lie dormant for long periods of time and they start growing with the first good rain.

Another surprise in this dry arid area was a Cobra, that we came across at about 10:30 in the morning. We were able to take photographs from real close.

We have just crossed some sort of settlement, which is about 4 Kms, from the track. This was apparent from the number of shade trees in an otherwise bare area, devoid of anything other than a solitary Acacia or Date tree. It seems that when there were rains, some of this area must have been cultivated.

We have neither seen, or observed any signs of wildlife.

1 P.M, we are at MAKOLA, which is about 80 Kms. from Ormara and the same distance from Pasni. This is a T junction and a track goes to TURBAT from here. We have sat down at a wayside Shack, and had our lunch here. We have talked to 5 or 6 people about wildlife, but none of them have come up with anything worth mentioning. Most of them talk of days gone by, especially Gazelles and how these have been hunted to extinction. Two of them, talked about the presence of one or two Leopards in the mountains behind the Coastal range, four five years ago. They had not seen any of the Cats that we mentioned.

3 P.M, we are only about 60 Kms from Pasni. We are now crossing a different type of terrain. This has small hillocks, and solitary hills with small plains interspersed with numerous streams. There is more greenery here than in any area that we have travelled through. Maybe there was some isolated rain here or the soil has more water retention properties. We came across a party of five people who were coming on Camels from the mountainside (Marked No. 10). They were carrying PHISH (Dwarf Palm), which they had cut and collected in the past several days (Phish is used in making Mats, Ropes and Sandals).

We engaged them in conversation after providing them with some freshly brewed tea. They told us that they lived in the mountains and were now taking this Phish to the market in Pasni. Their entire life had been spent in the wild. They told us that all this area used to be full of Gazelles, and the Mountains had plenty of Ibex and Wild Sheep in them. There were Leopards in the Mountains for as long as there was game. Sometimes these leopards killed their domestic animals also, but mostly these are left unmolested. Other than excessive hunting, they have no explanation for the disappearance of these animals. They were able to recognize the Leopard, the Caracal and the Jungle cat from the photographs we showed them. They have not seen the Leopard and the Caracal in the last five years, but claim to see the Jungle cat even now. According to their leader, Rouzan, they see the Jungle cat along the banks of a certain stream which passes close to their place of residence. They have not seen the young of these Cats. They are not as many as they used to be.

5 P.M, we are at the turning to Pasni, which is about 20 Kms. from here. There is a big River on our right, heading South towards the Sea. There is water in some spots still. The banks on both sides have dense growth of small bushes and shrubs. There is some grass also. The riverbed has a lot of Dwarf Palm growing in it.

6 P.M, we have arrived in PASNI (Marked No. 11). We drove to the Wing H.Qs. of the Coast Guards, which is being commanded by a very fine officer, MAJOR KYANI . He has arranged for our stay at the Rest House. He is a very keen hunter and full of knowledge about his area of responsibility. We have asked him to arrange for us to see all the old Guides/Shikaris of this area. Pasni is also a Fishing Town, and has a population of about 15,000 people.

PHASE 9 4th. 5th. November PASNI

Major Kyani sent a number of people to see us at the Rest House. Most of these people had hunted in this area in the past. Now since there was hardly anything in this region, these same Shikaris had been going to other areas. According to these people, game had declined everywhere. In the past there used to be Gazelles in abundance around Pasni. The majority of these Shikaris were unaware of the existence of the Cheetah, even in the past. Three people professed to know about it. They also said that it inhabited the plains between Ormara and Pasni. The last anyone of them had heard about it was thirty years ago. The Cheetah is called HONZ, here also.

All these Shikaris know about the Leopard, and recognized it from Photographs. Most of them had come across it in the mountains before Pasni (Coastal Range). The Leopard is called POULANG, here also. Now there are none. The few times these people have been to the mountains, they have not come across any signs or evidence to suggest the possible existence of these species any longer.

None of them had seen the Caracal since the last ten years. Most of them knew about it and some of them had seen it also. As far as the other species were concerned, they were only aware of the Jungle Cat. Some of them had seen it and some of them had not. The Manul or the Sand Cat had not been seen or heard of, by any one of them.

Major Kyani : " I am a keen Hunter and have hunted all over Pakistan. This is my third year in the Coast Guards. I am on deputation from the Army. I have spent almost two and a half years in the Coastal area, and have served at Hingol, Ormara and Gwadar. There isn't much to do here, therefore I have had ample time and opportunity to hunt in my area of command. I have shot Ibex, Urial, Gazelles and Crocodiles during this period. Right now the best spot for Ibex and Urial is the Gomazi Pass (Buzi top). People tell me that all game was available right in the Mountains nearby, but now there is hardly anything. There are no Gazelles in this part of the Coast. The Gazelles that I have shot have all been in the Ormara area. No, I have never seen the Goitried Gazelle. I Patrol my area regularly, in the daytime and at nighttime also".

" I have never seen any big Cats along the Coast. Yes, I know about the existence of the Cheetah in the past, in these areas. Old timers talked about it".

"Yes, I know what a Leopard looks like. I have seen **Snow Leopards during my posting in Siachen (Nortern Areas,along the Indo-Pak border)**. I have also seen photographs of the ordinary Leopard".

"Three or four times I have seen this Cat (Jungle Cat, when shown photographs), at night. Yes, these cats are in this region also. No, I have never seen the Caracal. No, I have never seen these two Cats either". (When shown photographs of the Manul and the Sand Cat)

Two parties in separate vehicles, went around the Pasni plains and River, to have a look at the terrain and meet some people. They returned in the evening without turning up anything of value or interest. We realized that we hadn't learnt anything new, or anything that we already were not aware of. Except that this area had also been denuded of it's wildlife. Therefore we agreed that it would be a waste of time, in prolonging our stay at Pasni, and decided to proceed further.

Uptill now, we had travelled along the proposed Coastal Highway; but from now onwards we would be travelling Northwards on different dirt tracks.

PHASE 10 6th. November TURBAT

6th. of November (my birthday), we have started from Pasni at 10 A.M and are on our way to **TURBAT** (Marked No. 12 on the map). It lies about 170 Kms. North of Pasni, and is one of the Divisional Headquarters of the Balochistan Province. The Headquarters of the Mekran Scouts is also located here. We have had to travel along the bank of a River throughout our journey. Sometimes the track decends into the center of the River bed. It would be impossible to travel on this track during, or immediately after rains. Pasni is almost at Sea level whereas Turbat is at an altitude of 2400 feet. Therefore without realizing that we were constantly ascending, we gained about 2,000 feet. There was a difference of about 5 degrees C, in temperature also. Human population is very thin, with very little cultivation. The main source of income is from livestock. There were large flocks of sheep and goats but these have been decimated due to the drought.

The area is mostly rocky and hilly. There are some very large plains along the way, with hardly any vegetative growth. The river bed has Dwarf Palms growing in it. From the number of domestic goats and sheep present in the area, it wouldn't be difficult to imagine these same plains being full of grass after the rains. At present the condition of the domestic livestock is extremely poor.

We haven't seen any wildlife during this journey. Even birds are scarce.

There are no tracks of any Cats, Fox or Jackall in the river bed.

This is quite a busy track, with lots of vehicles carrying passengers to and from Turbat, Pasni and Ormara.

We have stopped at four tea shacks to talk to people gathered there, from surrounding hutments and small villages. Most of them owned livestock and spent their time in the plains grazing their herds. The younger lot knows about the Gazelle, Ibex, Urial and the Leopard, but few if any are aware of the fact, that the Cheetah existed not so long ago, in this very area. The drivers of these vehicles, who obviously travel a lot in these areas, profess to having seen Gazelles sometimes at night. They also claim to have seen the Jungle Cat at night, a few times, especially near Turbat Town. **The older people all knew about the Cheetah, which they call HONZ, here also.** They also talked about the times, when game was plentiful and these same empty plains were full of Gazelles. These were times when hunters went after their prey on foot or on Camel back. With the arrival of vehicles, searchlights and modern weapons came destruction and gradual dissappearence of most game animals. No one in these areas has ever seen the Goittered gazelle.

Out of these 25 or 30 people that we talked to, along the way, two elderly persons, namely Jumah and Faizoo gave very authentic accounts of their experiences. Faizoo saw cheetahs mating, something biologists have rarely seen. Faizoo : " I live nearby and own a small piece of land that I cultivate, if there is rain. I also own some livestock. I am about 60 years of age. Poulang was common in our mountains. I saw them a number of times, when I was grazing my goats in the mountains. Sometimes we could hear one calling right in our house. They usually call at early morning time or evenings. No, I have never seen them with cubs. **I have seen something that few people have. I saw a pair mating once. First I thought that it was two Poulangs fighting amongst themselves, there was great noise, screaming and roaring. They were biting each other also.** I was behind a rock and froze in fright. Later on one of them mounted the other and remained in that position for a little while. Then they again started fighting and one of them ran away and the other followed it. It was 15 to 20 years ago when I saw Poulang for the last time".

" I saw Honz many a time in my younger days. About 25 years ago I saw a female, which **had four small cubs following it.** I was only a hundred yards away when I first saw them. When they became aware of my presence, the female called out to her cubs in short growls and dissapeared in the dwarf palm vegetation in a stream nearby (When asked to describe the sound that the female produced, he described something resembling a short, sharp yelp). No, the Honz is bigger and taller. It also makes different tracks, with its nails imprinted in the ground like a Jackall. No I have never heard of the Honz attacking humans. Gazelle were very common in this area and this was what the Honz hunted. **I haven't heard of the Honz now .** There are none left. Last time I saw tracks or a Honz was about 20 years ago. I know of some old hunters who used to shoot and trap both the Poulang and the Honz for their skin".

