

Protecting the critically endangered striped hyena population in Tajikistan through targeted conservation measures based on a comprehensive monitoring.

Status

The striped hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*) is globally classified as Near Threatened (NT) on the IUCN Red List, though regional assessments indicate a more critical situation. In Tajikistan, the species was believed to be extinct but is now listed as Critically Endangered (CR) in the national Red Data Book, suggesting fewer than 30 individuals remaining.



Historically widespread across the plains and foothills of southwestern and northern Tajikistan, the species declined due to intensive persecution during the collectivization period, when it was heavily hunted as a perceived threat to livestock. Its status has remained precarious since the end of the Soviet era, being officially listed as CR in the Tajik SSR Red Book in 1988. According to the IUCN Hyena Specialist Group, this critically endangered status now applies to all hyena populations in Central Asia.

Initial Situation

Despite its presumed extinction in Tajikistan, first photographic evidence of its survival emerged 2016, followed by further camera trap confirmations in 2019. These findings indicate a small, relict population striving to survive. A 2019 survey (ANCOT) provided further insights into their habitat use and threats. In 2024 the Tajikistan Nature Foundation (TNF) and NABU enhanced research efforts to support targeted conservation measures. Consequently, intensified camera trapping has since yielded multiple photographic captures, contributing to the assessment of current distribution and population size in Tajikistan.

The primary threats include direct persecution, poaching, poisoning, and illegal capture of cubs for the exotic pet trade. Declining carrion availability - due to reduced large carnivore populations and changing livestock practices - further challenges survival. Cultural superstitions and misconceptions contribute significantly to human-wildlife conflict, as hyenas are often perceived as grave robbers and threats to crops and livestock.

NABU Team Asia & Eastern Europe

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Project Duration:

3-5 years

Budget:

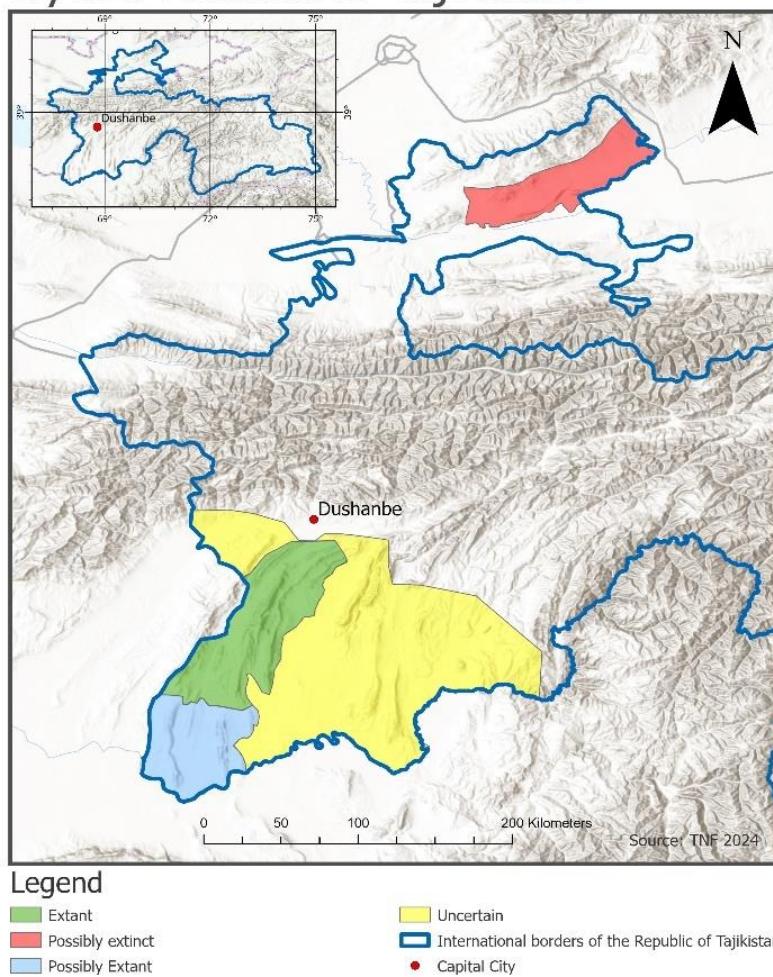
> €5,000 per year

However, the species' elusive and nocturnal nature, low density, and fragmented habitats, complicates conservation efforts. Without urgent and effective measures, including habitat protection and mitigation of human-wildlife conflicts, the striped hyena faces imminent local extinction in Tajikistan.

