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Centre for Resource Management

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ISSUES IN MANAGEMENT OF AN INTRODUCED MAMMAL

HIMALAYAN THAR IN NEW ZEALAND:

F.1

7.2.7. Recreational Hunters

Recreational hunters have traditionally been one of the largest back country user groups in N.Z. Numerically, they are certainly the largest of that user groups. The following discussion is centered on the views of the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association Inc. (NZDA). Although it is acknowledged that only a small proportion of recreational hunters in N.Z. are affiliated with this or any other hunting organization (see below) it is assumed here that the views of the NZDA with respect to Himalayan that reflect those of recreational hunters at large. A discussion of recreational hunting in general and the specific role that play in this activity follows a summary of the NZDA position.

The NZDA has long expressed interest in recreational hunting of Himalayan that. For example, the first scientific research on this species in N.Z. was undertaken by members of the Big Game Research Committee of this organization (Anderson and Henderson, 1961). NZDA interest in that culminated in the "Save the Thar" campaign and the resultant petition, presented to the Land and Agriculture Committee of Parliament in 1976. The petition, containing 12,000 signatures, called for retention of a herd of Himalayan that for recreational purposes (see 1.3). In September 1982 a more specific proposal for establishment of a RHA for that in the mid-Southern Alps was prepared and sent to the National Recreational Hunting Advisory Committee for consideration. The present views of the NZDA with respect to Himalayan that, details of the RHA proposal, and aspirations for the future management of this species were expressed in a statement presented by Mr. K. Schasching at the public meeting held in Wellington October 2, 1984 (see 6.3.3). The main points are summarized below:

1) Present Views

- It is acknowledged that that in large numbers do unacceptable damage to vegetation, and soil and water values. However,
- within the constraints of environmental carrying capacity it is thought that that can and should be

managed as a recreational resource. This was expressed by one hunter interviewed as a desire for "healthy animals in a healthy environment". (Hols, pers. comm., 1984).

- Present population densities are considered too low to adequately meet the needs of recreational hunters.

2) The RHA Proposal

Essentially two RHAs have been proposed in the mid-Southern Alps, one on each side of the main divide. The proposals call for large RHAs so that low population densities can be maintained to accommodate soil and water conservation objectives.

The eastern proposal includes all state forest and UCL in the headwaters of the Rangitata Catchment, i.e. the catchments of the three main tributaries, the Havelock, Clyde and Lawrence Rivers. Also included is that portion of the Rakaiia R. catchment south of Cattle Stream.

The western proposal concerns state forest and UCL in the headwaters of the Wanganui River (i.e. including the Evans, Lord and Lambert tributaries) and extends further south to the Perth River.

The eastern proposal abuts pastoral leasehold to the east and Mt. Cook national park in the south. The southern extension of the western proposal also approaches the boundaries of Mt. Cook national park.

3) Future Thar Management

- a) Continue the present moratorium on the commercial hunting of thar for a further 5 years; while at the same time,
- b) Have the New Zealand forest service vigorously control thar in and immediately adjacent to Mt. Cook National Park, and Westland National Park, and at the northern and southern ends of their range with the objective of eliminating them from these areas; and concurrently,
- c) Have the New Zealand forest service undertake a large scale investigation into the feasibility of managing thar for

recreational hunting at densities above those attainable in control operations.

4) Recreational Hunting in New Zealand: Background

Information.

Hunters are amongst the least studied recreational groups in N.Z. (Simmons and Devlin, 1983); in particular, little is known about recreational hunting of Himalayan thar. A full scale examination of recreational hunting in N.Z. is beyond the scope of this report. Unfortunately, this has not been undertaken elsewhere. In the following discussion, relevant aspects of recreational hunting in general are outlined, and the interest of recreational hunters in thar specifically is addressed in greater detail. Information is drawn principally from an interview of 6 thar hunters which was conducted for the purpose of this study, the literature review and discussion of recreational hunting by Aukerman and Davison (1980), and a regional study of recreational hunting in Lake Sumner forest park (North Canterbury) by Simmons and Devlin (1983).

