

On the distribution and status of the Brown Bear, *Ursus arctos*, and the Asiatic Black Bear, *U. thibetanus*, in Iran

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Abstract: The Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*) can be found in large parts of the Elburz and the Zagros mountain ranges but reaches remarkable densities only in the deciduous forests on the northern slopes of the Elburz mountains. The Asiatic Black Bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) is confined to some south-eastern provinces of Iran and is on the verge of extinction.

Kurzfassung: Das Verbreitungsgebiet des Braunbären (*Ursus arctos*) erstreckt sich über weite Teile des Elburz und des Zagros-Gebirges, hohe Dichten findet man jedoch nur im Laubwaldbereich auf der Nordseite des Elburz. Die Verbreitung des Schwarzbären (*Ursus thibetanus*) ist im Iran auf einige Gebiete des Südostens beschränkt; die Art ist vom Aussterben bedroht.

Key words: *Ursus arctos*, *Ursus thibetanus*, Iran, Middle East, Brown Bear, Asiatic Black Bear.

Introduction

The present status of the Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*) and the Asiatic Black Bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) in Iran is very incompletely known. The present paper is an attempt to summarise the present knowledge about both species in this part of the world.

Iran has a surface area of 1,648,195 km². Mountains cover more than the half of the country, and bears are found in the three major mountain chains, i.e. the Elburz mountains in the north (Damavand 5,601 m), the Zagros mountains in the west (Zardkuh 4,548 m) and the Makran mountains in the south-east (Huran 2,168 m). Precipitation is rather low in Iran; only the Caspian fringe and the northern slopes of the Elburz mountain range receive rain throughout the year, between 500 mm and 2000 mm. About 10% of Iran (180,000 km²) is considered to be forested. However, large parts of the *Pistacia-Amygdalus* woodland of the Zagros mountain range have suffered from heavy human pressure. Dense, deciduous forest can only be found on the northern slopes of the Elburz mountain range. This Caspian forest, with oak and beech as dominating tree species (*Quercus castanifolia*, *Fagus orientalis*, *Carpinus betulus*), has a length of about 900 km from west to east and a width of 50–100 km from north to south (about 70,000 km²).

Methods

This study is mainly based on information received from various scientists, hunters, farmers and game wardens and two field excursions by B.G. in 1997. The field work extended over five weeks, and covered southern Iran in February and northern Iran in October.