

# FUR TRADE IN KATHMANDU

## IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA



**TRAFFIC**  
INDIA  
INVESTIGATION



WWF  
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## 1. BACKGROUND

The illegal trade in wildlife and their derivatives is a worldwide phenomenon continued on an enormous scale. It is believed to be worth several billion dollars a year. With human populations growing and a concomitant increase in the use and misuse of land and resources, wildlife and its habitat are increasingly coming under threat. Poaching for profit can be the final nail in the coffin and can lead to a population's extinction. Indeed, it may also be a main cause.

In the 1960s the idea of a worldwide convention to control international wildlife trade was first discussed and after a meeting in 1973 of 88 countries, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) came into force on 1 July 1975. From the original 56 signatories, CITES parties have now grown to 115 and include both India and Nepal. Besides these international regulations, India and Nepal both have national wildlife legislation that prohibit or control wildlife trade within the respective countries. (see Appendix I).

However, conservationists in India have long been aware that inspite of stringent regulations, illegal wildlife trade continues and is a serious threat to several of the country's rarer species. Keeping this in mind, WWF-India set up a wildlife trade monitoring wing and from this, on 1 January 1992, TRAFFIC - India was born. An early project of the organisation was to attempt to determine the extent of trade in mammalian furs and skins. Srinagar and Kathmandu (Nepal) were known to be major trading centres and with this in mind it was decided to conduct a field study in these cities. However, the political situation in Jammu and Kashmir precluded the possibility of conducting the study in Srinagar at this time. This report, therefore, concentrates on the findings of the study conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The brief given to the authors did not allow for a detailed analysis of past and contemporary studies on the topic with the aim of examining trends. The report is therefore an account of the investigation conducted and a discussion of the results.

### THE INDIAN SCENARIO

The fur trade in India has traditionally utilised many species that are considered rare and endangered. Even where common species have been used, they have in some areas been over exploited to a dangerous level. For example the jackal had to be upgraded from Schedule V (vermin) to Schedule II of the **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972**, due to large scale killing for the fur industry, causing it to become rare in parts of its range. When species are already under pressure from habitat destruction or degradation, the pressure from fur trade pushes them hard and fast down the road to extinction. In India all the commonly traded species of the fur industry are included within Schedules I and II of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972**. However, the fur industry of India is centred in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir and this is the sole state in India not to be covered by this Act. The State does, however, have its own largely similar **Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife (Protection) Act 1978** and all trade is strictly regulated by law under this. When this Act came into force all persons possessing any Schedule I or Schedule II, Part II, animal had to declare it. When the ban on export of fur skins and garments was imposed in 1979, the pressure from the Srinagar traders to safeguard their livelihood was such that exception was made for them. All stocks had to be declared and were marked by the wildlife authorities and the following species were allowed for export out of their declared stock.

The figures listed represent the number of skins of each species in stock as declared by the traders in 1979.

1. Jackal ( <i>Canis aureus</i> )	200,242
2. Red fox ( <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> )	117,346
3. Common fox ( <i>Vulpes bengatensis</i> )	179,148
4. Civet cat ( <i>Viverridae sp.</i> )	13,541
5. Hill fox ( <i>Vulpes vulpes (montana)</i> )	24,200
6. Jungle cat ( <i>Felis chaus</i> )	306,343
7. Desert cat ( <i>Felis silvestris ornata</i> ) <sup>1</sup>	41,845

In subsequent years quotas and permits were issued for export of garments manufactured from these skins which in several cases appear by 1983 to have come close to, or already exceeded, these figures. Indeed it seems that the quotas bear no relationship with the declared stock of skin. Traders have been able to increase their stock by obtaining 'legal procurement certificates' although even under the **Jammu and Kashmir Act** such stock cannot form part of export consignments. Even in 1983/84 export figures of controlled fur garments (jackets and coats) were as follows:-

Jackal	3,974
Red fox	590
Common fox	240
Civet cat	42
Hill fox	5
Jungle cat	1,166
Desert cat	4

Depending on the species this represents an average of 12 to 25 skins per garment. At this time 95% of the stocks has been despatched to West Germany and 5% to Japan and Australia.