In their study of the mountain land recreationalist,

Aukerman and Davison (1980) suggest that recreational

hunting fulfills several needs of participants. These are:

- To meet the challenge of a demanding environment,
- To prove hunting skill and self sufficiency,
- To leave the city and get back to nature,
- To see animals in the wild,
- To relax, and enjoy the companionship of fellow hunters.

Only a small proportion of recreational hunters belong to hunting organizations (Aukerman and Davison, 1980; Simmons and Devlin, 1983). The NZDA is the largest such organization with a current membership of 4,600. The only other organization catering to the needs of thar hunters is the Big Game Hunters' Association. Unfortunately, no membership figures were available for this association, but it is known to be much smaller than the NZDA. The total number of recreational hunters in New Zealand has never been accurately assessed. Robb and Howarth (1977) indicate that

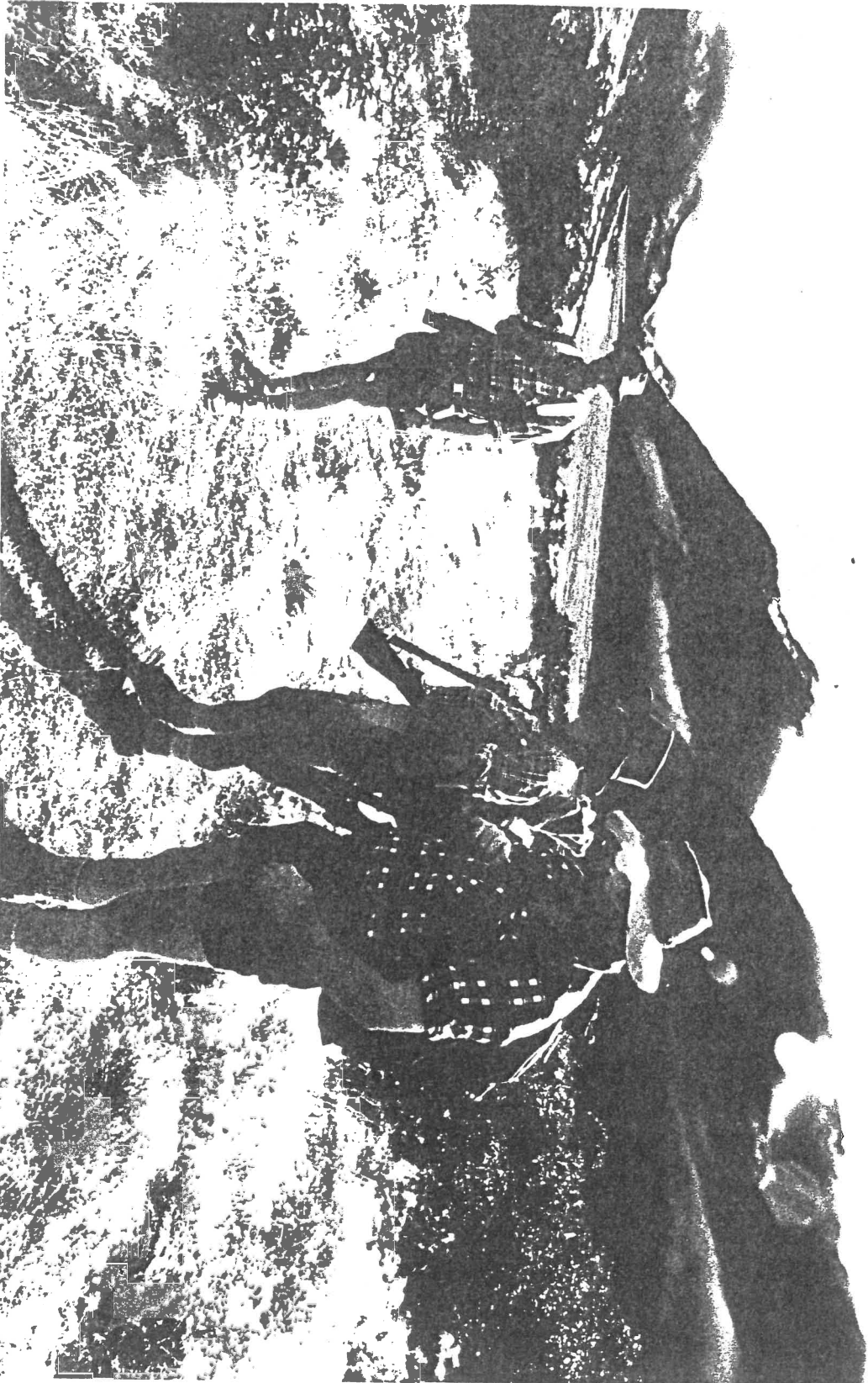


FIGURE 18: Recreational Hunters - off to pursue thar in
Carney's Creek, Havelock Valley

PHOTO: M.J. Levine

approximately 2.4 percent of the New Zealand public (i.e. ~72,000 people) considered hunting one of their three most favoured forms of recreation. However, the number of active participants is not necessarily an accurate measure of societal interest in recreational hunting. One of the consequences of commercial depletion of wild animals in recent years has been a "rapid and phenomenal decrease in the numbers going into the mountains for recreational hunting.. Large numbers no longer hunt because there is nothing to hunt. Those who still hunt make trips less frequently" (Aukerman and Davison, 1980). This trend is borne out by membership figures for the NZDA. In 1960, membership stood at 9,200; by 1984 national membership had fallen by 50 percent to 4,600 (Grant pers. comm., 1984). Because this decline in recreational hunting is due in large measure to the destruction of its resource base, potential interest in the activity is likely to be far greater than present participation indicates. For example, the recent user survey of Lake Sumner forest park, showed that of those individuals who had never hunted (58.5 percent of the total sample), approximately 37 percent were interested in trying this activity (Simmons and Devlin, 1983).

Demographic characteristics of hunters indicate that they are a distinct category of back country user. The sport is overwhelmingly male dominated and hunters are drawn predominantly from the 20-30 age group. As a group, hunters are more likely to continue with their sport into later life than trampers, and in terms of general education and occupation, hunters appear to be more representative of N.Z. society as a whole than other back country users (Simmons and Devlin, 1983).

