

CONSERVATION PRIORITIZATION OF IRANIAN MAMMALS FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Mammals are increasingly affected by ongoing trend of extinction and one fourth of the world's existing known mammalian species are endangered. Lack of proper conservation strategy can lead to non-suitable allocation of resources to larger species and ignoring smaller taxa. Despite Iran's rich diversity of mammalian fauna which is predominantly comprised from smaller species (more than 150 species), most researches have been conducted on various ecological aspects of large species, meaning less charismatic taxa have not been properly focused. Accordingly, the present investigation has been implemented with the aim of conservation prioritization of the Iran's mammals, based on their evolutionary distinctiveness and globally endangered score. Moreover, attempts devoted to species regarding graduate university dissertations as well as research projects funded by the Iranian Department of Environment have been assessed to give an overall comprehensive review of the state of the Iranian mammals for effective conservation. Thus, top 50 species with highest priority value were recognized, initiated by Asiatic cheetah, Asiatic black bear and dugong. Rodent and Chiroptera consisted the highest proportion of the high priority species of the country, respectively. In contrast, a total of 43 university thesis have been done on these top species (mostly habitat surveys and ecology), including 24 on ungulates versus 12 for carnivores, indicating intensive attention from Iranian biologists to these larger species. The same conclusion was derived based on analysis of funds allocated to different research projects by the DoE. Accordingly, while supporting the present approach by the Iranian biologists to address top large species in order to fill existing gaps of knowledge, it is essential to meet conservation needs of smaller species, such as lesser carnivores, rodents and bats. Moreover, it is recommended that to enhance the present prioritization of the Iranian mammals, a comprehensive assessment is needed with participation of Iranian biologists based on IUCN's Red List criteria to give a more nationalized inventory of prioritized species.

Key words: Conservation prioritization, mammals, evolutionary distinctiveness, status assessment, Iran.