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ECOTOURISM in the National Parks of PAKISTAN

Ecotourism is a form of responsible travel that takes place in and around natural areas and intends to contribute to conservation and enhance the livelihoods of the local people. Flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions in ecotourism. It is often invoked as a way to serve both conservation ends and support local livelihoods and promote sustainable economic development. The concept of ecotourism has been pursued since the 80s as a model for responsible travel to vulnerable natural areas to benefit local people and contribute to conservation goals. An important element of ecotourism is the intention to foster appreciation for natural and cultural heritage among hosts and visitors through interpretation.

Pakistan has a great opportunity for the tourists interested in Ecotourism based on its spectacular natural landscapes, great biological diversity and unique cultural heritage. Especially our national parks have huge potential where eco-tourists can come for wildlife safaris, nature study outings, wildlife and bird watching tours, educational expeditions, cultural and historical exploratory trips. Sustainable Tourism Foundation Pakistan (www.stfp.org), a non-profit organization dedicated to promote the concepts of eco-friendly tourism in Pakistan, has made pioneering efforts to promote community based Ecotourism in Pakistan. Its Indus Dolphin Ecotourism Project at Taunsa Barrage in the South Punjab is one such initiative which has effectively engaged local community with the conservation of endangered Indus Blind Dolphin and also has create livelihood activities for the poor fishermen who operate

nature based trips for river dolphin watching and bird watching in the area of River Indus and provide nature loving tourists an opportunity to experience the unique rural life of South Punjab. The main aim of this initiative is to provide source of income to local community as an incentive to conserve rare Indus River dolphins.

Snow Leopard Foundation, IUCN Pakistan, STFP and GB Tourism Department jointly working to promote ecotourism in the mountainous regions of Gilgit-Baltistan. Through various projects they are providing technical assistance to local communities to promote ecotourism in different areas of Gilgit-Baltistan including Hopper Valley, Bagrot Valley, Rupal Valley, Minapin and Ghulkin. Formation of local Community Ecotourism Committees, Development of basic ecotourism infrastructure such as visitors' information center, camping sites, trekking routes and wildlife watching point and training of local tour guides is part of these initiatives. Some of key sites of Ecotourism interest in Pakistan are mentioned below:



Saiful Maluk National Park

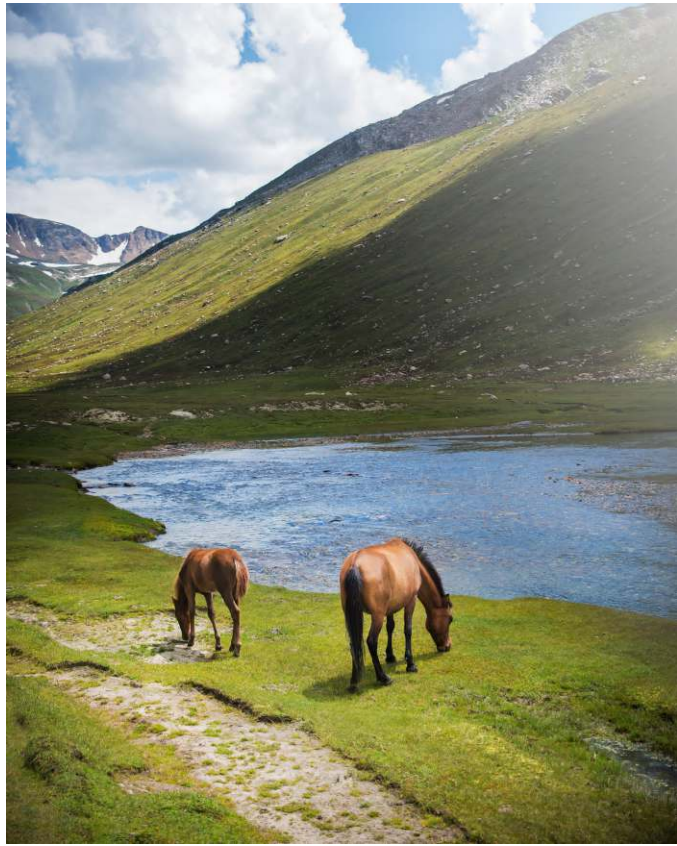
This national park was established in 2003 on an area of 12,026 hectares near Naran in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. It represents Western Himalayan subalpine conifer forests, alpine shrub and meadows. The park's wetland habitats, especially lake Saiful Maluk, are of significant ecological importance for resident fauna and migratory waterfowl. Some of the park's fauna includes the Snow Leopards, Asiatic Black Bear and Himalayan Snowcock, and the snow partridge. Summer is the best time to visit the Saiful Maluk National Park.



