

KASHMIR from October 1st to 8th

The goal of the trip was mainly the research of Asiatic Black Bear and Markhor. As for all my trips to India since 20 years the logistic on the spot was organized by Rakesh SHARMA (rakesh.sharma103@gmail.com), manager of “31 Jungles Wildlife Tours”. Either he is by himself our naturalist guide or, as for our trip to Kashmir, he gave material assistance thanks to his contacts.

From our basis which was a House Boat at Srinagar during all our stay, the 2 visited sites were:

1 - Dachigam National Park at 25 km from Srinagar. Access, as in most cases in Indian national parks, is done in the morning and in the afternoon at fixed hours.

2 – Kazinag National Park at 70 km from Srinagar just close from the line of control dividing Indian Kashmir from Pakistani Kashmir hence a heavy attendance of Indian army (our local correspondent settled the problems of contact with military authorities). This park of Kazinag meets together 3 sanctuaries : Lacchipora, Naganari (where the human) and Limber, the reserve where we went 2 times. Indeed, it's possible to get an accommodation very basic inside this reserve. This allows to avoid the 2 hours drive from Srinagar to Kazinag.

Our program was as below:

Oct. 1st : Flight from Delhi to Srinagar. Stay in a House Boat for 8 nights.

Oct. 2nd : Departure at 6am to Kazinag. Return at 8pm

Oct. 3rd : Visit to ornithological reserve of Hokersar at 10 km from Srinagar

Oct. 4th : Visit to Dachigam from 6am to 10am30 and from 5pm to 6pm30

Oct. 5th : Visit to Dachigam from 7am to 10am and from 4pm30 to 6pm30

Oct. 6th : Visit to Dachigam from 6am to 8am (although Dachigam National Park is closed on Sunday...)

Oct. 7th : Departure at 5am to Kazinag. Return at 7pm

Oct. 8th : Visit to Dachigam from 6am to 10am and from 5pm to 6pm15

Species observed :

Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus* : Dachigam National Park is probably THE place in the world to see this species, especially when they stuff themselves with acorns before hibernation. This period is, on the whole, from September 10th to October 10th. Then, the bears meet together under the oaks in the low parts of the park before to break up all over the park during the rest of the year. They are mainly active early in the day and one hour before the night. The first morning, we saw not less than 11 different individuals including 2 females with 2 young each in less than one hour. The same number was seen 4 days later at

the same places. We meet also 2 other individuals in other parts of the park. Droppings and indications of presence in the sweetcorns near the village inside Limber Reserve.

Panther *Panthera pardus* Droppings on many places at a time in Dachigam and Limber. One animal seen by our guide on October 7th at 5pm15 along the river at Dachigam.

Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula* : Droppings in Dachigam National Park. Our guides at Dachigam and Limber assure us that the species is well present in the 2 places although we didn't see it.

Hangul *Cervus wallichii* : This ss-species of Kashmir is at the edge of extinction : the population dropped from 1000 in the end of the 80ies to less than 200 and the park shelters almost the whole. Our stay corresponded to the mating season and we heard at least 7 males together in the low forests and in the grassy slopes. 2 were calling well obvious in this large grassy slopes; they were followed by 2 females.

Markhor *Capra falconeri* : At this season Markhors, especially the males, seem to stay at high altitude, at the upper limit of the forest. According to the villagers leaving in Limber's reserve, Markhors males come down to the limit of the village at around 2500 m from the end of November to March. We succeeded in watching, during our first trip to Limber, 2 females with one young at around 3000-3200 m. in an area of scattered trees and, during our second visit, one female ruminating in the same kind of environment.

Goral *Naemorhedus goral* : We didn't succeed to see this species although several persons living in the Limber's reserve claimed that it was well present in an area of steep forest near the village.

Langur *Semnopithecus entellus* (which species or ss-species?) : A group of about 40 individuals under the same oaks as Asiatic Black Bears. They seemed to be little concerned by the presence of the others. Their fur seem more thick than those of the individuals of the oriental plains (Langurs of Bengal ?)

Some species of birds observed :

- Dachigam

Brown Dipper

Yellow-billed Blue Magpie

Bar-tailed Treecreeper

Spot-winged Black Tit

Streaked Laughingthrush

Plumbeous Water Redstart

Chesnut-eared Bunting

- Limber

Himalayan Vulture

Golden Eagle

Lammergeier

Himalayan Monal: an old egg found along the path

Long-tailed Minivet

- Hokersar

Purple Waterhen

Scaly-bellied Woodpecker

Citrine Wagtail