"This cat is no longer seen in our area (Caracal) and is called Phul Gosh. It was fairly common till about 10 years ago. I don't know the reason for it's dissappearence. Maybe there is nothing for them to eat. No, I hardly go out much nowadays, as I am too weak. I have never seen these two (Sand Cat and Manul). This one is still present along the banks of streams and near villages. It sometimes catches our chickens at night and sometimes pigeons (Jungle Cat)".

Jumah: " I am about 65 years of age and still graze my herd of goats and sheep. They have never been so thin as they are now. There has been no rain in the last 5 years. Yes, we have had dry years in the past also but never 5 years of zero rainfall ever. Immediately after rains I used to take my herds to the mountai areas and then brought them down to the plains later. I saw many POULANG (Leopards) in my time in the mountains. They were sometimes a source of trouble but most of the time they left my herds alone. There were plenty of Ibex and Urial to feed them. No, I haven't seen any Leopards now. No, not even tracks. The last time I saw a Leopard was about 12 years ago in the mountain that you see on your right (Mekran Range extension). It was a female with one young kitten. No, I never saw her afterwards. There are no Ibex or Urial in these mountains now".

"I have seen HONZ twice in the plains. It is taller and longer than the Poulang. It lives in the River bed, in Gullies and in depressions in the foothills, but hunts in the plains. No, it does not hunt Ibex or Urial. It hunts Gazelles, Rabbits and sometimes wild KHAR (wild donkey). Yes, we had some wild donkeys in the past also, now there are none. The donkey is very fast but the Honz is much faster. The first time I saw them there were two of them in the Plain you have just crossed. Later I saw their tracks very often in the same plain but never saw them. No, I never lost any animal to these Honz. One of my neighbour's goat was once killed by a Honz, a long time ago. The next time I saw a Honz was , when I was on my way to Pasni. About 10 Kms short of the crossing, as I came out of the River, **I saw a Honz about a 150 yards from me. It seemed as if the Honz was running zig-zag in the plain. He would run fast for a few yards, suddenly turn to the right or left and then run again. This lasted for**

about two or three minutes. Then I realized that he was chasing a rabbit, which he finally caught. When he saw me, he picked up the rabbit in his mouth and ran away towards a depression in the river. This was about twenty years ago. **No, I have never seen the Honz or its tracks since".** (Was able to make positive identification of the Leopard and the Cheetah from photographs. Also knew the difference between their tracks).

About other species, " **This one is also a small leopard, except that it has a uniform colour. This one did cause damage to our livestock sometimes, specially the young animals. This could also kill Gazelles. It was quite common in these parts. No, now there are hardly any.** I haven't seen one in the last 5 to 10 years (Caracal). There are some of these still here but not many (Jungle Cat). No, I haven't seen either of these ever (Manul and Sand Cat)".

The Leopard here is called Poulang, the Cheetah is called Honz, the Urial is called Garant, the Gazelle is called Aasik, the Ibex is called Buz, the Caracal is called Phul Gosh and the other smaller cats are called Phishie or Gurba in this area.

We reached Turbat at around 8:30 P.M. The condition of the track was very poor, therefore we could only maintain an average of 20 Kms per hour. Although we had some problems with the vehicles, we managed to arrive safely. We had numerous flats and lost two tyres also. One of the Jeeps (the one towing the trailer) broke its chassis frame and the other one broke a few leaf springs, and the third one had both its engine mounts broken. We drove into Turbat town and went straight to the Mekran Scouts Mess to meet the Commandant, who had arranged for our stay in some Government Hostel.

Phase 11 7th. 8th. 9th November TURBAT

The whole of next day was spent in having the Jeeps serviced and fixed up. Some of us went around to the Bazaar to purchase the required items, and also to pass around the word about our presence, and the purpose of our visit. This town has a population of about 40,000 people. The atmosphere is very relaxed. All sorts of Iranian goods are available freely. There are a number of Government buildings, like schools, hospitals and agriculture support offices; but no work seems to be done. Everyone seems to take life easy here. Turbat has numerous Date orchards around the town. There is an Airport here with daily flights to and from Karachi and Quetta.

We met the Commandant of the Mekran Scouts and have asked him to make arrangements for us to travel to Mand and other areas along the Iranian border. We have also requested him to ask his Wing Commander in Panjgur to arrange for our stay there also . **He has advised us to be very careful from now onwards as the region is one of the most dangerous and lawless in the province.** Mostly people travel in convoys. We have been forbidden to travel at night. We have also been told not to camp in the open, and only to stay at the Frontier Corps posts, along the way.

The morning of the 8th, we divided ourselves into two parties. One headed by Maj.Tanvir, left to survey the Mand area along the Pak/Iran border (marked as No. 14 on the map). The other one headed by myself, went to see some old hunters and guides on the eastern and western sides of Turbat (marked as No. 12 and 13 on the map).

The first party covered about 200 Kms and followed the Nivano, Wakai route while going to Mand and came back via the Kuhad, Nihing route on their way back to Turbat (marked as No.14 on the map). The area they went through was open plains area, with a few small mountain ranges. These were mostly rocky plains. They also passed through a desert with hardly any vegetation. They did not see any form of wildlife till they reached the border. Here they **saw fresh tracks of a pair of gazelles** . Other than this they did not see any wildlife or observe any tracks either.

Locals whom they met along the way or in Mand, all talked of the abundance of game in the days gone by. Most of them were familiar with the local names of the different wildlife

species which had been present in the past. Most people were familiar with the name Honz but none had been seen in the past 20 to 25 years. According to these locals, there were still a few gazelles to be found near the border because hunters avoided getting too near. No one had ever seen the Goitered gazelle. These locals were quite ignorant about the existence of other Cat species.

There were no reports of Cheetahs straying into the Pakistan side from Iran. The few locals who frequently made trips into Iran (to buy goods, mostly petrol and diesel to smuggle into Pakistan where there is a 400% profit margin), expressed ignorance about the existence of the Cheetah there also. **They talked of the presence of large numbers of gazelles and wild donkeys inside Iran.** This party had to camp near Mand and got back into Turbat quite late, the next day.

The others (including myself), went to see the surrounding areas of Turbat, including the plain where the Khan of Kalat's nephew was supposed to have shot a Cheetah, 30 or 35 years ago. First we crossed the main River and went to the Eastern side (marked No. 12 on the map), to see a hunting guide by the name of Mindoo. His village numbering about 600 people is at a distance of 25 Kms. from the town.

MINDOO is about 50 years of age, a professional guide and also owns some livestock. He is a very knowledgeable fellow, but has never seen the Cheetah. He knows about the hunting habits, what it looks like, how fast it is and the difference between a Leopard and the Cheetah. All this he has learnt from his elders. **This means that the presence of the Cheetah was common in this area also.**

Mindoo takes hunters to different areas for Gazelles, Urial and Ibex. He has seen Leopards in the mountains, but not in the recent past. According to him the numbers of all these animals has decreased, significantly. There are too many weapons, hunters and vehicles now. **He has not seen the Caracal, the Manul or the Sand Cat.** He has seen the Jungle Cat on a few occasions, at night, when they have been out hunting with the searchlight. He says that wolves and Hyenas were quite common, but they are nowhere to be seen now. He has never seen the Goitered gazelle. The other variety (*Gazella bennetti*), is not found in the Turbat area any longer and they have to travel to Ormara or the Iranian border to hunt it.

After we had finished interviewing him, we proceeded to the western side of Turbat (Marked No. 13 on the map), to meet another well known Guide and hunter, Hasan Shikari. He is an employee of the Baluchistan Levies Force, and lives about 25 Kms outside the town. Starting from the outskirts of the town, the plains extend right upto the Iranian border, interspersed with small, low hills. This is the same plain, where the Khan of Kalat's nephew (Abdul Ghafoor Khan), had reportedly shot a Cheetah in the late sixties or early seventies.

HASAN is in his mid sixties, and has spent most of his time grazing his livestock or hunting in the areas around Turbat. He has seen the Cheetah twice in the past.

The first time he saw a pair together. He was grazing goats in the river bed where there was plenty of grass. He saw them in the thick vegetation, running slowly and crouching, with their bellies touching the ground. They would stop and raise their heads to look at a lone Chinkara male, grazing in an open space on the other side of the river. The pair managed to reach within 60 to 70 yards of the gazelle before it became aware of their presence. The Cheetahs sprinted towards the Gazelle very fast and chased it for some distance before bringing it to the ground. **The hunting tactics of the pair reminded him of two greyhounds coursing a rabbit. One of them ran on one side of the Gazelle and as it turned to run towards the other side, the other Cheetah would cut him off.** According to him all this lasted a few seconds. He witnessed this scene from a distance starting from 50 to 300 yards. **This happened about 40 years ago.** All along he talked of the tremendous bursts of speed of the Honz.

The next time he saw one was 25 years ago, when he was travelling to Gawadur on a camel. This was a lone Cheetah which ran across his path and disappeared in a deep

depression 80 or 90 yards away from him. After 3 or 4 minutes he re-appeared on the other side of the depression, not running but sort of trotting. He got down from his camel to see its tracks, but does not know whether it was a male or female.

He has never seen them since. He has never seen their tracks also. No one has mentioned seeing one either. He was clearly able to differentiate between the tracks of the Cheetah and the Leopard. He also recognized both from their photographs.