Lulosar Dodipat National Park



This national park was established in 2003 on an area of 75,058 hectares in Upper Kaghan Valley of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. It represents Western Himalayan subalpine conifer forests, alpine shrub and meadows and is known for scenic beauty of Lulosar and Dodipat lakes. These wetlands are significant for variety of waterfowl species. Summer is the ideal season to explore Lulosar Dodipat National Park.



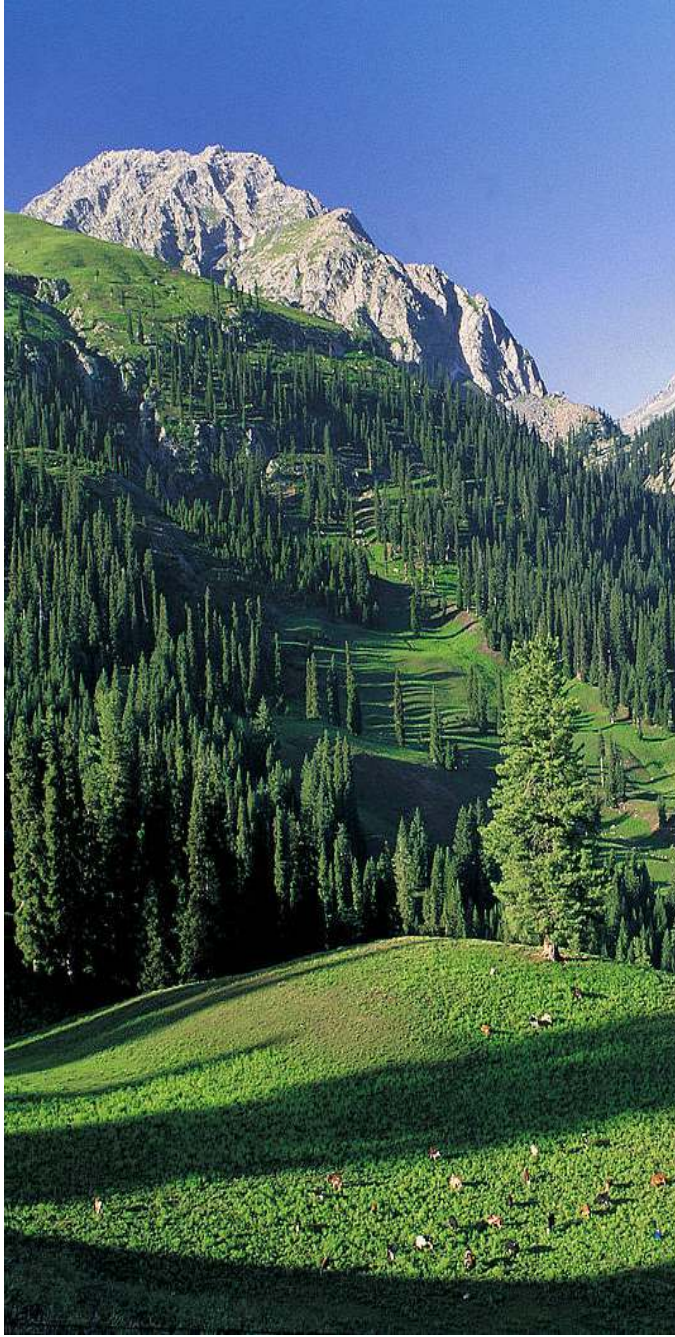
Margallah Hills National Park

This national park was established 1980 in the north of Islamabad Capital Territory on an area of 15,883 hectares. It represents sub-tropical broad-leaved ever green forest habitat. The notable wildlife species of the park are Rhesus Monkey, Common Leopard, Barking Deer and Kaleej Pheasant. It is known for the scenic beauty of Margalla Hills, hiking trails and various recreational spots. The park can be visited all year around.



Ayubia National Park

This national park was established in 1984 near Nathiagali in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province on area of 3,122 hectares. It represents temperate coniferous forest, temperate broadleaf and mixed forest. The notable wildlife species include Kashmir Flying squirrel, Red giant flying squirrel, Kaleej pheasant and koslass pheasant. The best time to visit the park is summer.



Chitral Goal National Park



Chitral Gol National Park is located at a distance of one hour's drive from Chitral town. This national park was established in 1984 on an area of 7,750 hectares near Chitral town in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. It represents montane grass lands and shrub lands. The park provides refuge to Kashmir Markhor, Siberian Ibex, Snow Leopard, Himalayan Black Bear and Brown Bear. The best time to visit the park is summer.



Machiara National Park



This national park was established in 1996 on an area of 13,532 hectares near Muzaffarabad in Azad Kashmir. Its landscape features evergreen broadleaved forest, deciduous broad-leaved woodlands and farms a part of Western Himalayan Broadleaf Forest region. The park is known for its scenic beauty and variety of wildlife species such as Common Leopard, Musk Deer, Cape Hare, Monkeys, Royle's Mountain Vole and Himalayan Palm Civet.



