



PALLA'S CAT: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: A Kerala Motor Vehicle Department official's Mongolia trip to photograph the Pallas's cat finds its way to a school textbook

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The three species highlight the biodiversity of Central Asia and underline the urgent need for conservation amid human-induced habitat degradation, climate change, and exploitation. Each species' unique adaptations and ecological roles make them critical to their respective ecosystems. Conservation efforts, including habitat restoration, policy enforcement, and public awareness, are vital for their survival.

Pallas's Cat



- **Description:**
A small wildcat species, Pallas's Cat (*Otocolobus manul*), is known for its unique physical characteristics, including a flat face, rounded ears, and dense silvery-grey fur that helps it blend into the rocky and snowy landscapes of Central Asia.
- **Habitat:**
Found in rocky steppes and cold deserts at high altitudes, up to 5,000 meters above sea level, spanning countries like Mongolia, China, and parts of Russia.
- **Behavior:**
Solitary and elusive, it is mostly nocturnal, hunting small mammals, birds, and insects. Its low population density makes sightings rare.
- **Threats:**
 - **Habitat Loss:** Increasing human activities like mining and agriculture encroach on its habitat.
 - **Hunting:** Poaching for fur and accidental killing during rodent control programs.



- **Conservation Status:**

Classified as **Near Threatened** by the IUCN Red List, with efforts focused on habitat protection and raising awareness about its ecological importance.

Bactrian Camel



- **Description:**

The Bactrian camel (*Camelus bactrianus*), distinguishable by its two humps, is highly adapted to the harsh cold desert environments of Central Asia, enduring temperature extremes from -40°C to 40°C .

- **Domesticated vs. Wild:**

- **Domesticated Bactrian Camels:** Used for transport, milk, wool, and meat by local communities.
- **Wild Bactrian Camels:** Critically Endangered, with less than 1,000 individuals remaining, mainly in the Gobi Desert.

- **Unique Adaptations:**

- Thick fur protects against cold winters.
- Stores fat in humps for energy, enabling survival during food scarcity.

- **Threats:**

- Habitat loss due to mining and infrastructure projects.
- Competition with domesticated camels for limited resources.



Przewalski's Hors



- **Description:**
Known as *Equus ferus przewalskii*, this is the last truly wild horse species, once extinct in the wild but reintroduced through captive breeding and conservation programs.
- **Physical Traits:**
Short, erect mane without a forelock, and a stocky build adapted to the harsh steppes.
- **Habitat:**
Inhabits grasslands and semi-desert regions of Central Asia, feeding primarily on grasses and shrubs.
- **Conservation History:**
 - By the 20th century, the species was nearly extinct due to overhunting and habitat encroachment.
 - Successful captive breeding and rewilding programs have restored small populations to Mongolia's protected areas like the Hustai National Park.
- **Threats:**
Habitat fragmentation and climate change remain ongoing concerns.
- **Conservation Status:**
Listed as **Endangered** by the IUCN Red List.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/an-mvd-officials-trip-to-mongolia-to-photograph-pallas-cat-find-its-way-to-a-school-textbook/article69054304.ece#:~:text=When%20he%20had%20gone%20on,a%20school%20textbook%20years%20later.>