

A survey on Afghanistan and Iraq wars effects on the eco-tourism industry in Iran: pilot study in northern Iran

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Abstract

The Afghanistan and Iraq wars effects on the eco-tourism industry were studied during a 4 year survey, in northern Iran, Guilan province. In this study, the number and volume of applications for traveling to Iran for sport birds hunting like woodcock from European countries was the main factor in the study. After the year of 1999, which the first group of hunters entered into Iran, in the year of 2000-2001 the number increased and after this year, decreased again. In late 2000 and early 2001, 84 people entered into Iran for hunting. In late 2001 and early 2002, although 200 people registered for bird hunting tours, finally only 9 persons traveled to Iran. The next hunting years, 2002–2003, it raised again and the number reached to 30. The results of survey, conversation with hunters and agencies owners show us that the Middle East conflicts are the main factors.

Keywords: war, Afghanistan, Iraq, eco-tourism, woodcock, Guilan.

1 Introduction

The tourism is one of the important economic activities in all around the world. According to World Tourism Organization (WTO) report, there were 449 million tourists in the world in 1991. Tourism industry for under development countries had US\$ 62.5 billion income in 1990.

Eco-tourism or the tourists for the nature, is a part of tourism activities and a new phenomenon in the world. Main subject for eco-tourism activity is nature enjoyment for several different reasons like studies, hunting, fishing, landscapes, and birds watching Pourvakhshoori [2].



This type of tourism activity has basic differences by others, because of its low harmful effects on the environment. Hunting, itself, is not an eco-tourism activity, but if the goal of hunting is a part of nature conservation, this can include as an eco-tourism industry. One of activities, which can conserve the nature, is harvesting of wildlife's over population because of their bad ecological effects on habitats. Every year, in many countries like Iran, the governments decide to balance the population of the wildlife stocks Majnonian [1].

Iran, a country with different geographic and weather conditions, has high attractions for tourism activities including eco-tourism. In recent years, new changes in political and social views of the government happened and there are opportunities for development of these activities now. Although to reach to optimal conditions, the country has a long way. Conditions that the authors believe that the country need are infrastructures like culture, legislations, and harmony between governmental parts, locals, and political situation in the region, international awareness and right news.

Tourists hunting application return to past decades in Iran. It was a way for apart of DOE and guardsmen income and locals as well. After revolution in 1979 and many political limitations from western countries, demand decreased until 1997, when some changes happened in political atmosphere in Iran. During the recent years, there are ongoing increases on application for hunting.

In this study, the authors try to have a survey on hunting eco-tourism activity in a province in Iran and show how it damaged by political conflicts in Middle East region. Also we would like to suggest some sort of solutions for the problems, which is addressed in this study.

2 General topics of the study

In this part some of introductions and descriptions explain in details for further sections.

2.1 Study area

The study area, Guilan province, describes as a small province in North West part of Iran, with 14711 km² surface, fig. 1.

The province is located in geographical features of 36 34 N to 38 27N and 48 53 E to 50 34 E. The population in the province according to 1996's census was 2,224,000. Most of them live in towns and the rest are in villages and their jobs are rice farming. In winter they catch fish from the Caspian and hunt in the lagoons and irrigation ponds. Tourists are their new incomes in recent years. At least 5 million people visit Guilan per year and most of then are locals and domestic. There are many opportunities for tourist attraction in cultural heritage subjects but because of central part of Iran's values, there are not huge applications on it in Guilan. Lands of Guilan are bounded between Alborz Mountain in west and south and the Caspian in north and east. Also some provinces surrounded it and Azerbaijan Rep. is only foreign neighbor country.



The weather is moderate and wet. The humidity is very high and in some cases it meet 100%.



Figure 1: Map of Guilan.

The differences of land's height are more than 3000 m and it has a wide range of the precipitation. It starts from some parts of south with 150 mm to more than 2000 mm in Anzali city.

The various kinds of ecosystems like rangelands; forests, hills, seaside, sea, wetland, alpines and rivers are its potential for the wonderful environment.

2.2 Birds and hunters

The main subject of tourist attraction in the study area was sport bird of Woodcock.

Woodcock, *Scolopox rusticulum*, is a Migratory bird. Every year, from early autumn till middle of winter, these birds migrate to north of Iran from European countries, fig. 2. Iran is not only destination for migratory groups of the bird but they also can select Azerbaijan Rep. and Ukraine by their ecological needs, priority and criteria. The birds flying are too fast and into a coverage area of small and tall trees.



Figure 2: Woodcock, *Scolopox rusticulum*.



The birds can hide at moments and also hunting in this situation is not too easy. According to this situation many of hunters would like to demonstrate their ability in hunting skills. Woodcock eats under ground worms and its brain has informal position in the head skeleton. Every day in sunset and sunshine times, birds have their daily flight to high and low level lands.

The first part of the bird's wing is very suitable for ink writing and many people know that as a French pen. Annual estimation of bird's population is more than 15,000. Birds breeding area is not in Iran and returns to their home countries in late winter. In Iran, hunters prefer to hunt it in night by light, but this is illegal. This activity is not very common in the locals' communities and people prefer to hunt bigger size of the birds like ducks, geese and coots.