He also talks of days gone by when there was game in plenty. He talks of a mountain where **there are still a few Leopards.** This mountain is at a distance of 75 Kms, North west of Turbat. According to him they prey on the few Ibex and Sheep there, but the **main prey is Donkeys.** They also kill rabbits and porcupines.

He has not seen Caracal recently. He has never seen the Sand cat or the Manul ever. There are a few Jungle cats near the Turbat town, which he has mostly seen at night.

The Cheetah is called **HONZ**, the Leopard is called **POULANG**, the Ibex is called **KOH PACHIN**, the Uriel is called **GARAANTH**, the Gazelle is called **AASIK** and **SAAID**, the Donkey is called **KHAR** and all smaller cats are called **PHISHIE** in this region.

There is hardly any wildlife in this area now. There are strong indications that it was very rich in game animals and birds in the past. The Leopard still exists in small numbers but is highly endangered. The Cheetah is extinct. It probably disappeared 20 years ago. There is no prey available any longer. The Caracal is probably extinct also. The Manul and the Sand Cat have never existed here. The Jungle cat is also uncommon and the few survivors are mostly to be found near towns and villages where they prey on rats, mice, domestic fowl and carrion. There are no reports of Gazelle seen anywhere. The numbers of Ibex and Uriel are very low. There is no Cheetah activity reported from the Iranian border which means that there are probably no Cheetahs in South Eastern Iran also.

PHASE 12 9th. & 10th. November

Afternoon of the 9th, we have decided to move on to Panjgur, with a night stop at Hoshab. The track is in a very bad state, and because of engine trouble, we have not been able to travel at a fast pace.

The area from Turbat to Panjgur is very different. Here there are very few open plains. The soil is also very different. It is mostly rocky. There are continuous small hills and mountains. The people we met at wayside shacks do not seem to know of the Cheetah, but certainly are familiar with the Leopard. They do talk of gazelles having been present in this area but no longer.

We have reached **HOSHAB** (Marked No. 15 on the map), at 5 P.M. This area is located at an altitude of about 4000 ft. The total distance travelled is 120 Kms. Hoshab is a small town located at an intersection, with one road going to Quetta, the other one to Awaran, the third one to Jhal Jao and the fourth to Turbat. We spent the night in an old British Mud Fort, which is now occupied by a Company of the Mekran Scouts. In the pre independence period this fort served as an outpost of the British forces deployed here. There is a chill in the air, especially at night.

We interviewed the local Post Commander and the Company Commander, Captain Changezi, who travel a lot in their area of command for the purposes of patrolling. There seems to be some sort of law and order problem in this particular region. Because of its unique location, it is also one of the main check points, for the prevention of smuggling from and to Iran.

According to these two officers, they have never seen much wildlife here. They are aware of the existence of a solitary Leopard, because they have received reports of its preying on domestic livestock from the local population. This Leopard is residing in a mountain range about 20 Kms distance from here. They do see a few rabbits sometimes but they have seen

Gazelle only once or twice. **They have never seen large Cats ever**. They have probably seen the Jungle Cat on two or three occasions. They could not recognize or identify the Caracal.

We haven't seen any wildlife.

We left Hoshab at 5 A.M the next morning for Panjgur. The weather here is different from what we have encountered in the past. It is more chilly and drier. The altitude is about 4000 ft. Our vehicles have been giving us a lot of trouble. We have had to stop frequently. It is very rough going. The vehicles should be in top class condition to be able to withstand the rigours of such a journey. It is 9:30 A.M, and we have stopped to have a cup of tea. We have travelled about 80 Kms. This is a wayside shack where people gather from the surrounding areas to exchange and pass on information and news. The area around us is mostly mountainous, with hardly any large plains. It is broken ground with frequent streams. All the streams that we have crossed are dry. There is almost zero vegetation in this area. **There are no signs of any wildlife anywhere. We haven't seen any tracks either.**

The people we have met **only know of the Leopard from amongst the Cat species**. Most of them have only heard about it but never seen one ever. **They do not know of the Cheetah having existed in these parts**. They are aware of the presence of the Ibex and Urial in the mountains but have **seldom seen any gazelle**. There seems to be hardly any hunting activity in this particular region.

We have reached **PANJGUR** (Marked No. 16 on the map) at 2:30 P.M. The total distance travelled from Hoshab to Panjgur was 170 Kms.

PHASE 13 11th. 12th. 13th. 14th. of November PANJGUR

Panjgur is one of the oldest towns of Baluchistan and the District HQs of the Mekran division. It is a large town spread out over a vast area in a valley surrounded by high mountains on three sides and plains extending right upto Iran on one side (western). Most of the houses are made of mud, whereas the Government offices seem to be of more recent and modern construction. The old British Fort in the town (also made of mud), now houses the Wing HQs of the Panjgur Scouts. There is an Airport with daily flights to most major cities. We have been provided accomodation in the Buildings & Roads Department Rest House, which is located on the outskirts of Panjgur town.

The general conditions are very bad due to the drought and people from all surrounding areas have poured into the town looking for help and aid. They are unable to sell off the livestock that they bring into town because of its poor condition. Most of them go back empty handed or finally manage to sell them off at 1/20th. of their actual value; for the simple reason that the animals are too weak to be able to walk back. Their main requirement is food. Apparently a lot of relief work seems to be in progress but actually the relief goods end up in the wrong hands, or in the market. The use of Narcotics is widespread and we came across a number of people using Marijuana, Heroin, Opium and other mood altering substances. Iranian goods are commonly sold here. We saw several vehicles with Iranian and Omanese registration plates. There is no modern Industry in this area nor did we observe any in the Turbat area. The little cultivation still taking place is possible due to the unique irrigation system of KAREZES, which are only found in this region. People here are generally peacefull and helpful. Most of the craftsmen, artisans, mechanics etc. have come from other provinces and settled here.

There are a number of sportsmen, hunters and guides in the town. We have been able to meet the majority and glean some usefull information from them. Most of them are familiar with most forms of wildlife and talk of the abundance of game in the days gone by. According to them the plains on the western side of Panjgur were full of Gazelles, Donkeys and Hares. This is where the Honz was found till as recently as the early seventies. The Leopard was more common in the Mountains on the North eastern side of Panjgur, where Ibex and Urial were plentiful in the hilly areas and Gazelle were found in the valleys. Everyone that we talked to

was aware of the existence of the Cheetah in the past. An old timer **RASOOL BUX** , resident of Panjgur claimed to have seen Honz on a number of occasions during his hunts.

" Saaid (Gazelle) were found in large numbers just outside the town, especially on the track to Qila Khudabadan and Gwargo. I have hunted just everything that is found in our area, but since hunting Gazelles was easier, this was my favourite. I used to hunt from Camel back or on foot. When I became old I started hunting from the Motor bike and the Jeep. My son who owns a motorbike, would drive it and I would sit behind him with my shot gun. The Gazelle would not run away and we could get to quite close. Later when the Gazelle started getting wary, I would ask my son to drop me behind a large bush downwind from the animals. He would then make a detour to get behind them and drive them towards me. Most of the time this worked."

" Wherever there were Saaid there was the Honz too. I came across the Honz a number of times during these trips. I have seen a single Honz, a pair of them and once or twice I have seen three together also. No I have never shot one. I have seen their tracks a number of times. These are different from those of a Leopard (Was able to identify both, immediately from photographs).

I have seen Honz from very close. One of my Tribal Chiefs had a young cub brought to him by a sheperd. The Chief (Hamidullah Gichki) raised this cub on milk and later fed him meat also. He grew up into a full sized Honz and was kept chained like a dog in his courtyard. A lot of people used to go and see him. No he never hurt anyone. He was very friendly. Some of the people who saw the Honz are still around. Sometimes he would get loose and catch a chicken in the courtyard. This was later presented to **Mir Yar Mohammed Rind's** father. This was in the mid-sixties."

"The Honz is no longer present in our area. Last time I saw one was about 25 years ago.

No other guide or hunter has ever mentioned the presence of the Honz now."

"The spots on the coat of the Honz are different from that of the Poulang. It is taller and longer in body length. The head of the Honz is small. It is the fastest animal that I have ever seen. It mostly hunted Gazelles but sometimes it caught Hares and sometimes Donkeys. I do not know where these Honz have gone, maybe there was nothing for them to eat any more. There is nothing for humans, what will happen to the animals?"

" Others have told me that there are still a few Leopards in the mountains of our area. I haven't been to the mountains recently therefore I am not sure whether this is true or not. No one has reported the loss of their domestic livestock in the last 6 or 7 years. Last time I saw a Leopard or its tracks was about 10 years ago in the Safed Koh Mountain about 75 Kms from here. I have shot three Poulang in my lifetime, including one which I shot from inside my goat pen. This one had already killed 2 goats from my herd and I was lying in wait for it."

"I know of the Phul Gosh and have seen it in the past, but not recently."

"No I have never seen these two. I don't think they are found in our areas (When shown photographs of the Manul and the Sand Cat)."

"I have seen this Phishie sometimes (Jungle Cat)."

"The Hyena, the Wolf, the Wild Donkey, and the Gazelle which were very common have all dissappeared. There are a few Ibex and Urial in the mountains far off."

"No I have never seen this type of a Gazelle (Goittered)."

