

Conservation Biology of
AMPHIBIANS
OF ASIA

*Status of Conservation and Decline of Amphibians:
Eastern Hemisphere*

Edited by

Harold Heatwole and Indraneil Das



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88864 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

Tel: 088-233098 Fax: 088-240768

e-mail: info@nhpborneo.com

website: www.nhpborneo.com

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CHAPTER 6

Status and Decline of Amphibians of Afghanistan

Indraneil Das

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Abbreviations in text and references: asl = above sea level; GAA = Global Amphibian Assessments; IUCN = International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources/The World Conservation Union; UNEP = United Nations Environmental Programme.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (total land area: 547,500 km²) (Fig. 1) is a land-locked country in southern central Asia, bounded by the central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north, Pakistan in the east and south, China to the extreme northeast, and Iran on the west. Mostly arid, the landscape is dominated by the mountains of Hindu Kush, located on a northeast-southwest axis, a barrier to the dispersal of Indian elements from the south and west, and to the steppe faunas and floras of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, to the north and west.

Largely mountainous (the highest peak is Nowshak or Noshak, located within the Hindu Kush range, at 7485 m asl), plains are in the southwest and north of Afghanistan. Surface water is scarce, and the Sistan Basin (a desert depression) is one of the driest regions in the world. The major rivers, including the Helmand, Khash, and Farah, flow into the Sistan, which sprawls across the Afghan-Iran border. The climate is otherwise extreme, with harsh winters and long and hot summers in the lowlands; temperatures are in the range of -15°C to over 35°C. A weak influence of the Indian monsoon is felt in Afghanistan's eastern valleys (including the Gumal and Kundar valleys and the Kabul River basin) and rains falling in July are associated with reproduction of amphibians.

The largely rocky and sandy biotope, typical of deserts and of semi-desertic conditions, renders Afghanistan unsuitable for maintaining a high diversity of amphibians. Streams tend to be ephemeral, and one of the few relatively mesic regions is in the area of Paghman, whose streams are perennial, fed by melting snow. The conifer-covered province of Khost contains one of the few forested areas in the country, but also, is under intensive agriculture.