

## Lalsuhanra National Park, Bahawalpur

Sally Walker \*

In 2002, Zoo Outreach Organisation was asked by the IUCN Regional Biodiversity Programme, Asia, to help organise and facilitate a Conservation Assessment and Management Plan (C.A.M.P.) Workshop for the Mammals of Pakistan, in Islamabad, organised by IUCN Pakistan. It took a long time for visas, schedules, etc. to be arranged, but in August 2003, the C.A.M.P. was "on". Sanjay Molur and I facilitated the C.A.M.P. Workshop which will be reported in a later issue.

After the C.A.M.P. Sanjay returned to India but I went on to Lahore to lead a zoo meeting there which has resulted in a national zoo association for Pakistan and the initiation of zoo legislation. Another highlight of the visit was a trip to the Lalsuhanra National Park, near Bahawalpur. I had a great interest in this National Park because I heard that there were rhinos living in wild conditions there. Actually I came to understand that this was not the case, but being interested for many years in zoos and also in the Great Indian one-Horned Rhinoceros, I wanted to see all the captive ones in South Asian zoos or other captive conditions. That is how I came to visit Lalsuhanra National Park.

My visit was well planned with all official notifications done. I had a bodyguard (my first) and much care was taken to insure that neither I nor Pakistan came to harm as a result of my visit. My hosts in Bawalpur were Dr. Abdul Lateef, Curator of the Bawalpur Zoo and Mr. Muhammad Mahbub-Ur-Rehman, Conservator/Administrator of the National Park.

Ms. Uzma Khan, Sr. Education Officer, WWF, Pakistan on deputation to the Lahore Zoo, and also my CBSG, South Asian (Ex Situ) national representative in Pakistan accompanied me from Lahore.

Lateef and Rehman were excellent hosts. Lateef Rao gave Uzma and I a detailed tour of the Bawalpur Zoo the first day and Lateef and Rehman took us to the National Park the second day and told us its history. It seems that Lateef Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan, the President of Pakistan was concerned about the wildlife of the country and invited two British expeditions to visit the forest areas of the country on a survey and report on the status of Pakistan wildlife. The leader of this expedition was Guy Montfort and his recommendations after the survey was to establish three national parks, one of which was Lalsuhanra National Park in Punjab Province specifically to preserve Black Buck, Chinkara, Blue Bulls and peafowl and Khunjab National Park in northern areas for preservation of Snow Leopard, Marco Polo Sheep and Pheasants, and the Kirthar National Park (Hyderabad) in Sindh, for protection of Sindh ibex.

The members of the expedition were impressed Lalsuhanra because of varied types of habitat with forested green areas, wetlands and desert in the same area. Montfort held forth about this in his book "The Vanishing Jungle." An area of 77480 acres was initially declared as National

Park for the Punjab in 1972.

Later the Government of the Punjab transferred additional area over a period of about 30 years, 50,000 acres in 1984 and 35088 acres in 2000.



In the meantime, WWF had appealed for animals to begin a breeding programme in the National Park and a collection of wildlife lovers and zoos in Texas donated 10 blackbuck for the project. Another appeal from WWF brought a donation from children from Holland of fencing which measured 12 feet high and 70 KM long for making secure enclosures at Lalsuhanra National Park for the animals.

The terrain of this park really is quite interesting with Green land of old irrigated plantation of nearly 21,000 acres, a desert (Cholistan) of 1,27,628, and wetlands of nearly 5000 acres.

The Lalsuhanra National Park is not very much like the national parks in India and other South Asian countries. In those countries, tourists are permitted, but almost as an afterthought so that the Park will remain protected. In Pakistan, National Parks are more for the people than the animals. There is much tourism and the Pakistan people, who love to get out in the open, really enjoy these parks. The Park is under the administrative control of the Punjab Forest Department since 1972. It is headed by an Administrator of the status of a Conservator of Forests

The Objectives of the National Park are listed as :

- To preserve scenic beauty, flora and fauna.
- To re-introduce, the endemic fauna particularly the Black Buck, Chinkara and Nilgal.
- To develop the area for out-door recreation activities.
- To carry out scientific management of the natural fauna so as to promote and enhance wildlife values.

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-- To allow scientific studies on flora and fauna.  
 -- To afford visitors, adequate protection and services as well as safeguard the facilities.  
 -- To control public usage so that the natural values of the Park may not be impaired.  
 -- To manage the forest plantation in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Working Plan of Lalsuhanra Plantation.

Many recreational areas have been developed by an ever increasing number of visitors multiple use of available land resources and to improve the Jheel area for water-fowl. World Wildlife Fund arranged through donation by children of Holland 72 KM Chain-link Fence which was used for erection of 5 enclosures in different part of the Park for protection / preservation of local Flora and Fauna. In addition to it the department has created the following recreational facilities for the general public which are now being enjoyed by ever increasing number of visitors. They have a Children's Park, a Mini Zoo in this Park, a Lion Safari, tourist huts, an aquarium and museum Hall, five large wire mesh enclosures for breeding Black Buck and Chinkara and preservation of local Flora and Fauna and, of course, the Rhino enclosure.

