



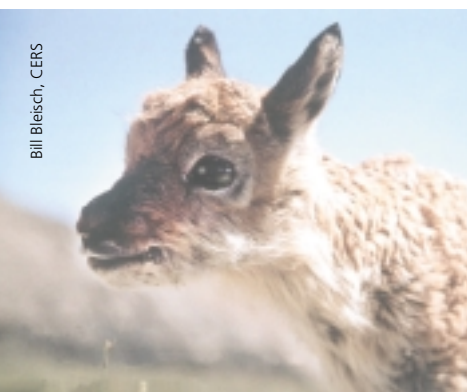
WRAP UP THE TRADE

AN INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO SAVE THE ENDANGERED TIBETAN ANTELOPE





Fashion for Extinction



In its remote home high in the mountain plateaus of central Asia the endangered Tibetan antelope (*Pantholops hodgsonii*) – also known as the chiru – is among the world’s most protected species. Ironically, poaching has brought the chiru to the brink of extinction.

For 22 years this diminutive, yet magnificent antelope with distinctive lyre-shaped horns has been classified under Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES); the highest legal protection for any species. It is illegal worldwide to kill, harm or trade chiru or its body parts: transgressors face several years’ imprisonment, a heavy fine or both. And unlike most endangered species this one has the protection of an army of minders.

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Despite its immense legal protection, the Tibetan antelope is being blasted into extinction.

It is being slaughtered indiscriminately by poachers for its ultra fine under fleece wool, known as shahtoosh, which is woven into luxury shawls. Most of these end up in the wardrobes of wealthy Westerners.

Anti-poaching patrols battle hard to protect the antelopes from the ruthless well-armed poachers, but it is a fight they are losing: their numbers are too few to cover the chiru’s 600,000 square kilometre territory on the inhospitable Tibetan plateau.

The population for the entire Tibetan plateau during the early 1990s was between 65,000 and 72,500, just 10 percent of the population 100 years ago. China estimates that as many as 20,000 Tibetan antelope are killed annually to supply the trade. Unless action is taken now to kill the demand for shahtoosh the Tibetan antelope will be extinct within five years.

The Shawl



Shahtoosh is Persian for “the king of wool”. It is exceptionally soft, feather light and just one-fifth the width of a human hair. For several hundred years shahtoosh shawls have been prized by northern Indian

families and passed on from mother to daughter.

During the late 1980s the shawls became a fashion ‘must-have’ among wealthy trendsetters. Demand grew within the USA, Mexico, UK, France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland,

A shahtoosh isn't a shawl – it's a shroud.

Middle Eastern countries, Hong Kong and Australia.

Shawls are typically made in three sizes. A woman’s measures 1 x 2 metres and weighs about 100 grams, requiring 300 to 400 grams of raw wool: this represents the lives of about three chiru. Men’s shawls are approximately 3 metres by 1.5 metres, entailing the killing of five chiru.

The price of a shawl depends on size, colour, the extent and quality of any embroidery and wool purity. In India pure shahtoosh shawls cost between US \$800 and \$5,280. Internationally, prices are far higher. Some shawls seized during a police raid in London in 1997 were priced at up to US\$17,600.

The poachers dazzle the chiru with vehicle headlights and shoot them en masse, often with automatic weapons.



The Crime

Until the 1970s few humans braved the bitter cold of the chiru's home range. The demand for shahtoosh was minimal and hunting had little impact on the vast antelope herds. But the 1980s saw a dramatic growth in demand from the world's fashion industry triggering a rapid and sharp increase in the price of shahtoosh wool.

Once poachers killed only males when they had their thick winter coats. Now they also kill females in summer when their coats are at their thinnest – and while they are pregnant or have just given birth. The poachers dazzle the chiru with vehicle headlights and shoot them en masse, often with automatic weapons.

In 1998 and 1999 a Chinese research team discovered for the first time that calving females were being targeted.

Scientist Dr William Bleisch reports: “In the summer of 1998 only one team of poachers, who had killed fewer than 100 female chiru during the week before our arrival, were found. During the same period in 1999 at least four teams of poachers were operating in this area and they had killed more than 900 animals in just the few days before we arrived and drove them away.”

Since 2000 the Chinese government has allocated more funding for anti-poaching operations and issued more vehicles and equipment for protection patrols. In March 2001, 39 kilograms of raw shahtoosh was confiscated on the Tibet-Nepal border, an amount that represents the death of more than 300 Tibetan antelope. By the end of April 2001 Chinese Forestry Police had confiscated over 20,756 antelope pelts.



China estimates that as many as 20,000 Tibetan antelope are killed annually

The Manufacture and The Myth

Shahtoosh shawls are woven only in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The trade and manufacture of shahtoosh has always been controlled by a handful of wealthy, influential local traders who farm out consignments of the raw wool to a select few of the most skilled and experienced hair removers, spinners and weavers.

Fifty years ago 20 – 30 kg of shahtoosh per annum was processed in Kashmir: by 1997 this had risen to 3,000 kg according to one wholesaler.

