



FACTS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



THE WORLD OF ENDANGERED ANIMALS

**SOUTH AND
CENTRAL ASIA**

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First Floor
9-17 St Albans Place
London N1 0NX
United Kingdom
www.brownbearbooks.co.uk

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Editor: Tim Harris

Design Manager: Keith Davis

Designer: Lynne Lennon

Children's Publisher: Anne O'Daly

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In this book you will see the following key at top left of each entry. The key shows the level of threat faced by each animal, as judged by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

EX	Extinct
EW	Extinct in the Wild
CR	Critically Endangered
EN	Endangered
VU	Vulnerable
NT	Near Threatened
LC	Least Concern
O	Other (this includes Data Deficient [DD] and Not Evaluated [NE])

For a few animals that have not been evaluated since 2001, the old status of Lower Risk still applies and this is shown by the letters **LR** on the key.

For more information on Categories of Threat, see pp. 54–57.

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Habitats, Threats, and Conservation

South and Central Asia is a vast area of contrasts and extremes. It is divided by the world's highest mountain range, the Himalaya, with the highest peak of all—Mount Everest—rising to 29,035 feet (8,850 metres). To the north of the range, much of Central Asia is semi-arid grassland that is bitterly cold and inhospitable in winter but which has a surprising diversity of animal life for the rest of the year. There are also areas of desert, such as the vast Gobi Desert in Mongolia. In contrast, much of South Asia has a tropical monsoon climate so it is hot all year with heavy seasonal rains and a dry season. This climate supports forests and rich grasslands, although in many areas these environments have been cleared or cultivated.

Roof of the World

To the north of the Himalaya chain is the high Tibetan Plateau, for good reason sometimes called “the roof of the world.” This has animals ranging from wild yak and wild ass to snow leopard and ground-feeding birds. The plateau is an unforgiving environment, especially in winter. Several of Asia's greatest rivers have their source there, including the Mekong, Salween, Ganges, Indus, Yangtze, and Yellow rivers.

Stretching from the plateau to the west and north are the huge expanses of the Central Asian grasslands (steppes) and semideserts. A few hundred Przewalski's wild horses—the only truly wild horses in the world—graze the steppes of Mongolia, and rapidly declining steppe pikas fight a losing battle against habitat change in their native Kazakhstan. Bordering that country is the world's largest lake, the Caspian Sea, which has an area four times greater than Lake Superior. Several thousand miles to the east, in southern Siberia, is Lake Baikal, which—at 5,371 feet (1,637 metres)—is the world's deepest lake. It is home for many unique plant and animal species, including tens of thousands of freshwater Baikal seals and many species of fish and aquatic invertebrates. Eighty percent of the lake's animal species are endemic, meaning they are found nowhere else.



The Himalaya

The highest peaks of the Himalaya range support few animals, but snow leopards can eke out an existence at almost 15,000 feet (4,500 metres), and markhors and takins also live on rocky mountain slopes. At lower altitudes, below the tree-line, there are lesser pandas and a varied selection of pheasants and other birds, including Temminck's tragopans. At the eastern end of the Himalaya, in southwest China, are giant pandas and black crested gibbons. Lower still, biodiversity increases further. In Chitwan National Park, Nepal, for example, a World Heritage Site, there are at least 42 species of mammal and more than 500 different birds have been recorded. The forest mammals at Chitwan include tiger, sloth bear, great Indian rhinoceros, Indian pangolin, rhesus monkey, and hanuman langur; clouded leopard has occurred but is not thought to be regular. Among the birds are wetland species, including kingfishers and the Vulnerable lesser adjutant stork, while the Critically Endangered Bengal florican lives on the grassland.



Western and Eastern Ghats

South of the Himalaya range is the relatively more gentle landscape of the Deccan Plateau of India. India is certainly not all flat. The relatively gentle mountain ranges of the Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats, because they have been harder to cultivate, still support important areas of forest and some animal species that are restricted to the mountains. The Western Ghats are a center of endemism: 84 species of amphibian, 16 birds, and seven mammals are found nowhere else in the world. Species that are protected in the mountains' national parks include tiger, gaur, sloth bear, Asian elephant, and Nilgiri tahr. One of the endemic birds is the Endangered black-chinned laughing-thrush. The Critically Endangered Jerdon's courser lives in thick vegetation in the Eastern Ghats though it is rarely seen.

Much of lowland India has been given over to cultivation, though a few forested areas still support very small populations of tigers, while Asian elephants are more widespread. Lowland wetlands attract millions of waterbirds from fall to spring, when they migrate

Climate change and the resultant increase in sea level could be a threat to many low-lying coastal regions around the Indian Ocean, such as Bangladesh and the Andaman Islands.

south from the bitterly cold winter weather farther north. The shallow, monsoon-flooded wetland of the Rann of Kutch, on the border of India and Pakistan, is one such example. When it fills with water it supports enormous numbers of ducks, herons, pelicans, and birds of prey. Nearby, in Gir Forest, is the world's last remaining population of Asiatic lions, numbering fewer than 500 of these magnificent predators.

Deserts and Coast

To the west again is the Arabian Peninsula, a region of vast deserts, where only the hardiest creatures can survive. These include the Endangered Arabian oryx and the Nubian ibex. The warm saline (salty) waters that encompass the Arabian Peninsula, from the Red Sea in the west to the Persian Gulf in the east, have many coral reefs, though these are threatened by coastal