After spending two days in Panjgur, during which we gathered information and met the local shikaris and guides, we decided to try our luck elsewhere. We had been told that there were large open plains on the western side and the area was almost totally uninhabited. Therefore we decided to investigate the Iranian border near Grawag, which lies along the Siahan range (Marked as No. 17 & 18 on the map). This seemed to be the right place as a big chunk of Iranian territory forms a bulge into Pakistan (Enclave). We were sure that if there were Cheetahs on the Iranian side, they must be straying into Pakistan sometimes.

We split ourselves into two groups and decided to approach the Iranian border from two different routes. One party went by the Gwargo route and the other one took the Qila Khudabadan, Suriab and Washap route. We were supposed to get together at Grawag the next morning.

We have started at 7 A M from Panjgur. A very high velocity wind is blowing. It is almost impossible to keep ones eyes open. It must be terribly hot in the summers and dust storms, and sandstorms must be quite frequent. The area we are travelling through is entirely different from what we have observed in the past. It is mostly vast, open undulating plains with a number of streams and ravines (all of them dry), cutting through them. There are a few small hills in the distance. Most of these run from East to West. The ground is rocky with small pebbles and stones. There is very little vegetation, but the dry streambeds are full of dwarf palms. The little vegetation that we see is typical of what we saw in the Cholistan desert, with the same species of shrubs and bushes. There is no inhabitation in the first 60 Kms. of our journey.

We have not seen any water points either. We have encountered a large number of pick-up trucks travelling to and from the Iranian border. All of them are fully loaded and seem to be carrying foodstuff, fuel and other items of daily use.



Interviews along the Pakistan/Iran border.

We have been signalled to stop by an oncoming vehicle. On getting down we were asked by the driver about our destination and purpose of going there. On being informed that we were gathering information and carrying out a survey to determine the status of wildlife, he volunteered to accompany us. He is an old man and his name is Hadadullah. He is a driver by profession and specializes in carrying (smuggling) cargo in and out of Iran. His real home is in Mand, just on the Iranian border. He has spent most of his life travelling and has therefore seen plenty of wildlife in his time. According to him, there was wildlife in abundance everywhere that he went. **The numbers started declining rapidly about 20 years ago.** He did not know the difference between the Leopard and the Cheetah, but told us that he had seen some during his journeys in the plains (In all probability what he saw in the plains were Cheetahs and not Leopards). He says there used to be Gazelle in the hundreds. He also knows the name Honz and Poulang, but thinks that both these are names of the same animal. He

failed to identify any of the Cat species from the photographs that we showed him, except the Leopard and the Cheetah.

We have reached a sub post at Sur-e- aab, which is about halfway to Grawag. This post is located at a hilltop from where one can see for miles and miles in all directions. This area is also flat and has a few hills running East to West. The men of the Mekran Scouts detachment stationed here have informed us about the lack of wildlife in their area. They have neither seen any nor heard about it.

We have resumed our journey to Grawag after having a cup of tea. The track is better and we are managing to make better progress. We have just entered a large open plain with a stream running through it. This is the largest plain that we have yet seen. There are no hills or mountains visible even in the distance. The terrain and vegetation is such that we are expecting to come across some form of wildlife, especially Gazelles, at any moment. But there is nothing. All that we have seen is a lone Laggar Falcon flying above us. It seems unreal and strange. There is total wilderness and the area is totally uninhabited, yet there is a total absence of the wildlife species that should have been here. This seems unreal and strange. There is no logical explanation for this phenomenon. At least we have not been able to determine the reasons or causes for this total absence of wildlife.

It is 12:30 P.M. We have reached Grawag. A company of the Mekran Scouts is stationed here in the old British fort, which dates back to the year 1910. This post serves as a frontier outpost, as the Iran border is only 4 Kms. away. The fort is totally made of Mud. Date Tree Trunks support the roof, and the walls are very thick. Overall it is in excellent condition. It is situated in the foothills of the Siahaan Range.

The present Company Commander, Khan Mohammed, related that in 1915, Major Brown the Commandant of Panjgur, along with his staff would ride to this post once a month to attend to administrative and judicial matters. This journey was accomplished in one day with a regular change of horse. We were shown the quarters used by him during his stay there. We were also shown a Gallows on the roof of the fort. These were used to hang the dissidents, rebels and outlaws, in full view of spectators, so as to put the fear of God into any one, aspiring to follow in their footsteps. We requested the Commander to arrange for our overnight stay at the post and left to see as much as possible of the area along the Iranian border.

We travelled in the dried up bed of a river to get to the border, which was about 5 Kms away. This small river eventually flows into Iran. There was no fence, barbed wire or wall separating the two countries. There is a small village (20 or 25 houses) at a distance of 100 yards from the boundary. The closest Iranian town of any importance is Sarawan, which is about 55 Kms. from here. People going or coming back from Iran probably use this as a resting-place. The residents were quite perturbed at our arrival, till they realized that we meant them no harm nor did we belong to any Law Enforcement Agency. Slowly and gradually men and children of all ages started arriving. We told them about our mission and asked them to refer us to someone knowledgeable about the region and specifically about wildlife.

We were introduced to a young man, BARKAT ALI, a resident of this very village. He told us that he is a keen hunter who knows the surrounding area well. He accompanies vehicles going into Iran to get Petrol and Diesel from there. He says that the Gazelle is almost extinct on this side of the border, but he sees quite a few when he goes to the other side. He cannot take his gun with him into Iran as the authorities there are very strict, therefore he has never shot any there. The Gazelle he recognizes from the photographs are the *Gazella benetti* and not the Goitersed variety. He knows the name Honz, but has never seen one. According to him the mountain behind his village, which he calls the Siah Koh (Siahaan), still has a few Ibex and Urial. According to him there are some Leopards still in this mountain range. **He has never seen the Caracal, the Sand Cat or the Manul.** He was able to identify the Jungle Cat

from the photographs and told us that he has seen these along the banks of the river that we had crossed.

For more detailed information he called his Grandfather, ALI MURAD to talk to us. This gentleman is in his mid eighties, but physically very fit.

"This was a paradise for wildlife in the old days. There were Gazelles, Partridge, Sand Grouse, Chukors, Se Se, Wild ducks in the river and Rabbits everywhere. There is nothing now. Everything seems to have vanished. Except for the few Ibex and Uriel in the mountain that you see in front of you (Siahaan), there is nothing left now. Sometimes there are reports of a Leopard in this mountain. Yes, sometimes one of our goats or sheep is killed by them. They mostly prey on the Donkeys in the mountains. There are large herds of these donkeys. I don't know whether these are originally wild or were abandoned and have taken to the hills. This is a long mountain chain, and goes well into Iran on one side, and touches Kalat on the other."

"Yes I have seen Poulang and I have seen Honz also. The Poulang was more common in the Mountains and the Honz was found in the Valleys and plains. No, I never saw a Honz in the mountain. The Honz was a hunter of Gazelles, rabbits and the donkeys in the plain. Both look quite similar but both leave different tracks. No the Honz is bigger than the Poulang. The Honz is a brave animal, it hunts in the daytime and openly, after a fair chase. The Poulang is a sly and cowardly animal. It hunts at night mostly lying in ambush for its victim."

"Last time I saw Honz was about 25 years ago, just across the river in that plain. It was alone and seemed to be wandering aimlessly in the grass. Yes, when we have rains there is tall grass in these plains. The grass is about 30 inches in height. No, I have never shot one. **I had seen Honz before also, they were fairly common 50 years ago. No, there are none now. They have dissappeared like the Gurk, the Aaptar and the Phul Gosh. No, there are no Phul gosh now. These (Caracal) also hunted Gazelles sometimes but mostly hunted smaller animals and birds.**"

"I have no idea what happened to all these animals."

He was able to identify the Cheetah, the Leopard, the Caracal, and the Jungle Cat; but had **never seen the Manul or the Sand Cat**. He had seen Goittered Gazelle, but a long time ago, and those also on the other side of the border.

We interviewed some other people also, but none of them professed to having seen the Honz or heard about it recently. Most of them were familiar with the name. Some of these people go regularly into Iran, and talk of wildlife in plenty there. A few had seen Wild Donkeys in the plains on the Iranian side, **but had never seen the Cheetah**. None of them was able to recognize any of the other Cat species except the Jungle cat which some of them claimed to have seen.

After going along the border towards the South for about 40 Kms, we decided to go back to the Fort. The area we have travelled through is uninhabited. We did not see any wildlife at all, nor did we come across any humans. There is a metalled road going paralell to the border on the Iranian side, which is regularly patrolled by the Iranian Khasadars. The total absence of wildlife of any form is a mystery beyond our comprehension. We got back to Camp at around 7 P.M and spent the evening chatting with the troops. It is quite cold and we are sitting around a log fire. The wind is still blowing with the same ferocity. Most of the men stationed here had heard of Leopards in the mountains, but expressed ignorance about the presence of any other form of wildlife except the Ibex and the Uriel in the mountain ranges. They had also seen donkeys and infact had captured a young male, which was taken to their HQs in Turbat. According to them this species of donkeys is different from the ordinary domestic variety. It is bigger, the colour is different, there is a male leader, and they do not get domesticated.

Next morning we left after breakfast to try and go along the border towards the North (Marked 17 on the map). Three members of our team (Haji Soda, Afzal Ranjha and Ather Salim), alongwith a local guide were dropped off at the base of the Siahaan Mountain. Their

mission was to go as far as possible, and survey the area on top. We tried to travel North by Jeep, but failed to make much progress, as there was no motorable track, which could take us across the Siahaan range. We could have crossed it, but only if we took the road on the Iranian side; this was too much of a risk and therefore we abandoned the idea of crossing over. We had no means of knowing, how the Iranian Khasadars would react to our presence in their territory.

