

ARGALI AND BLUE SHEEP ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU: STATUS UPDATE

Richard B. Harris, Wildlife Biology Program, School of Forestry, Univ. of Montana,
Missoula, MT 59812

Daniel H. Pletscher, Wildlife Biology Program, School of Forestry, Univ. of Montana,
Missoula, MT 59812

Abstract: Surveys we conducted from 1986 through 1997 in Qinghai Province (roughly the northern half of the Tibetan plateau) form the basis of our understanding of the conservation status for 2 species of wild caprin, argali (*Ovis ammon*) and blue sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*). Blue sheep are relatively common and wide-spread, and although the subject of some unregulated hunting, are not in immediate danger. Argali are considerably more patchily distributed, subject to greater mortality pressure, and exist in lower numbers where present. Still, at least locally, argali can support limited trophy hunting where such an activity provides an incentive to more active conservation. National parks -- as North Americans conceive them -- are absent in China, and "nature reserves", although encompassing large areas of the Plateau, cannot be assumed to effectively protect wild fauna. Because of the vast areas and general inaccessibility of the Plateau, as well as the limited financial resources available to Chinese managers and researchers, the future of these species resides largely in the hands of those living near them. As market forces increasingly enter previously remote areas, both species are vulnerable to non-local Chinese who have little incentive to act responsibly. Fortunately, most local pastoralists possess positive attitudes toward wildlife conservation, but even they often will require specific incentive programs to help them assure these species' future.

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