Project Area

Southern Tajikistan is characterized by arid low-altitude biomes, high temperatures and mountain ranges with predominantly low relief. The landscape consists of loess hills, reaching 1,500 meters above sea level and 1,000 meters above the ravines. Livestock husbandry, agriculture and the intensive collectivization during the Soviet era and subsequent liberalization have led to the degradation of more than 90% of pastures, forests, and shrublands.

Estimated Distribution of Striped Hyena Habitat in Tajikistan



Aims

Outcome	
A. Striped Hyena country status is assessed and updated with IUCN HSG	
B. Knowledge of striped hyena ecology and population in Tajikistan is improved	
C. Persecution of striped hyena is reduced	
D. The perception of hyenas within local communities is changed	
Objectives	Contributes to
a) Documenting striped hyena presence/absence in South Tajikistan	Outcome A,B
b) Mapping the distribution of striped hyenas in Tajikistan	Outcome A,B
c) Determining threats, food sources, and important factors for striped hyena survival in Tajikistan	Outcome B
d) Involving local hunters and shepherds in reward programmes to discourage from killing hyenas	Outcome C
e) Increasing awareness among targeted groups in the hyena habitat	Outcome C,D
f) Empowering & supporting local conservation enthusiasts in raising community awareness	Outcome C,D
Activities	Contributes to
1. Camera trapping in areas where hyena presence was confirmed	Objectives a,b
2. Regular monitoring to evaluate implemented measures and population trends	Objectives a,b,c
3. Hyena ecology studied in selected areas	Objective c
4. GIS maps developed covering hyena distribution, hotspots, and ecological data	Objectives a,b
5. Mobilizing a patrol team in the project area, which is authorized as community state rangers	Objective d
6. Selecting, training and mobilizing local conservation champions to perform community engagement work	Objective d, e
7. Organize workshops at local schools & community centers to promote the conservation of striped hyenas	Objective e

Previous monitoring activities have resulted in multiple photographic captures, which have provided valuable insights into the current presence and distribution of striped hyenas in southern Tajikistan. While these initial findings are promising, more comprehensive and regular monitoring is needed for a more precise distribution assessment. The nocturnal and elusive nature of striped hyenas combined with their small population size in Tajikistan, makes monitoring particularly challenging. This project proposes an expanded, regular monitoring program to improve data accuracy and support targeted conservation measures. Regular surveys are needed to track population trends, while documenting habitat conditions and human-wildlife conflicts to refine conservation strategies and promote coexistence.

Persecution remains one of the most serious threats to striped hyenas in Tajikistan. To combat illegal killings, it is essential to establish law enforcement activities to help the small population to stabilize. Additionally, awareness raising campaigns play a crucial role in educating communities about hyena ecology and the valuable ecosystem services they provide. These campaigns will also address common misconceptions about striped hyenas and highlight the potential benefits of their conservation for local communities.

Our planned and currently proposed actions also linked to the IUCN Hyena Conservation Action Plan 1998 developed by the Hyena SG. NABU is working with its partners to develop a long-term conservation program that goes beyond the proposed project to ensure continuity and sustainability of the investment and build future activities on what has been done.

Budget:

A funding contribution of **€5,000** per year (€15,000–€25,000 over **3–5** years) will significantly enhance our monitoring efforts. This support allows us to cover more areas, leading to more precise population estimates and better data-based conservation measures—crucial for the species' small and rare population in Tajikistan.

With **additional funding**, it is possible to **go beyond monitoring and implement essential conservation actions**, such as law enforcement activities and awareness raising campaigns. These measures play a key role in addressing major threats but require resources beyond the monitoring budget. The extent to which these activities can be realized **depends on the available funding**, making every contribution valuable in strengthening our joint conservation impact.