We decided to explore the area between point 17 and 18. This region is also unpopulated. We did not encounter any wildlife here also. There were numerous dry streams and ravines with soft sand beds. We did not see any tracks in them either. Incidentally there are no trees in this part of Balochistan. After spending four five hours in this region we headed back to Grawag where we were supposed to meet the team coming from the other route. The party which had gone into the mountains came down at about 4 P.M.

The party which had gone into the mountains, saw three donkeys from far away, saw some old tracks of Urial, Ibex and a lone Hyena. Apart from this they saw nothing else not even tracks of any other Cat species. There was hardly any vegetation that could have sustained any ungulates. They could not make out whether the donkeys they saw, **were originally wild or feral.** The local fellow accompanying them said that the closer one got to the Iranian border, the more animals one would see.

The 2nd. Team had already reached Grawag Fort when we drove back. The 2nd. team headed by Major Tanvir, had approached the Iranian border from the Gwargo side. They too did not see or observe any signs of wildlife. They met a number of people who talked of wildlife, but only in the past tense. The area they travelled through was also similar to what we had seen. The only difference was that they saw more and more trees, the closer they got to Iran. The Gwargo side according to them was more populated than the Grawag side. Most of the older people they talked to, knew of the Honz, but they **did not come across any person who had seen it in the last 25 years.** Some of these people had seen Gazelles close to the Iran border recently, but on rare occasions.

We left for Panjgur at 4:30 P.M, the same evening and managed to make it to town, by 10 P.M. High velocity winds followed us back to the Rest House. The return journey was also uneventful. **We did not see any wildlife** although it is quite common to come across different species of Cats, a few Jackals, Hares or a fox anywhere else in the outdoors, especially at night (I am referring to most areas of Punjab and the Sind Province).

Next morning, the 15th. of November, we left for the Nag Valley, District Kharan.

PHASE 14 15th. of November NAG VALLEY

It is the 15th. of November, the time is 7 A.M. We have left Panjgur as early as possible so as to observe and see the maximum area in the daytime. Our destination is Nag, which is at a distance of 135 Kms from here. The track is no different in condition to what we have been travelling over in the past. It is now even more difficult as we are climbing steadily as we progress towards Nag. We have started from an elevation of about 3500 feet and shall probably end up reaching 6500 ft. The chilly wind is blowing with much the same ferocity as of yesterday. It is very cold now and we have had to wear all the warm clothing that we were carrying with us (which isn't much).

We seem to be travelling North with a slight but steady veer towards the East. The Siahaan Range runs paralell towards our left (West), with the Sabz Koh mountain in the foreground. The first 50 Kms. was a track through small hills without any break. **There are no human settlements in sight**. There is no flat area anywhere. After climbing steadily for the next hour or so, we are gaining access to large open plains. **This is the famous Nag valley, District Kharan.**

We haven't seen any signs of wildlife. The water points are all dry. **No trees anywhere** in sight. Here, there is vegetation similar to that of the desert, but thicker and richer; but it is

totally dry. Looks scorched. It is obvious that ungulates can't survive on this. At some point in time, **this must have been one of the richest areas in terms of wildlife. Looks like ideal country for the Gazelle.** The few domestic goats or sheep that we have seen are all famished and in a very weak state. The area is mostly uninhabited. It is now 11:30 A.M and we have stopped to have our brunch alongwith a cup of tea at a wayside shack. This is a gathering place for the few locals from neighbouring settlements. The difference here is that some of the locals speak Brauhvi. They call the Leopard **KHALGAA** in this language. The Ibex is called **Koh Pachin** and other cats with the exception of the Cheetah are called **GURBA**. The Cheetah is called **YEOZ** or **YOUZ** in this region. The elders collected here all talk of different forms of wildlife, but in the past tense.

One of these **Alam** has been singled out for an interview. He is about 65 to 70 years of age and lives in the foothills of the Siahaan. By profession he is a livestock owner and a professional hunter also. He is knowledgeable about the geographical, cultural and genealogical aspects of his region. He has regularly been hunting in the past and has therefore acquired a lot of practical knowledge about the fauna of his domains.

" You have come to my area when it is too late. I could have shown you all sorts of wildlife in the past. All the Sardars and Khans of Pakistan used to take me as a guide on their hunts. I have also guided *Farangiis*(Europeans), in their quest for trophy Ibex, Urial and Leopard. Now there is almost nothing, except the few Graant (Urial) and Koh Pachin (Ibex) in the mountains that you have left behind, or in this big mountain that you see in the distance. Had you been here 20 years ago, you would have definitely seen some Khalgaa (Leopard) on your way here in the small hills that you crossed. Yes I have shot everything, including a number of Khalgaa. I have even seen **MUM** (*Ursus thibetanus gedrosianus*, Baluchistan Bear) in the Black Mountain (Siahaan). This Mum is a very dangerous animal, and will pick up women, whom it takes to its cave, and rapes them till as long as they are alive. No, it was not common but my elders told me that in the past these animals were common in the mountains. No, now no one has seen Mum neither has the presence been reported from anywhere. No, the Khalgaa has not been seen or heard for quite some time now. **I think it is no longer in our area, because even if we did not see it, we would have surely heard its call. In the past when it was common, we lost a number of our goats and sheep to it. This is a very brave and powerful beast, once it killed and ate my she camel, which was grazing along the mountainside and had not returned the previous night.** We had big dogs to guard our flocks but sometimes the Khalgaa also killed these.

Nag Valley.

"No, the **YeoZ** did not live in the mountains, it was found in the plains. I saw them many a times. No, I never killed a YeoZ. There are many people who have shot them. Most of them killed the YeoZ for its skin, otherwise **it is a harmless animal and does not kill our livestock.** It does not attack humans, the Khalgaa does. Both look alike, except for their size and habitat. The **YeoZ is taller than the Khalgaa** and lives in the flat ground. It takes an experienced eye to differentiate between the two. Both the animals have **different spots on their skin.** Yes, **the Khalgaa has a larger head** . No, I have not seen the Khalgaa or the YeoZ with their young. "

" This valley is very fertile, and is lush green after the rains. It used to be full of **Gazelles and Rabbits, which are all gone now.** There was a time when we could shoot as many Gazelle as we wanted to. They did not fear a motor car or motor cycle and would just stand there in the glare of the search light. **This is what the YeoZ lived on** . The YeoZ is the fastest animal that I have ever seen. Once I saw a Gazelle being chased by a YeoZ in the Machko plain. The Gazelle jumped in the air and was caught by the YeoZ before it touched the ground. We witnessed this from a very close distance. Later we went to see the scene and could clearly make out that the distance was at least 30 feet between the leap of the Gazelle, from one point to the other."

"No, it has been very long, almost **20 years since we last saw the Yeoz**. The Gazelle have disappeared, the rabbits are gone and so has the Yeoz. There was too much hunting. A lot of hunters came from outside. Even now we have the Arab hunters who come every year to this area. They have a palace on the other side of the mountain. They hunt everything. We had the Houbara (*Chlamydotis undulata macquennisi*) in this whole valley the year around. It used to breed and lay eggs here. We saw them with their chicks frequently. Now they too are gone. We don't see them anymore. Did you see any along the way?"

"I have seen this Gurba (Caracal) but not recently. These used to live on the sides of the mountain or in the depressions in the plains. **They were very good hunters. Very quick and agile.** So quick that they could catch flying birds also. Sometimes one of our baby goats or sheep was also killed by them. They mostly hunted in pairs. They look different from other Gurbas with their long pointed ears and short tails. No, now one rarely comes across this variety. This Gurba (Jungle Cat) is still seen sometimes, but mostly near dried up river beds. Maybe it hunts the mice there? No, I have never seen these two (Manul and Sand Cat). **Even Wolves and Hyenas have not been seen** in these parts for a long time. Sometimes I see a lone Fox or Jackal now."

Alam was very accurate in his description and his account. It was clear that he had shot a number of animals in his time, including Leopards which he must have shot for their skins and not because they were destroying his livestock. **The precise detail with which he described the Cheetah, leaves no doubt in my mind that he had shot a number of them also, but was trying to cover it up for fear of being prosecuted**. He had seen the Caracal and the Jungle Cat, but hadn't seen the Manul or the Sand Cat because they do not belong in this area. As far as seeing a Bear is concerned, they have been reported from different Mountain Ranges in Southern Baluchistan, in the past. As far as the tale about picking up women is concerned, that is a very old folk belief amongst the locals. The Bear is supposed to have extraordinary sexual prowess and desires.

It is strange that we are travelling in a valley which in ordinary circumstances should have been full of wildlife, but today we haven't seen any bird or animal. Not even a Fox or a Jackal. **. The Cheetah can't exist here; there is no prey.**

It is 1:45 P.M. We have come to a crossroads with a big sign saying Houbara Research, Rehabilitation & Breeding Center. But we haven't seen any. It is becoming colder and colder. There is no human settlement in sight. As we proceed further the vegetation is getting thicker; but there are no trees in sight. A high mountain range is now running along our right (Eastern) side also. It is called the Koh-I- Gichak Mountain. We are veering more towards the East as we come closer to Nag Village. There are signs of some plots of land having been cultivated in the past.

