

By Izzat Imtiaz

# "Protect Wildlife, Protect Nature" (Balochistan Black Bear)

**P**akistan is rich in biodiversity, particularly in the arid and semi-arid regions which cover almost 80% of the total land area. But some species are becoming threatened and some are becoming endangered in all over the Pakistan. Unfortunately, in Pakistan there are hardly any good stories related to this sub species of the Asiatic bear. Scientific name of the Asiatic Black Bear is (*Ursus thibetanus gedrosianus*)

A subspecies of the Asiatic Black was once found in western Pakistan (majority in Balochistan), south-eastern Iran and south-western Afghanistan but now it is listed as "Critically Endangered"

in Pakistan and extinct in most of the natural habitat locally. They are mostly found in the elevated mountain ranges of Takht-e-Suliman, Toba Kakar, Ziarat, Kalat and Khuzdar, this specie of bear is called as "mum" in Baluchistan. The habitat of the specie is arid subtropical thorn forest. These are omnivores but fruits are a preferred type of food so they like to consume figs and bananas, but sometimes they eat small rodents, lizards and small vertebrates such as birds etc. A common attribute visible in the Baluchistan bear is that it has a darker chest mark compared to other subspecies.

The decline of species is due to lack of awareness and scientific

knowledge among people. And also habitat loss majorly because of illegal logging, growth of human population that leads to expansion of villages, development of highways network, and installation of power stations in the wild. In Pakistan, numerous thousand bears were caught from their habitat for show off, exhibition in circuses, dance exhibitions and bear baiting. This creepy and cruel act was made unlawful and prohibited in 2001, but still occurs to some extent. Local let their cattle graze in the bear territory and end up in killing the native bears blaming them for the killing of their livestock. Illegally hunt for body parts like gall bladders for medicines

is also a threat to the species. It seems to be an interesting trophy for many people that affect their growth putting a threat on their species. It's a shame people are destroying such things for personal pleasure.

World wide fund of nature (WWF) Pakistan has done recently a survey, according to its report only six pairs of Black Bears are left so they need a high protection. WWF Pakistan aims to assist the Balochistan Government to establish a Protected Area for the Balochistan black bear, and to prepare a recovery plan. This endemic sub species is faced with severe hunting pressure and serious habitat loss. Regular Surveys could help the organizations for keeping in view the

check and balance of Black Bears population. Secondly necessary steps could be taken to manage alternate food sources for Black Bears in case of shortage of food for this purpose plantation of date palm trees could be helpful. The most important step towards conservation of specie could be played by the locals of the area. People should have knowledge about the ecosystem, conservation of species and role of each species in maintenance of ecosystem. Conservation efforts will entail establishing the population status and threat levels, identifying the core habitat, collecting relevant socio-economic and ecological data and proposing possible recommendations.