A study conducted in 1985 to assess the feasibility of replacing the threatened wild caught species with farmed ones concluded on the basis of available trade statistics that they needed to find the source of 80,000 fur skins of a size to make 6000 coats. Such a replacement has not officially occurred although Kashmiri fur traders in New Delhi now also stock significant quantities of domestic cat furs.

It should be noted that the above figures and conclusions are in relation to the controlled legal trade of species. There is ample evidence to suggest that illegal trade also continues at a substantial rate thereby greatly increasing the number of wild animals being lost to the fur trade. The illegal trade is in both the 'controlled' species and in those totally banned, but in almost all cases these are covert transactions in India.

In Kathmandu however, the wildlife fur trade even in highly endangered species continues in a largely overt manner. In November 1988 an American biologist, Larry J. Barnes initiated a study to look into this and make a list of some of the more endangered cat furs that were openly on sale. His report, "**The Overt Illegal Fur Trade in Kathmandu, Nepal**" was published by Inverness Research Associates in April 1989. He and his colleagues collected specific data on four cat species, namely, leopard cat, common leopard, clouded leopard and snow leopard, but the presence of jungle cat, fishing cat, desert cat and wolf was also noted. Their conclusion was that the fur trade in Kathmandu "represents the lives of thousands of wild cats and wolves which were

<sup>1</sup>Also referred to as *Felis libyca*

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killed illegally for ornamental fur coats." The report also made several recommendations for ending or reducing this illegal overt trade in endangered species.

TRAFFIC - India, in its desire to assess the present extent of trade in mammalian products, recognised that this study needed to be updated. Its interest in Kathmandu was particularly strong in view of the reported preponderance of Kashmiri traders there and the likelihood that many of the species being dealt in had originated in India. Several of the traded species are either non-existent or extremely rare within Nepal. Added to this was the fact that the turmoil in Kashmir meant that few tourists were travelling to Srinagar and thus little retail trading especially in fur products would be occurring there. The present study was therefore initiated.

## 2. METHODS

The authors of this report, both British nationals resident in India, visited Kathmandu in February 1992 posing as a wealthy couple interested in purchasing fur coats. Three and a half days were spent exploring the fur-selling shops of Kathmandu. A further few days were spent by one of the authors collecting information on the wildlife laws of Nepal, and attempting to meet those in the government responsible for their enforcement and in assessing the extent of NGO activity in this field.

Thirty-six shops were surveyed over the three day period on Durbar Marg, Jamal, the Yak and Yeti approach road, and around the Oberoi and Annapurna Hotels in the Thamel district of Kathmandu. The number of fur traders visited amounted to a few more than this but those with no illegal species were not noted. While coats were tried on and inspected in a manner appropriate to buyers, an assessment of the number of short and long coats of various species was made and recorded at the first opportunity on leaving the shop. On occasions the time lapse between the assessment and recording caused difficulty in recalling the exact number and details of the species and it was not always possible to return to confirm them. The overall figures should, therefore, be viewed as a minimum figure. This is especially true of garments made from pieces and also for the more abundantly available species. For example, products of fox fur were so prevalent that once this was recognised, in well-stocked shops we stopped recording their numbers to concentrate on the rarer species. Generally, differentiation was not made between various fox species except where our attention was specifically drawn to it by the shopkeeper. The most commonly found though, was red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). In the overall figure they are all included together.

By engaging the shopkeepers in conversation an attempt was made to elicit further information regarding the country of origin of particular species, volume of sales, availability of other undisplayed species etc. This did not however prove to be very rewarding because in general those attending the shops were not the owners and even if willing were not informed enough to give reliable information. On occasions, whenever possible, photographs were obtained.

Before embarking on the survey, both the authors had spent some time familiarising themselves with the relevant wildlife species. In this they were greatly assisted by Mr V.G. Gogate of the Natural History Museum, New Delhi, who gave invaluable information and advice and kindly produced skins which allowed them to have hands-on familiarity with some species. Besides this, both have had many years of involvement with wildlife and conservation in the subcontinent and were thus already familiar with several of the relevant species - at least in their live state. Identification was therefore done by visual and tactile inspection. (The uniquely rough texture of a fishing cat pelt, for example, prevents confusion with that of any other spotted cat). Where possible small amounts of hair samples were also obtained.