5) The Importance of Himalayan Thar to Recreational Hunters.

A group interview conducted with six recreational hunters from Christchurch provided some information on the importance of Himalayan thar as a recreational species. All were NZDA members selected because of their strong interest in thar hunting. Nonetheless, all hunted a wide variety of other species as well. The group indicated that there are five

characteristics of thar hunting which make it particularly rewarding:

1) Thar live in the "most beautiful country" in N.Z.

2) The hunter must work hard to obtain an animal.

3) It is possible to hunt thar with a companion - this often is not the case when deerstalking in dense bush.

4) Thar provide a unique and desirable trophy.

5) To some degree the scarcity of animals itself has given rise to greater recreational interest.* Although all agreed animals were far too scarce at the present time.

The group considered that perhaps 10 percent of recreational hunters pursued thar regularly. This is roughly in agreement with the findings of Simmons and Devlin (1983); 6.1 percent of hunters surveyed in Lake Sumner forest park indicated that were their first or second choice species. In addition, forty percent of hunters surveyed in the park indicated that they had hunted thar in the past. Simmons and Devlin (1983) conclude that hunters tend to seek a variety of hunting experiences as well as developing favourite species. It should also be noted that thar are not found within the Lake Sumner forest park. A possible consequence of this is that hunters who are particularly interested in thar were under-represented in the sample.

The thar hunters indicated that a variety of factors have influenced the popularity of Himalayan thar amongst hunters. These are:

1) Information -

In the past, e.g. early 1960s, many hunters were unaware of the existence of thar. At present, hunters are more aware of thar as a game species. Many, however, are unsure whether any thar remain, and if so, where and how they may be pursued. With the scarcity of animals, hunters who know of rewarding areas (very few for thar) are unwilling to share this information. Some hunters took the view that the Forest Service should take a more active role

Unfortunately, the many possible reasons for this were not explored.

in alerting recreationalists to the presence of animals.