Musk Deer Gores National Park



This national park was established in 2007 on an area of 52,815 hectares in Upper Neelum Valley of Azad Kashmir. It is located in the high Himalayas and Pir Panjal mountain range, housing a significant population of threatened Himalayan Brown Bears. The park is connected through a network of national parks such as Deosai National Park and Musk Deer National Park. Summer is the best time to visit the park.



Khunjerab National Park

This national park was established in 1975 on an area of 2,27,143 hectares at the border of Pakistan and China in Gilgit-Baltistan region. It is a high-altitude national park and lies within the Karakoram-West Tibetan Plateau alpine steppe ecoregion. It is one of the most important alpine biodiversity regions within Pakistan, supporting many endangered and threatened species such as Snow Leopard, Marco Polo Sheep, and Himalayan Ibex. The best time to visit the park is summer.



Deosai National Park



This national park was established in 1993 on an area of 3,63,600 hectares near Skardu town in Gilgit-Baltistan region. It is a high-altitude alpine plateau featuring Karakoram-West Tibetan Plateau alpine steppe ecoregion. The park is home to Himalayan Brown Bear, Golden Marmot, and Himalayan Snowcock. The best season to visit the park is during the summer.



Nanga Parbat National Park

Nanga Parbat National Park was established in 2021 on an area of 1,78,561 hectares in Diamer and Astore Districts of Gilgit-Baltistan. The park is the part of conservation and protection of the wildlife, specifically Ladakh Uril and other species. It is the home to dry temperate coniferous forest, Alpine meadows, and Alpine scrub zone, Montane dry sub-tropical scrub zone in the hub of majestic beauties that include Killer Mountain (Nanga Parbat), Rupal Peak, Shaigiri Peak, Bazhin Glacier, Fairy Meadows, Rama Lake, and Mazhino Pass. Its climate naturally offers a variety of fauna that includes Musk Deer, Brown Bear, Black Bear, Markhor, Ladakh Uril, Fox, Wolf, Stone martin, Weasel with birds Monal pheasant, magpie, Himalayan Griffon Vulture. The flora includes scattered Spruce, Birch, blue pine, Juniperus spp, fir, willow, and Sea Buckthorn. The best time to visit the park is summer.



Lal Sohanra National Park



This national park was established in 1972 on an area of 351,368 hectares near Bahawalpur in the province of Punjab. Its landscape features a diverse blend of habitats which include desert, forest, and wetlands. It has also been declared by the UNESCO as Biosphere Reserve. The park supports wildlife species such as Black Buck, Chinkara, Houbara Bustard, and Egyptian Vulture. The best time to visit the park is autumn and winter.



Kirthar National Park



This national park was established in 1974 on an area of 3,08,733 hectares in the province of Sindh. Its landscape represents desert and xeric shrub lands. The park is known for its scenic beauty, Karchot and Khar Centers, Marsh Crocodile breeding center, and Sindh Ibex. Autumn and winter is the best time to visit this park.



Ziarat National Park



This national park was established in 2018 on an area of 111,852 hectares near Ziarat town in Balochistan Province. The landscape of this national park represents temperate coniferous forest. It has also been declared by the UNESCO as Biosphere Reserve. The notable wildlife species are Suleiman Markhor, Asian Black Bear, Wolf, and Chukar. The park is known for the living fossil: Juniper Forest. Summer and autumn is the ideal season to visit this park.



Hingol National Park



This is one of the largest national parks of Pakistan, located along the Makran Coast of Balochistan Province. Established in 1997 on an area of 6,19,043 hectares, it is one of the most scenic landscapes of Balochistan. It can be accessed from Karachi city via coastal highway. The park represents desert, xeric shrub lands, and mangroves. The notable wildlife species are Common Leopard, Wild Goat, Marsh Crocodile, and Marine Turtles. The park is known for mud volcanoes, natural rock formations (Princess of Hope, Lion), sandy beach, Hingol River, and the estuary. The park can be visited during autumn, winter, and spring.



Indus Dolphin Reserve



Indus Dolphin Reserve is a Ramsar site located between Guddu Barrage and Sukkur Barrage on the River Indus in Pakistan. Stretched on an area of 125,000 hectares, it was designated as a wetland protected site on 10 May 2001. The portion of the river above Sukkur Barrage in the province of Sindh is one of the best sites for Indus River Dolphin watching. The other good site for dolphin watching is below the Taunsa Barrage in the province of Punjab. The best time to go for a dolphin watching trip is autumn and winter. For more details, visit the website www.indusdolphin.org.