The time is 4:30 P.M. We have reached Nag proper (Marked No. 19 on the map). There wasn't much human activity in the areas we travelled through. **It probably has one of the lowest population densities.** It is a small settlement, consisting of a few houses, some shops and a Civil Rest House, where we have gone and sought shelter from the ever increasing cold and chilly wind. It has a well equipped kitchen too. The first thing we have asked for is firewood, which we needed to build a fire to warm us up. We have built a log fire and are comfortably sitting around it. That done we have asked the watchman to spread word around that we require information about wildlife. This was necessitated by the fact that it is the custom in these areas to stay away from strangers and visitors; not out of fear or contempt, but to respect their privacy. Very soon we were host to a number of locals, eagerly awaiting their turn to pass on information. Most of it was similar to what we had already learnt and observed during our journey. The essence of the information thus gathered is stated below:-

- 1, There is a very strong history of the presence of the Cheetah around Nag.
- 2, The Yeoz (Cheetah), is not to be found in this region now. Extinct.
- 3, The last authentic sightings are at least 25 years ago.

4, There is a general consensus amongst the locals, that the Cheetah is gone because there is nothing for it to eat any longer. (Scarcity, and finally disappearance of prey).

5, The Leopard was fairly common all around till quite recently.

6, Even now there are reports of Leopards from surrounding hills and mountains, but none of the 15 odd people present, had seen it in the past 5 years. Highly Endangered.

7, Gazelles (*Gazella bennetti*), once found in plenty, are nowhere to be seen now. They were found in abundance till about 15 years ago. Extinct.

8, Urial and Ibex populations have declined rapidly.

9, There are a few Hyenas in the Hilly areas but no Wolves now.

10, The Fox and Jackall are also not common.

11, The Caracal is recognized by almost everyone, therefore must have been common.

12, Caracals are not encountered now. None of the locals present, has seen it in the last 5 years. Every one talks of its skill and ability as a hunter. Highly Endangered

13, Jungle Cat has been observed by most of these people. Said to be mostly found near human settlements and along river banks. Rare

14, Some of the locals when shown photographs, claimed to recognize the Sand Cat. According to them it was not very common. There were two common descriptions, one that it had a longer tail than most Cats and the other that it had larger ears than normal. None of these people had anything to say about its pads. The majority claimed to have seen it at night in the headlights of the vehicle they were travelling in. No particular area was identified as its habitat. Some of them mentioned that it survived on rodents and small birds. It was believed to be very shy of humans and was known to avoid areas inhabited which were inhabited and frequently visited e.g cultivated fields. Like the other Cats they called it the Gurba too.

Presence a possibility?

15, No one had seen the Manul in this area. It probably does not exist here.

16, The Houbara no longer breeds in this region. A few birds are seen wintering here. No one has seen chicks or eggs in the past 5 years.

17, The disappearance of certain species and the decline in numbers of some is said to be the result of hunting pressures.

The disappearance of the predators is very strongly linked to the disappearance of their prey species.

The Chowkidar (Watchman) of the Rest house told us that a local by the name of Lal Jan, who lives next to the road that we shall be taking, shot a Cheetah only two years ago. This is very exciting news and we look forward to interview him next morning. Since the reports and information received did not warrant further investigation, we decided to move on farther, North to Besima.

Phase 15 16th. of November SURAB

We have left Nag at 8:30 A.M. A metalled road begins from Nag and continues for 45 Kms. The terrain is rapidly changing. It is getting more rocky as we continue gaining height. The Siahaan Range is behind us but another very high range(Mashka) is now visible on our right. We have reached **Lal Jan's** place. He is a pleasant fellow with a lot of knowledge about wildlife and their habits. The only problem is that we have difficulty in understanding him. He says that let alone shoot a Honz, he has never seen it in his life! What he shot was a Wolf, which he came across suddenly. He knew of the Leopard but did not know of the Cheetah. When shown photographs of the two, he insisted that it was the same animal. According to him the Gazelle were totally absent from this area now. He had seen them often in the past (*Gazella bennetti*). He calls the Houbara **Charz**.

There still are no signs of any wildlife, in fact it is so scarce that the two Tea shacks that we stopped at were still talking of the lone Wild Boar that had been killed by one of the locals a week ago. There are small chains of hills all along the track. After travelling 80 Kms, we now

seem to be travelling on some level track. We have come to a very large Mud Flat, so large that the extremities are not visible. It is like an Aeroplane landing strip. There is no vegetative growth whatsoever. After travelling another 20 Kms, we have reached its end where we have stopped for Tea at a shack located next to a Levies Post. The locals that we have conversed with are not familiar with anything other than Gazelles, which they have seen in the past or a few Chukor and Se Se partridges, which are to be found in the foothills of the mountains.

They know about the Leopard, but are not familiar with the name or description of the Cheetah. Amongst the other Cat species, they are only sure of the existence of the Jungle Cat. The track although still unmetalled is now much better. We are able to travel much faster than before. It is 12:30 A.M and we have reached Besima. After leaving Panjgur this is the most populated place that we have come to. It is a crossroads, with one track coming from Panjgur, one going to Quetta, one going to Kharan and the last going to Khuzdar. There is a very large, modern Hospital located here. Other than the town, the region seems to be uninhabited. **We have travelled long distances before encountering humans or observing any settlements.** Since we hadn't observed anything of interest, we decided to move on to Surab (Marked No. 20 on the map), especially as there was still time before nightfall. We managed to get to Surab around 4 P.M, and locate a Civil Rest House. Surab is the Sub Divisional Headquarter of District Kalat. There is quite a large population in this town. There are a number of Government offices, shops and small eating places here. Apart from the sizeable population of the town, **the area between Besima and Surab is desolate, barren and unpopulated.** The distance from Nag to Surab is 184 Kms. It is the coldest place that we have been to, in this trip. It snows in the winters. We were very comfortable in the Rest House, as it was a very old one and still had the fire places. We requested the Assistant Commisioner to send all the known Guides and Hunters to us.

A number of locals came to see us in the evening, and a few in the morning. Most of the information passed on to us was a repeat of what we had heard in Nag, except the fact that here, most of the people **did not know of the Yeoz (Cheetah).** Only a very few had heard about it, and that also from fellow **hunters of other areas.** No one claimed to have seen it. The conclusions drawn from their information is as follows:

- 1, There is no history of the Cheetah in the areas around Surab and Besima.
- 2, Even the name is not familiar.
- 3, Gazelles were not very common.
- 4, The Leopard is known to have occurred in the mountains surrounding Surab.
- 5, Leopards had not been seen by any of these people in the last 7 or 8 years.
- 6, The recent reports received by the locals about the presence of Leopards were in connection with damage to domestic livestock. This probably meant that there was great dearth of natural prey in the mountains also.
- 7, The Caracal had not been seen by the locals for many years past.
- 8, The Jungle cat is present, but mostly in close proximity to towns and villages.
- 9, The Sand Cat was not recognized by anyone. It has probably never existed here.
- 10, There were some locals who claimed to have seen the Manul in the mountains (A mountain about 8000 to 9000 ft. high), North of Surab.(If you look at the map this area lies one third of the way on the route marked between point 20 and point 21. These are probably offshoots of the Central Brauhi Range). None of them claimed to have seen it in the plains. According to them it was a small cat the size of a House cat and had very long fur. The other thing they were certain of was that it had a long thick tail. They were not sure about its colour, some described it as brown and some said it was grey. All of them agreed that it was a very pretty cat.
- 11, Wolves have not been seen or heard of in the past 7 to 8 years.
- 12, Hyenas are said to be present in the hills and mountains, because of reported damage to goats and sheep in the foothills.

13, Jackalls have been seen in the evening, by these locals, outside the town.

14, There are a few Chukor and Se Se partridge in the hills and mountains. Some flocks of Imperial Sand Grouse (locally called KHARGAT) and a few Houbara are seen wintering here.

15, The locals attribute the decline in the numbers of wildlife species, to excessive hunting. **From our own observations and the information gathered from the locals, we were able to deduce, that the Cheetah had never had a strong presence here. The terrain also did not suggest otherwise.**

The leopard must have been fairly common in the past, but was probably very rare now. The decline in their numbers is related to lack of, or scarcity of natural prey. This is obvious from the high incidence of livestock killings.

The Jungle Cat (*Felis chaus*) is still to be found in this region, mostly near human settlements and cultivated areas.

The Caracal did belong here in the past but is probably extinct now.

The Sand Cat does not belong here.

There is a possibility of the presence of the Manul in the said mountainous regions north of Surab. The description does correspond to whatever little that we know of about this species.

Something that I had failed to mention in the previous part of this report; although of no direct bearing to the Cat survey is, **the total, unexplained absence of the Birds of Prey**. It was perfect and ideal terrain, with lizards, rats, gerbils, small birds etc. which form part of the natural prey for these species. During my past travels to these places, I had seen hundreds of them, especially the Saker and Laggar varieties. There were all the reasons for these birds to be here, but all that we saw was a lone Laggar Falcon outside Panjgur on our way to Grawag. But I had also forgotten to mention the numerous parties of trappers that we came across starting from the Hara plain to the present area.

There is a great demand for the Peregrine and Saker Falcons, by Arab hunters.

This was the last halt before the Provincial capital, Quetta. The areas and regions that we had originally decided to survey and explore, with the addition of the Cholistan and Kirthar areas (**which were not included in the original plan and proposal**), for the purposes of this assignment, had all been studied thoroughly and meticulously.