For generations the shahtoosh industry has hidden the unsavoury origin of its wool, claiming it came from the Ibex, wild goats,

or “Siberian geese” and that wisps of moulted wool were gathered from bushes and rocks.

Today, many shahtoosh shawl buyers still believe these myths. But the fact is that shahtoosh comes only from the Tibetan antelope that must be killed before the wool can be removed.

The Tibetan antelope must be killed before the wool can be removed





Poachers caught by IFAW funded anti-poaching patrol and confiscated chiru pelts, horns and poachers guns



IFAW / Wild Yak Patrol

The IFAW/WTI Investigation 2000/2001

IFAW/WTI investigators were offered Tibetan antelope skins and raw shahtoosh wool in Tibet and finished shawls in Delhi and London

A new joint investigation by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) has revealed the extent of the illegal trade in shahtoosh: investigators were offered Tibetan antelope skins and raw shahtoosh wool in Tibet, and finished shawls in Delhi and London. They also visited the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir – the only place where shahtoosh is woven and which supplies the entire global market with shawls.

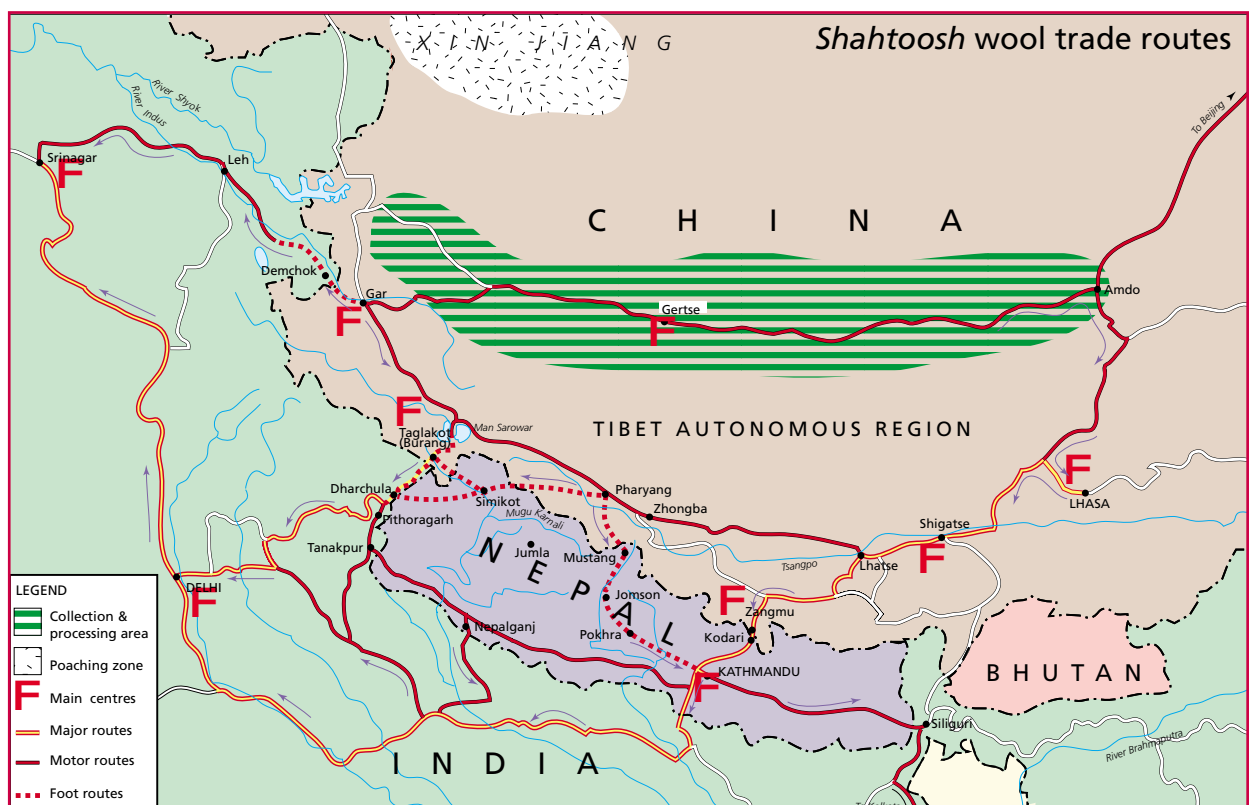
Kashmir – International efforts to save the Tibetan antelope have been thwarted by the fact that J&K has permitted the shahtoosh trade in defiance of CITES. In May 2000 the J&K High Court ordered the state government to enforce CITES. This prompted the birth of shahtoosh traders' associations and worker's unions, which demanded alternative employment or compensation if the J&K Government enforces the global shahtoosh ban. Shahtoosh weaving

is among the world's most clandestine cottage industries, with weavers working the wool informally within their homes.