### 3. RESULTS

It was found that overt trade in fur garments and skins continues unabated. From the 36 shops surveyed the following are the minimum figures of furs that were being openly displayed in Kathmandu in February 1992.

<b>Common Leopard</b> ( <i>Panthera pardus</i> )	9 long coats 12 short jackets 7 hats 1 stole (made from 20 tails)	most items were made mainly from belly and head pieces. 2 long coats made of dorsal pieces.
<b>Clouded Leopard</b> ( <i>Neofelis nebulosa</i> )	2 long coats	
<b>Fishing Cat</b> ( <i>Felis viverrina</i> )	1 long coat 3 short jackets	
<b>Leopard Cat</b> ( <i>Felis bengalensis</i> )	12 long coats 3 short jackets  1 hat	mainly ventral pieces but at least two long coats made of best dorsal pelts.
<b>Jungle Cat</b> ( <i>Felis chaus</i> )	19 long coats 27 short coats	only two made of small pieces.
<b>Desert Cat</b> ( <i>Felis sylvestris ornata</i> )	30 long coats 44 short jackets	
<b>Rusty Spotted Cat</b> ( <i>Felis rubiginosa</i> )	1 long coat	
<b>Palm Civet</b> ( <i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditis</i> )	3 long coats  2 short coats	
<b>Marten</b> ( <i>Martes sp.</i> )	2 long coats 2 short jackets	
<b>Wolf</b> ( <i>Canis lupus</i> )	21 long coats 17 short jackets	
<b>Jackal</b> ( <i>Canis aureus</i> )	3 long coats 4 short jackets	
<b>Fox</b> ( <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> )	25 long coats 52 short jackets 25 full skins many hats, trimmings, gloves etc.	4 coats made of leg pieces 9 Jackets made of leg pieces

**Note:** Of the total 294 long and short coats recorded, fox were the most numerous comprising 26.2% of the total counted. But this was closely followed by desert cat at 25.2%. The next most common species on view were: jungle cat 15.6%, wolf 12.9%, common leopard 7.1% and leopard cat 5.1%.

Of the cat species (294 coats counted) desert cat and jungle cat proved to be most numerous - 45.4% and 28% respectively. Leopard was next at 12.9%, leopard cat 9.2%, fishing cat 2.5%, clouded leopard 1.2% and rusty spotted cat 0.6%.

Felids (6 species) accounted for 55.4% of all coats counted while canids (3 species) formed 41.5%.

26.2% of coats were made of species listed in Appendix I of CITES (wolf, leopard, clouded leopard, leopard cat<sup>2</sup>, rusty spotted cat), 42.2% are species from Appendix II (desert cat, fishing cat, jungle cat) and the remaining 31.6% appear on Appendix III (fox, jackal, marten, palm civet).

The number of skins used to make a full length coat will vary between 7 for a large animal like leopard to 40 or 50 for a small cat like the rusty spotted.

Thus in terms of animals our figures represent over 100 leopards, 14 clouded leopards, around 400 leopard cats, over 1000 jungle cats and more than 1500 desert cats.

It may be re-emphasized that these are minimum figures. In recording, any doubts either in identification or in memory have not been counted. Furthermore the figures are collected almost entirely from those garments on immediate view. Several shops kept more coats, especially the rarer species, hidden from view, on the premises or elsewhere.

The investigators did not see any item made of snow leopard fur. However they were referred to another shop, the Kathmandu Arts Emporium on Durbar Marg, where they were told, a large selection could be seen ("coats are available in hundreds") including common leopard and snow leopard, and a different "white leopard from Pakistan" costing US\$10,000. However, this could not be verified. When visited, the shop concerned insisted that they did not deal in furs. Unfortunately a section of the community appeared to have become suspicious which may explain this reaction.

Many of the shopkeepers reported that they had factories in Kathmandu as well as in Kashmir. Although no figures were given several shopkeepers claimed to have good sales. In several shops the authors were told that the main buyers were Italians and Spaniards who both prefer cat species, and Russians who go for jackal and wolf. West Germans and Finns were also mentioned as notable customers. There was a general awareness that public opinion especially in the U.S.A. and U.K. was anti fur. This was a disadvantage for the present investigators whose British accents made their claims to want to purchase a fur coat, less believable. In one area, the Yak and Yeti approach road, where several shops were visited in turn, suspicions were certainly aroused and attendants from other shops followed the authors to the last two or three shops to warn the keeper in Kashmiri. In one shop the coats on sale suddenly all became "fakes" although none were.