ii) Access, and difficulty of hunting terrain -

In the past, the remoteness of that habitat was the major difficulty in hunting this species. Long treks with heavy packs were required to reach hunting areas. Similarly, the difficulty of the terrain that inhabit called for better equipment than most hunters had. Today access and terrain still pose difficulties. However, with improvements in technology (e.g. 4 wheel drive vehicles, better rifles, light tramping equipment etc.) they have become less formidable obstacles to the hunter. Still, many will seek easier game far closer to home.

iii) Changes in hunting objectives - Prior to the boom in commercial hunting during the 1960s, game was

freely available in accessible country throughout N.Z. Many hunters simply "shot for the pot", and many measured their hunting success by the number of animals killed. Abundant game in accessible areas meant there was no need to journey to the high mountain lands for sport. This approach to hunting is no longer feasible given the relative scarcity of wild animals today. Hunters indicated that scarcity has increased interest in trophy hunting, and conservation of remaining stocks amongst recreational hunters. On the other hand, hunters indicated that deerstalkers had little incentive to restrain themselves when animals they spared were likely to be taken by commercial or Forest Service hunters. It was acknowledged that some indiscriminate shooting of wild animals continues.

The central issue for recreationalists was clear. They felt there were too few that to meet their needs. They stressed they do not advocate a return to peak population levels. "We don't want animals in great mobs like they used to be - no one would want that. We want our bush, we want our mountain-tops in good shape, but we also want animals" (Hois, pers. comm. 1984). That hunters

stressed the need for greater animal numbers, to make hunting worthwhile at present, and to ensure retention of animals for the benefit of future generations.

The decline in the success rate of recreational thar hunters since the early 1970s has been well documented.

FIGURE 19: Thar kills from Mt. Cook National Park and Recreational Hunting Success, 1972-1977.