An IFAW-WTI team went to the Kashmir valley to research the possible socio-economic impacts of a ban on shahtoosh production. Preliminary results of a survey of 1,200 people show that the valley has around 70 shahtoosh manufacturers, employing an estimated 30,000 people. Faced with a ban on shahtoosh, 60 per cent of the survey respondents prefer to weave pashmina shawls as an alternative. Pashmina is the fine hair of pashmina goats that, unlike shahtoosh, is produced by combing the animals without harm.

Dongba – A Khampa nomad confirms that chiru are being killed in the nearby areas: "Today you can get a kilogram of shahtoosh for 1,500 yuan. Chinese traders and Khampas come from Lhasa and Shigatse in cars to buy it. The poaching months are usually May-June and the traders come around September-October."

Lhasa and Shigatse are the main hubs of bulk wool transactions. From here it travels with pashmina or sheep wool or disguised in light foam mattresses via Zangmu / Kodari border into Nepal. The wool is then repackaged in and around Kathmandu and sent by individual couriers by buses into India. The destination of the wool is Kashmir.





A yak caravan near Darchen, Tibet. A large amount of shahtoosh is carried by such caravans.

Joanna Van Gruisen

Pharyang – A Dokpa reports that two years ago, a kilo of shahtoosh fetched around 8,000 to 9,000 Nepali rupees. If necessary he can get any amount of shahtoosh to Zangmu with the help of tradesmen from Lhasa and Shigatse. “How you take it out is your business,” he says.

Taglakot (Burang) – Contact was made with traders who claimed to have “substantial stocks,” and agreed to supply 200 kilograms of raw, shahtoosh wool in Delhi. Investigators were shown half of a kilogram of shahtoosh. The trader had 15 kilograms ready and wanted the investigators to buy it right away; he asked for 6,000 yuan per kilogram and a transportation charge of 4,000 Indian currency per kilogram from Taklakot to Delhi.

He said, “We have consignments going every month (to Delhi). We have regular buyers there. We normally take it by foot across the border to Pithoragarh and then by bus to Delhi. We have many couriers, who keep changing buses

(right) **Laba, the director of Tibet Forestry Police, inspects confiscated chiru wool in mattress**

and routes. Shahtoosh is compressible and large amounts can be taken in small bundles. No one notices.”

Gertse – At their first stop the investigators asked for shahtoosh. Unfazed, a shopkeeper replied “Oh yes, one of my friends has 15-16 kilogram ready wool for sale. But if you need it with skin, I can give you some of that too.” He showed the team a bag containing 30 skins, each priced at 450 yuan and plastic bags

containing 1.5 kg of shahtoosh wool. He could supply skins or wool to Lhasa or Taglakot.

Delhi – March 2001 – investigators were offered superior quality shahtoosh shawls for sale. One such offer was by traders based in a Delhi Government bazaar: the salesmen asked for 26,000 rupees (US \$650) for each shawl. Another shop owner in a 5-star hotel in Delhi offered a shahtoosh shawl delivery service to London, claiming he took shawls there every year.

London – May 2001 – IFAW investigators were offered a shahtoosh shawl in a prominent shopping district. The incident has been reported to the police.



The Solution

IFAW believes three things must happen if the Tibetan antelope is to be saved:

Shahtoosh weaving in J&K must stop

Kashmir's shahtoosh workforce should switch to pashmina. However, being thicker and stronger pashmina can be processed mechanically, requiring far fewer workers. It can also be cheaply machine woven, making redundant the shahtoosh workers' hand-weaving skills. And poor quality pashmina is already being mass-produced outside Kashmir, forcing down the cost of the hand-made variety.

The way ahead is to give alternatives like Kashmir Pashmina a special place, a niche as the best-woven pashmina. To do this the manufacturers will require direct sourcing of super fine pashmina from Mongolia or breed similar livestock in Kashmir, while providing appropriate animal welfare standards.

The fashion world could play a vital role in promoting this product. In this way both the Kashmir weaving industry and the Tibetan antelope would have a brighter future.

The anti-poaching patrols must be coordinated to become more effective

A National Tibetan Antelope Conservation Plan

should be developed by China through a multi-agency approach. International support and cooperation must be given. Although the Chinese government has seriously addressed the Tibetan antelope protection issue, there remain tremendous inadequacies in the existing regulatory structure, which needs to be more coordinated and less bureaucratic. Lack of funds and inadequate equipment are characteristic of all of the anti-poaching efforts in the Tibetan Antelope range. **This must change.**

The fashion demand for shahtoosh must be ended

Whilst there is demand for shahtoosh, poachers will continue their ruthless slaughter. IFAW and WTI have launched awareness campaigns in Europe and India to enlist the support of fashion designers and others in the fashion world. The response has been excellent but more support is needed to spread the message that a shahtoosh is not a shawl but a shroud. Pledges for people in the fashion world to sign and leaflets to be distributed at fashion shows are available from both IFAW and WTI.



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Sources: This document is a summary of IFAW/WTI's new report "Wrap Up the Trade: An International Campaign to save the Endangered Tibetan antelope". The full report is available on request.