Otherwise there was little reluctance to name species or at least claim them as wild. Identification varied considerably and was on the whole inaccurate. Both leopard cat and desert cat coats were called "ocelot". Desert cat was also called "snow cat", "lynx", "wild cat" but never desert cat. "Lynx" was also used for jungle cat and occasionally for fox. A palm civet was said to be "opposum" and one jackal, a "raccoon". It seemed this was done more in ignorance than to deliberately mislead.

<sup>2</sup> Not all leopard cat subspecies are listed in Appendix I of CITES. However, as it was not possible to distinguish one subspecies from another for the purpose of counting, they have been classified as Appendix I.

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It was mentioned variously that "all the animals come from Nepal", "from Tibet" or "from India". Again it was felt that these comments were said in ignorance or when the shopkeeper thought that it would please buyers.

Occasionally domestic species, cat, rabbit etc, were passed off as wild but generally where a skin had been dyed, eg. jungle cat to mink colour, it was not denied. Very few had been dyed with a pattern to imitate a rarer species. Most shops listed contained items of rabbit and mink and several also had domestic cat garments.

All shops sold items other than fur and leather. In general the inventory would include *papier mache* knickknacks, carpets, carved wooden boxes, scarves, crewel work cushion covers and other such typical Kashmiri handicrafts. In all but one shop the origin of the attendants was certainly Kashmiri. Many claimed to have recently come as a result of the present disturbances in their home area.

#### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Barnes (1988) hinted at the fact that some of the fur in the Kathmandu market could have Indian origins. The present study also noted the strong likelihood of this being true although no conclusive proof has been gathered. It was however confirmed that almost the 39 shops surveyed were owned by Kashmiris and the shops themselves were known as "Kashmiri Store". It is to be noted here that shopkeepers referred to Tibet and Nepal as being a source of skins along with India. The recommendations that have come out of this study and the policy options that they offer have varying degrees of feasibility. The following are some of the options that may be considered for curbing the illegal trade:

1. *Law enforcement by Nepalese authorities:*

The most effective method of curbing illegal trade will be for the enforcement machinery of Nepal to monitor the trade in Kathmandu. A check on all the establishments dealing in furs, confiscation of illegal furs and the introduction of a system by which stocks kept by the traders are declared to the authorities is a possible option. This operation may be carried out as suggested by Barnes after giving the merchants a grace period, but the authors feel that this might reduce the efficiency of the operation keeping in mind the fact that this trade has been a long prevalent one and traders are well conversant with the national legislation. In case of irregularities no grace period need be given. A "clean up" operation must be carried out on a priority basis.

2. *Action by Indian law enforcement agencies:*

The Indian border check posts can be more efficient by alerting agencies such as the Border Security Force, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the Customs. Safeguards must be installed so as to prevent large scale smuggling of furs across the borders. It is strongly suspected that the furs cross the border in semi-finished forms and would be concealed in personal baggage or with other garments. The possibility of garments coming into Nepal along with aid packages from developed countries must be verified.

3. *Public awareness and illegal trade boycott:*

An attempt must be made to reduce the demand for furs by making the buyers more aware of the need to monitor illegal trade for endangered species. This can be done by efforts of Nepali NGOs such as the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation and through public awareness organs such as the magazine *Himal*. Tourists upon arrival must be provided sufficient information on the country's wildlife legislation and the need for their participation in conservation efforts. It may be through messages on the immigration card, translights at airport lounges or by publication of material in in-flight magazines.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The number and species of skins available as garments present in Kathmandu preclude the possibility that they all originate from Nepal. Desert cat, for example, comprising 25.2% of our findings, is not a species found wild in Nepal. Nepal borders China and India and all three are CITES signatories. Given the preponderance of Kashmiri traders it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that many skins may have originated in India. Thus when they appear in the shops of Kathmandu, it is likely that in many cases, CITES has already been violated besides the fact that offences may have been committed under the domestic wildlife legislations of both India and Nepal.