PHASE 16 17th. of November

None of our vehicles started in the morning. The engine oil had frozen. After lighting a fire under the oil chamber to thaw it, we succeeded in starting them up. We left Surab at 10:30 A.M, for Quetta via Kalat. Luckily we have again got back onto an excellent metalled road which goes all the way to Quetta. We are constantly climbing. It is still very cold, although the wind has subsided to a great extent. There are large flat plains interspersed with hills and mountains. There is some sort of vegetation here also unlike any other that we have seen earlier during the journey. The landscape at intervals is dotted with small settlements. **This region is more populated than any that we have seen in the past.**

After crossing a mountain range we entered the Kalat valley and finally ended up in Kalat city. This is at a distance of 72 Kms. from Surab. This is the hereditary seat of the Khan of Kalat, the overlord of all the tribes of Balochistan (His title is Khan e Khanan, the same that was adopted by Genghis Khan). All the tribal Chiefs owed allegiance to him and his decisions are still considered final and binding in case of inter tribal feuds. This area seems to be more cultivated. There are settlements all along the road.

After having spent some time with the Khan of Kalat, Mir Mohyuddin Khan, we decided to move on towards Quetta which is 144 Kms from here. We are now constantly travelling in a valley which is all cultivated. There are Apple orchards everywhere. People we have talked to along the way have very little knowledge or interest in wildlife. A few have told us that

Gazelle were present in all the valleys in the past. Now there are none. **No one has heard of the Cheetah.** They only know of the Leopard, which is called Khalgaa here also.

We have crossed Mastung and come to the Lak Pass. This is a very steep climb and the Jeep with the trailer has had great difficulty in getting to the top. This is the Chiltan range and the famous National Park of the same name is on our right. After descending we have entered the Quetta valley. We got into Quetta (marked No. 21 on the map) city around 5 P.M. We drove straight to the Cantonement where Capt. Nadir has arranged three suites for our accomodation in the Infantry School Mess. This is very conveniently located, and one can get to the heart of the city in a matter of minutes. Capt. Nadir has already got in touch with the people that we want to see, during our stay here.

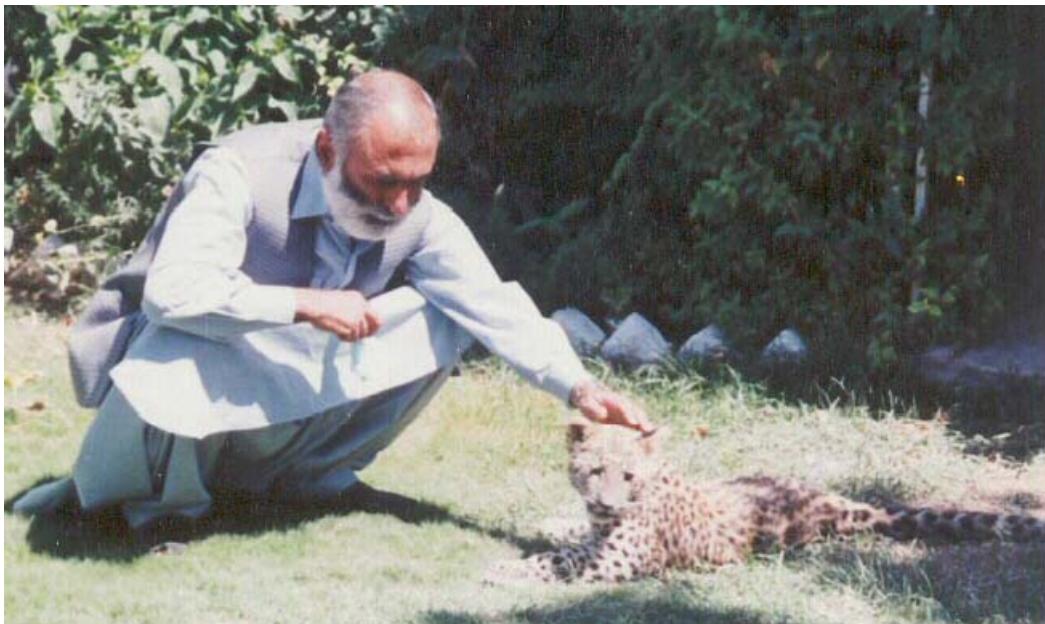
PHASE 17 18th. 19th. 20th. 21st. 22nd. November QUETTA

There are a number of things that have to be done during our stay in Quetta. The first is to call on all persons who have been of help and assistance to us, and were instrumental in having made this survey possible. All members of the team called on the Inspector General/Commandant, Frontier Corp (the Commander of all Scout detachments throughout Balochistan) Major Gen. Ziaullah Khan, to thank him for his hospitality, help and assistance. We were also able to appraise him of our findings related to his area of jurisdiction.

Photographs of his Headquarters, Wing HQs and frontier posts were presented to him. We gave him a list of all his officers and Ors, who had taken care of us, with a request that he issue them letters of commendation. **He assured us of his co-operation in the future also.** The next person we went to see was the Governor Balochistan, who had been responsible for the help afforded to us by the civil adminstration in Hingol, Ormara, Turbat, Panjgur, and Surab. The plight of wildlife was fully explained to him, and necessary remedial measures were recommended. He was very receptive about the sugesstions regarding Hingol N.P, Goran Gutt Mountain and the steps needed to maintain the status of wildlife along the Coastal Highway. He has asked us to prepare a plan for carrying out **a survey of the Goran Gutt area.** We were also able to give him a correct picture about the drought and famine conditions of the region we had travelled through. He assured us of **all possible help and assistance that we might need in the future.**

Some of the team members were later on entrusted, with the task of getting the vehicles in order, so as to prepare them for the long journey ahead.

Capt. Nadir had been able to trace out the recipient of the two Cheetah (supposedly) cubs from Chagai/Kharan. The gentleman who had bought them has a large collection of birds and animals. He is very knowledgeable and posesses a lot of information about wildlife in general and about wildlife of his Province in particular. He does not hunt himself, but knows each and every hunter personally. His passion other than birds and animals is Caving; an activity he is engaged in, the year around. His name is Malik Rahim, and he is a well known, respected citizen of the city. His family migrated from Afghanistan in the early part of the 20th. Century. He received a report from a fellow who deals in animals, that someone had caught a pair of Yeoz cubs(Cheetahs), from somewhere near the Pak/Iran border. These were being kept in a house on the outskirts of the city. Malik Rahim went to see these cubs and realized that these were **not Cheetah Cubs and were infact Leopard Cubs** . Both were males. He found both of them in a very weak and undernourished state. Moreover they were suffering from acute diaorreah. He was able to find out from the person who had caught them that these had been captured from inside Afghanistan and not the Pak/Iran border. He bought both of them for Rs.65,000 (US \$1300) and brought them home. They were about 8 or 9 weeks old at the time. He could only save one of them, the other devoleped high grade fever (probably stomach infection), and eventually died. According to the trapper there was a sizeable population of Leopards in the mountains across the border.



Malik Rahim with the one surviving "cheetah" cub in Quetta, which turned out to be a leopard.

Malik Rahim had also kept a pair of Lion cubs. The female is still with him whereas he **presented the male to Mullah Omar**, head of all the Taliban, in Afghanistan. These had been brought to Quetta from Mashad (Iran).

Since he keeps buying animals from the local trappers, he is kept well informed by that community. He is the first one to know of anything new or unusual that arrives in Quetta. **According to him the Goittered Gazelle is almost extinct** on the Pakistan side, with reports of a few survivors from the Chaman border. These are still present in fair numbers in the Afghanistan deserts and plains. He told us of a number of parties that go into Afghanistan territory, with the blessings of the local Taliban commanders, and hunt these Gazelles there. He has also mentioned the uncontrolled and wanton killings of all forms of wildlife, by the Arab parties who ostensibly go to hunt Houbaras with their Falcons. He is not very optimistic about their future in Afghanistan too, with the sort of hunting pressure they are faced with. He did not know of the Sand Cat but was sure that some local trappers had brought some **Manul kittens to him 3 or 4 years ago**. He recognized the Manul from its photograph immediately. A representative of one of the Princes of Abu Dhabi, took these kittens (three in number) from him. He says that the **Manul although not common, is present in the higher mountains around Quetta also**. According to him Caracal was also common in the days gone by but it was rarely seen now. He has promised to keep us informed about any news related to the Cat species.

The other gentleman on our list was Sardar Nasir, the owner of Jinnah Arms & Ammunition Store, Jinnah Road, Quetta. He is a direct descendant of the Roayal family of Afghanistan. His Grandfather migrated to Quetta in the late 19th. Century. **He has a lot of influence across the border and can go and come as he pleases**. This he regularly does for the purposes of hunting. He hunts Pheasents, Chukor, Se Se Partridge, Markhor, Wild Sheep and Gazelles freely inside Afghanistan. He offered to take us whenever and wherever we wanted to.

According to him there were plenty of Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*) across the border from Chaman. He also mentioned a few Gazelle of the same variety on this side of the border also. He was aware about the presence of Leopards in Afghanistan, but said that he had never seen the Cheetah there. They mostly hunt these antelopes at night. We have left photographs of Cheetahs with him, which he has promised to show his guides/shikaris, and ask them whether this species exists there or not. He says that there is still an abundance of animals in the mountains of Afghanistan.

Something that we had never seen earlier was shown to us. This was the skin of a very large Black Wolf, which he claimed to have shot from the same region on a night hunt.