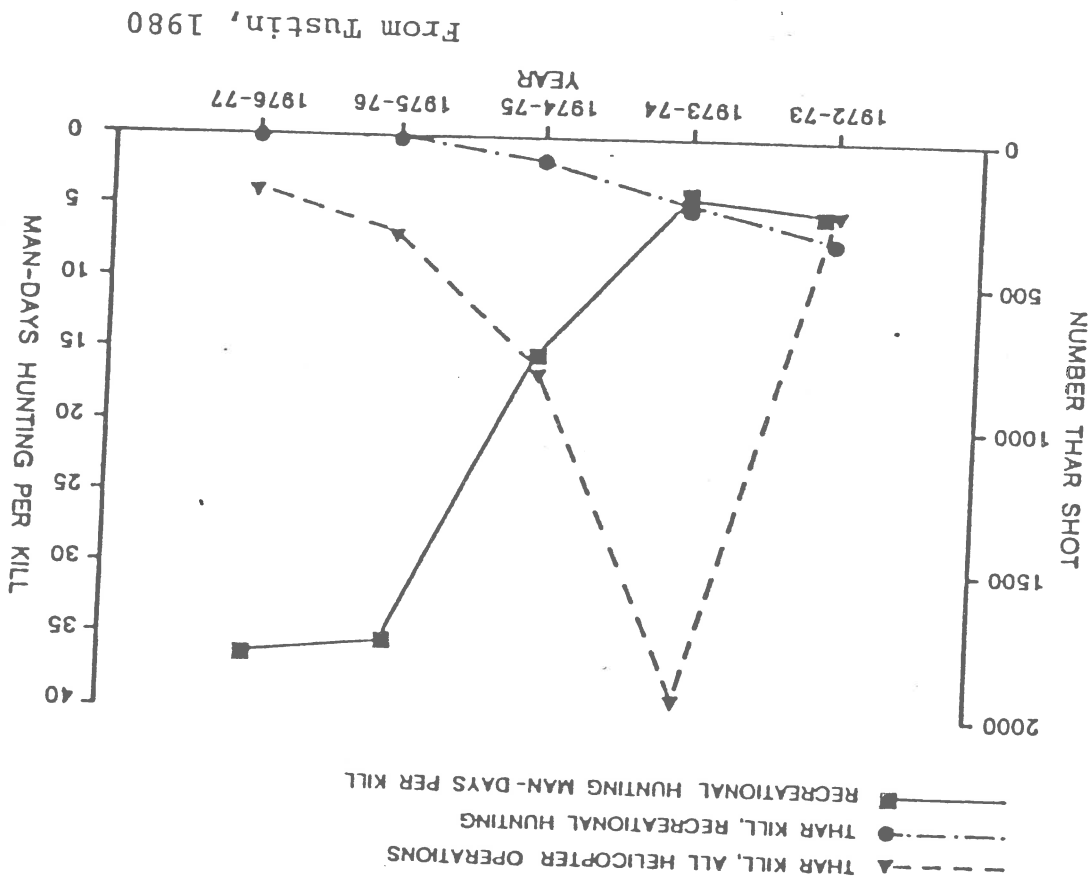


Figure 19 shows the tremendous increase in man-days per recreational thar kill which followed commercial helicopter hunting and government control operations in Mt. Cook National Park. This is indicative of the trend throughout thar habitat.

TABLE 11: Recreational Hunting Success Statistics for Himalayan Thar, 1978-1980

Years	% Hunters saw no animals	% Hunters killed no animals	% Hunters killed at least one animal	% Hunters very successful, 10+ animals killed
1978-1980	40.9	61.5	38.5	4.1

Table 11 shows the level of success during the period 1978-1980 amongst thar hunters surveyed by Simmons and Devlin (1983). Simmons and Devlin also found that questionnaire data from "hunters who have subsequently given up the sport indicate that 80 percent had withdrawn from the sport within two years of their last 'successful' trip and a further 11 percent had withdrawn in the following two year period". On this basis over 60 percent of thar hunters surveyed would have been in this "at risk" category in 1980 (Simmons and Devlin, 1983). This lends substance to thar hunters' expressed concern that continued low population levels will lead to further attrition of the ranks of sportsmen.

Thar hunters interviewed saw the solution to the problems described as the imposition of some form of game management for thar in some portion of their habitat. First and foremost they expressed a desire to see official recognition of the resource values of the animal; equally important was the desire to see maintenance of larger populations to improve hunting success. With respect to management practices, the following specific points were noted:

- Excessive populations could always be culled through helicopter hunting.
- Animals removed could help pay for the costs of control.
- Recreational hunters would be willing to pay for use of managed thar populations, providing the cost was reasonable, and if 'hunnable' thar populations could be maintained under the management regime.
- Fees collected could pay for periodic control operations. Hunters felt that this system could be abused, but would be preferable to having nothing to hunt.

These views are consistent with those expressed in general terms by recreational hunters cited by Aukerman and Davison (1980).

ments of recreational hunters, the estimation of demand for that hunting is a difficult prospect. Existing permit returns for hunting on crown lands would be virtually useless for this task. First, some hunters do not obtain necessary permits. Second, only a small percentage of those permits issued are actually returned (Aukerman and Davison, 1980). Third, those that are returned are likely to be inaccurate. Hunters interviewed indicated that returns have been intentionally falsified in the past in order to prevent Forest Service from learning the location of remaining animals. The demand for that would have to be assessed on the basis of recorded kills. This is likely to lead to an underestimate. Finally, and most importantly, it can be safely assumed from the preceding discussions, that recreational hunting effort will vary substantially with that population size. At the present moment it is probable that recreational use of that populations will decrease through attrition of unsuccessful hunters, if there is no increase in that numbers. It also seems safe to assume that recreational use of that populations would increase with any substantial increase in animal numbers. However, it is impossible to assess in advance what the recreational hunting demand would be for a given increase in population size.

7.2.8. Non Hunting Recreationalists.

Recreation is the primary human activity in national parks, state forest, and on UCL. It is also an important use of pastoral lands (Gresham, 1978). Many have commented on the substantial growth in recreational use of high country lands in general during the past few decades (see O'Connor 1972; 1978; 1981; Aukerman and Davison (1980); Thomson (1978); Wendelkin (1978)).

Tramping and mountaineering are the two principal forms of non-hunting recreation in the rugged country that inhabit. There is no indication of conflict between recreational hunters drawn to the area to shoot that and other recreation- al users. However, many trappers and climbers, as well as recreational hunters are disturbed by the overflight of light