In spite of the exposure given by Barnes' report in 1988 it would appear that the fur trade in Kathmandu continues on a worrying scale. Of the four main species documented by the Barnes report only snow leopard was not observed by the TRAFFIC - India investigators. However, local residents reported having seen a snow leopard coat available for sale in a shop only a few weeks earlier and several traders spoke of them being available. It would also appear that there had been a minimal drop in the availability of common and clouded leopard garments and a fairly significant drop in the number of leopard cat items. This may reflect in a drop in availability or it may indicate an increased wariness on the part of the traders to openly display these skins - perhaps due to the publicity created by Barnes' report. On several occasions, the present investigators saw leopard and leopard cat garments only after winning the confidence of the traders, as they were not on open display as were other species. Whereas, Barnes did not record any garments made from the rare rusty spotted cat, the present researchers found one full length coat available. Fishing cat, jungle cat, desert cat (recorded as *Felis libyca* in Barnes' report), wolf, fox and civet species were all noted by Barnes as being available although quantitative information on these species was not given and therefore cannot be compared.

### POST SCRIPT

There are a number of retail fur outlets in New Delhi, India, with a concentration of several at Yashwant Place, Chanakyapuri. As noted earlier, many of the garments on display here are made of domestic cat fur. However, when questioned attendants in two out of three of the furriers visited also claimed to be able to provide wild species including leopard. They were:

Mohd. Ramzan & Sons,  
109 Yashwant Place, New Delhi 110021  
and  
Malik Fur House,  
106 Yashwant Place, New Delhi 110021.

The latter have two branches in Srinagar and a head office-cum-factory at Tajghari Mohalla, Nowhatta Road, Srinagar 190002 (according to their card).

From the experiences in Kathmandu it was felt that a British couple with India qualified accents were not the most plausible people to pursue such leads. It is, however, felt that this line of enquiry could certainly be usefully pursued by appropriate persons of Italian, Spanish or East European nationality as these would be the most plausible buyers from the traders viewpoint.

Table 1  
Comparison of 1988 and 1992 Surveys

Species	Barnes 1988	Van Gruisen/Sinclair 1992
<b>Snow Leopard</b> <i>Panthera uncia</i>	4 long coats 2 hats	-
<b>Common Leopard</b> <i>Panthera pardus</i>	8 long coats 11 short 31 hats 2 gloves	9 long coats 12 short jackets 7 hats 1 stole
<b>Clouded Leopard</b> <i>Neofelis nebulosa</i>	3 long 1 short 1 hats	2 long coats
<b>Fishing Cat</b> <i>Felis viverrina</i>	Presence noted	1 long coat 2 short jackets
<b>Leopard Cat</b> <i>Felis bengalensis</i>	24 long 36 short 8 hats 1 stole.	12 long coats 3 short jackets 1 hat
<b>Jungle Cat</b> <i>Felis chaus</i>	Presence noted	19 long coats 27 short.coats
<b>Desert Cat</b> <i>Felis sylvestris ornata</i>	"Well represented"	30 long coats 44 short jackets
<b>Rusty Spotted Cat</b> <i>Felis rubiginosa</i>	-	1 long. coat
<b>Palm Civet</b> <i>Paradoxurus hermaphraditis</i>	"Civet Species" noted	3 long coats 2 short. coats
<b>Marten</b> <i>Masters sp.</i>	-	2 long coats 2 short jackets
<b>Wolf</b> <i>Canis lupus</i>	Presence noted	21 long coats 17 short jackets
<b>Jackal</b> <i>Canis aureus</i>	-	3 long coats 4 short jackels
<b>Fox</b> <i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Presence noted	25 long coats 52 short coats 25 skins hats, gloves etc.





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The TRAFFIC Network is the world's largest wildlife trade monitoring programme with offices covering most parts of the world. TRAFFIC is supported by WWF - World Wide Fund For Nature (formerly known as World Wildlife Fund), and IUCN - the World Conservation Union to monitor trade in and utilisation of wild plants and animals, and works in close co-operation with the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). As the majority of the Network's funding is provided by WWF, the Network is administered by the WWF Programme Committee on behalf of WWF and IUCN.

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