He also showed us numerous photographs of his hunting trips. The hunted species included Markhor, Ibex, Wild Sheep of two different varieties, Gazelles of both types, Hares and Rabbits, a Leopard and a number of different game birds. Because of his Arms & Ammunition shop, most of the local hunters congregate here. Therefore it is one of the best places, for exchanging and acquiring information related to wildlife and hunting. Sardar Nasir arranged a trip to the Chiltan N.P and accompanied us on a day trip. He has a number of contacts there, who are mostly guides and game watchers. These are mostly people who have lived their entire life in this mountain. They are experts in jungle lore. The preservation and conservation efforts have resulted in the numbers of the Chiltan variety of Markhor, *Capra aegagrus chiltanensis*, to exceed 1200 head. This is an isolated population in an isolated area. This is the most successful and well protected National Park of Pakistan, that we have ever seen. These are one bunch of the most devoted, dedicated and motivated people that we have come across. Because of no rains in the last 5 years, there is no water in any of the water holes, and hardly any vegetation that these animals can subsist on. There is imminent danger of some disease breaking out amongst these herds, resulting in their decimation. It is strongly recommended (although we know that it does not fall directly under Cat Conservations purview), that a part of these herds be relocated in other areas. This part may please be forwarded to the concerned, relevant organization.

The strange part is, that despite abundance of prey, there is not a single Leopard in this N.P. The most knowledgeable guide, Ahmed, told us that the last time he saw a Leopard was 4 years ago.

This same Ahmed was **confident of the presence of the Manul** in his mountain. According to him it lived on rodents and the few birds found there. He narrated how he had seen this same Cat catch a Chukor Partridge, while it was getting into a crevice in the rocks, to spend the night. The description that he gave fitted exactly to the photographs that we had seen. Unfortunately, we could not confirm his description by showing him photographs, as we had forgotten to bring them along. He was not aware of any other forms of Cat species. He also mentioned the Mum (Balochistan Bear) as having belonged here 20 years ago.

The Quetta valley used to be a paradise for wildlife in the past, but not so now. We know of a party of hunters who went and **shot 37 gazelles** at night from inside Afghanistan, while we were still in Quetta. We came across large parties of Arab hunters, in convoys of 15 to 30 vehicles. They comb an area thoroughly, by moving in an extended line and shooting everything and anything that they come across. We saw them all over in Baluchistan. The only place in Pakistan, where the Houbara bustard is supposed to breed is also one of their

Camping sites where they come annually and hunt. Some of the more affluent ones have permanent Camps and landing strips in these areas. The parties of Arab hunters are constantly going deep inside Afghan territory, with the assistance of the Taliban, who are handsomely compensated by these Oil Rich Sheiks. Here they are decimating all forms of wildlife rapidly. Mostly, people of this region are unaware, that the Cheetah had existed in their Province. The situation regarding other Cat species is also very dismal and alarming. People are just not bothered whether they survive or not. To them they are just cats.

According to the local trappers, there have been **foreigners (Europeans, Americans, Arabs) who have paid handsome amounts to them, to capture** certain species in the past, especially Caracals, Sand Cats and the Manul, which were taken out of the country.

Legally or illegally, that I do not know. **Please check this out.** These trappers are still on the lookout for such species and have their contacts in Karachi and Islamabad.

A concentrated effort to educate people on conservation and preservation issues is required, both by the public and the private sectors. This education must start from the primary school level.

After having met and spent time with the people that we wanted to, and making sure that we would be kept informed about things that were of interest to us, we decided to move on to Shoran, the hometown of Mir Yar Mohammed Rind.

PHASE 18 23rd. of November SHORAN

We left Quetta at 8:00 A.M. Our final destination is Lahore, which is 1300 Kms from here. We plan to spend the night at Shoran (marked No. 22 on the map) and two nights in Khanpur. We have reached Surab and shall cross the Bolan Pass. The descent starts from here and continues right upto Dhadar (hometown of the Raisanis). One has to cross the Bolan pass if one intends to go to Sind or onwards to Punjab. We are constantly travelling South with a slight veer towards the East. We are going along a river which has some water in it also. There are cultivated fields all along the river. After the Bolan Pass we went through Mach, Dranjani, Dadhar, Sibi and Bhag. From the next town, Belpat we turned West towards Shoran.

Shoran is the residence of the Rind Sardars. Mir Yar Muhammed Rind, an elder of the family was known for the protection he had given to wildlife in his area. He is also the son of the Chief who was given the pet Cheetah as a present by the Gichki Sardar of Panjgur. This area is just under the foothills of the Central Brauhi Range. Right from the time that we left the main road, we travelled through mud flats. There is very little cultivation here. There are small sand dunes throughout this area. We have not observed any signs of wildlife throughout this journey, except a few Jackal and Fox tracks. Although ideal country for Hares and gazelles, there is no sign of them. Birdlife there is absolutely none.

We are the guests of the Rind family who have very kindly arranged for our stay. We have been very well looked after. We have been told that Gazelle (*Gazella bennetti*) were quite common till about 5 years ago. No hunting was allowed by the elder Sardar. Now these had completely vanished. Some of the locals attribute the disappearance to the lack of vegetation (because of the drought), and some say that this was the result of an outbreak of a disease, which according to their description, seems to be Rinderpest.

There have been no reports of Cheetah in the last 20 years. According to the greybeards gathered here, it was present in this region, but not very common. There are reports of Leopards from the Central Brauhi Range, whenever damage is caused to the domestic livestock. The numbers of the natural prey of the Leopard (Ibex and Wild Sheep) have decreased tremendously.

We were able to meet Mir Yar Muhammed later, and ask him about the pet Cheetah. He remembered it very well and told us that it remained with them for about 14 years when it died of old age. He says that it roamed around freely in their courtyard without harming

anyone. His favourite pastime was chasing village dogs that came inside without hurting them. He would sometimes catch a chicken and eat it. They never tried coursing with it. He was fed a diet of milk and meat. Mir Yar Muhammed told us about how he had seen a number of these same Cheetahs, in Kenya and Tanzania, where he went later, for sight seeing. Mir Yar Muhammed also mentioned the existence of wild donkeys in this region in the past. He was not sure whether they were still around or not.

PHASE 19 24th. 25th. 26th. November Balochistan-Sind-Punjab

Early next morning, we took leave of our hosts, and left for Khanpur. We went back towards the main road from the other track, and got onto it near Dera Murad Jamali. The windscreen of one of the Jeeps broke and the rest of the journey upto Khanpur (360 Kms.) was completed without it. After Dera Murad Jamali we crossed over into Sind, and entered Jacobabad and then Shikarpur. From Shikarpur we got onto the Indus Highway and headed towards Kandhkot and Kashmore.

Both sides of the Indus Highway from Jacobabad to Kandhkot is swamps, marshes and artificial lakes. Most of these have a growth of thick reeds. The majority of the locals are Mohanas (a caste of fishermen), and are engaged in various activities related to fishing. The Fishing Cat, *Prionailurus viverrinus* has been observed here a number of times. The locals as well as persons who frequently travel on this road, confirm having seen this species. The locals assert that it is a powerful swimmer and will take to the water happily. According to them it subsists on frogs, fish and small water birds. Incidentally the river Indus flows at a distance of about 15 Kms from these swamps towards the East.

Three Provinces were travelled through on the 24th. of November, 2000. After crossing the Guddu Barrage, we entered Punjab. From the Shikarpur by pass, Guddu is 125 Kms. The Sadiqabad by pass is 58 Kms from Guddu. From Sadiqabad to Khanpur the distance is 87 Kms. We reached Khanpur at 2 A.M. After spending one day in Khanpur, to rest and relax, we got back into Lahore on the evening of the 26th. of November, 2000.

We have tried to concentrate on the Cat species alone but couldn't help making observations about other forms of wildlife.

Incidentally, this was probably the first expedition of its kind. Never has a detailed wildlife survey been carried out in this part of the Balochistan province.

The situation is alarming to say the least.

Not only the Coastal areas, but the rest of this Province is being denuded of its Wildlife rapidly. Not once during our journey of 3600Kms in the remotest possible wilderness, did we see any signs of wildlife, other than the few Ibex and a solitary Urial male, on top of the Gomazi Pass.

Something has to be done without losing time. A number of species have embraced extinction already. The Tiger, the Cheetah, the Goittered Gazelle, the Black Buck, the Swamp Deer, the Gavial and so many others, have become extinct in Pakistan. Let this not be the fate of the remaining few species that are certainly endangered and may vanish forever. For, a species lost is gone forever and can never be brought back. It is like a flame extinguished; never to be lit up again.

Individuals or Organizations who have the nessessary resources and infrastructure at their disposal, are under moral obligation to join in this crusade to ensure the survival of the endangered species.

Unfortunately this is one of the most neglected issues in our country. Very few people seem to care about the state of wildlife, or give it the importance it deserves. Most people feel that a country plagued by problems like over population, hunger, water shortages, power crisis, corruption, lawlessness, and so many other ills; an issue, such as conservation and preservation of wildlife, should be of the least concern.

This is the basic reason, for a number of wildlife species having become extinct, some on the verge of extinction, and the rest certainly belonging to the highly endangered class.

Apart from the hunting pressure, and the wanton destruction, there are other factors also, which have contributed to the extinction and rapid decline in the numbers of wildlife. These are deforestation, loss of habitat, over population, lack of knowledge, and last but not least absence of sincerity of purpose, on the part of people, whose job it was to look after the welfare of these creatures of God.

We must realize that apart from helping maintain the precarious balance of nature, these animals and birds add to the beauty, grandeur and majesty of this otherwise desolate and barren world. We are also under obligation to our coming generations, that we at least leave them what we inherited.