The rhinos were a gift of the Government of Nepal and were brought as very young animals in 1983-83. Initially they were kept for many years in a rather small, albeit moated enclosure with a pond but wildlife officers felt they were not comfortable there and the two pregnancies sustained by the female were not successful. More recently a large rhino enclosure of 12.5 acres has been constructed among large trees. The pond remains in the front of the enclosure and also the feeding area so that the rhinos pay frequent visits to the viewing area. They animals are very tame and mix familiarly with their keeper, who goes in with them. They were healthy and calm and clearly enjoyed the additional space provided by the new enclosure. They wander into the forested area of their enclosure which is closed all around the 12.5 acres. Although there is a large sign in front of the enclosure announcing the presence of the rhino, the absence

### Animals exhibited in the Park

Name	Source	2003
Rhinoceros	Nepal 82/83	2
Chinkara	Local	64
Monkeys	Murree	3
Partridges, Black	Local	2
Peafowls, Pied		12
Peafowls Blue	-do-	79
Ducks, Caroline	Belgium	200
Peafowls, White	Lahore Zoo	7
Swans, Black	-do-	8
Crane, Migratory		3
Macaw, Blue	Belgium	2
Cocakattoo, White	-do-	1
Quail	Local	2
Ducks, Common	-do-	71
Fowl, Ginny		13
Pheasant, Silver		1
Owl		1



**Female rhino takes a stroll after feeding in the Lal Lalsuhanra National Park, Bahawalpur, Photo by S. Walker**

attractive signage explaining the significance of the rhino there is glaring and unfortunate. Rhinos used to range in Pakistan many decades ago and this was one reason the King of Nepal gifted two young rhinos to the Pakistan government. Perhaps Uzma Khan will design something for them to get erected so people can know why and how these magnificent animals came to be there.

Another interesting feature of the Park, albeit not entirely a good feature, is the

large numbers of ungulates in the breeding enclosures. The Black Buck and Chinkara, the breeding of which is the mandate of the park, are all very much inbred and overbred. Hundreds of animals inhabit the enclosures which are possibly large enough, but the feeding takes place in a relatively small area which leads to much fighting. The Black Buck population is skewed in favour of males with well developed horns. When they come together to each out of pans placed

close together in the eating area, their horns click and the very sound starts a fight. The concept of breeding park is good but the animals need some management, such as identification of individuals, marking, maintaining a studbook, exchanging animals with other parks to prevent inbreeding, separating males to control the population, etc. There are a number of deaths during the year due to fighting. Also the various herds began from a relatively small number of founders, and have not had input of fresh genetic material since several decades. The same is true of the chinkara population. Much breeding is going on.

Some highlights of Park activities are :

- the number of Black Buck has increased from 173 (1992) to 501 (Oct, 1997) & 544 (July, 2003)
- the number of Chinkara has increased from 45 (1992) to 120 (July, 2003).
- the Fish Pond was auctioned for Rs.51.00, 5.41, 16.54 and 59.00 Lakh during the year 1993-94, 1994-95, 1995-96, & 1997-98 respectively. No auction during 2003-2004.
- A project for Establishment of Lion Safari Park and improvement of Pond area in Lalsuhanra National Park was conceived and implemented.
- A Rhino's Moat over 12,5 acres (3050 Rft) has been constructed.

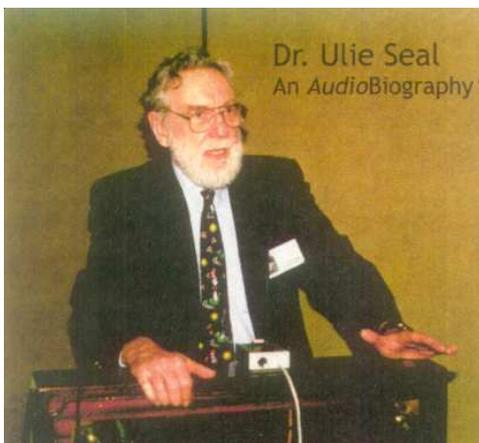
One of the Black Buck breeding enclosures is actually an immense part of the beautiful Cholistan Desert. We rode a little way into the desert but could not see any Black Buck but it didn't matter. The desert has its own dramatic charm and made a wonderful end to a to a fascinating visit.



**Black Buck compete for food which is served in small pans. When their horns click together, it is a signal to fight.**



**The Cholistan Desert are of the Park is large and relatively undisturbed. It makes an excellent introduction to the Desert ecosystem, just an hour away from the city of Bahawalpur. Photo by Sally Walker**



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