2.3 Game areas

The habitats, which the bird prefers to stay in migratory routs, are low land forest with low slope and low-medium density of trees. According to these criteria the best and available area is located in north of Iran in Guilan and Mazandaran provinces. These provinces are located in the Caspian coastal line of Iran where the sea meets land. In the beginning stage of birds' arrival, they select top area of mountains and in colder weather, birds settle in lower habitats. In all around Guilan province every body can find Woodcock, but main density and population are located in specific parts like Gisum Forest, Nahalestan area, Radarposhteh region, Saravan Park, shanderman area and Doostlat hills, fig. 3,4.

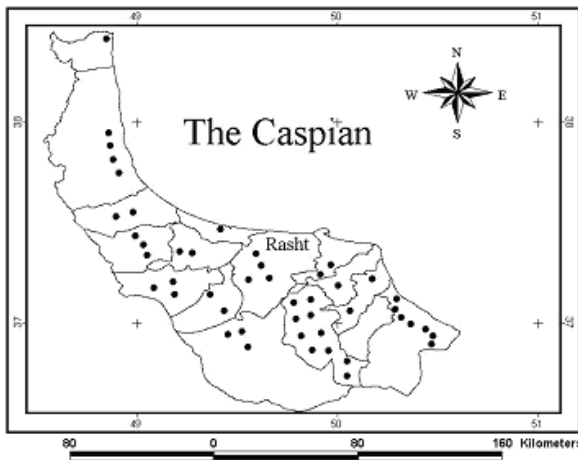


Figure 3: The distribution of Woodcock habitats in Guilan.

Land ownership in many areas is for government and very small area of orchards are owned by private sectors. The game area is located in west and central part of the province.



2.4 Activity

Woodcock hunting group are include of hunters, local guide, translator, car driver, and a representative of DOE. In the game area only local guide and DOE people are with hunters. Hunting starts at one hour after sunshine and finishes one hour before sunset. These activities according to their permission can extent up to 6 days. The hunters also have dogs and other hunting facilities for their need.



Figure 4: A sample of game area.

DOE representative has a survey with a distance to hunters and in the end of daily activity measures the biometric characters of hunted birds.

Hunters allow hunt birds up to 6 birds per day. Hunter and DOE guardsmen register their investigation in specific sheets for their records. This program started in 1998-1999 by informal planning for tourism agencies surveying in capacity recognition. In 2000-2001, 84 people from Italy traveled to the study area for hunting.

3 Methods

Many of forms and information sheets provided for the study, from beginning years. In hunting programs, many of data collected, including of birds biometric records, weather conditions, observed birds, number of hunted birds and by hunt species. Data organized in several information sheets and surveyed by simple statistics program in computer software of Excel. Also some kind of graphs prepared for the results & discussion parts by same software. According to many interviews with tour agencies owners and hunters, meantime, the recent history of Middle East conflicts compared with the travels rate.



4 Results

Results of the study show that in the years of 2000-2001, the rate of application was very high, because of stable political situation in neighbor countries around Iran. In these years, 1284 Woodcock hunted by hunters, meantime we permit them to hunt up to 1500. For 2001-2002 at least 200 people nominated to be in a part of Iran's eco-tour. After the September the 11th and terrorist attack to United States and US decision for the Afghanistan war only 9 people in 2 groups traveled for hunting including 2 Asian. The table 1 shows more details. After the Afghanistan war the application rate started to increase, but Iraq's conflicts had some effects on it again. During the diplomatic dialogue for Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) solution ways finding, decision for travel to Iran had a low increasing rate. Many of tourists did not know that the war against Iraq will start or not and when it will start. In the other hand, from the basic year of 2000-2001, there are 89.29% decreases for the activity and it reached to 10.71%. In 2002-2003 these rates met 35.71%. In conflict years because of low demand for travel to Iran, the prices decreased. In good years for each person in average 5.2 persons-days stayed in hunting areas and in conflict years it met 5.4. In other hand, because of low pressure on stocks, observation of the birds and its hunting increased in conflict years and the number of hunted birds reached to 17.55 in average. In stable years it reached only to 15.4 in average.

Table 1: Years of study, hunters and hunting information.

Years of study	2000-2001 Base year	2001-2002	2002-2003
Number of people	84	9	30
Average days staying	5.2	5.4	5
Total days for groups	438	49	150
No. Of birds (hunted)	1294	264	810
Average hunted birds per day	5.2	5.4	5.4
Increasing rates (%)	100	- 89.29	- 64.29
Conflicts history	Nothing	Afghanistan War	Threat of war on Iraq

5 Discussions

The results show that wars and international conflicts in the Middle East region effected eco-tourism industry in north of Iran in the negative way, fig 5.



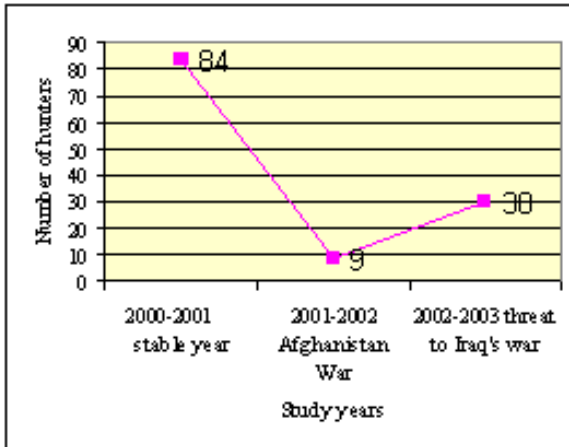


Figure 5: Rates of hunter arrival to Iran.

If we look at the map of the region, we can recognize between 600-1500 kilometers distances between hunting area and wars point. It means that there is not any threat on tourists in the destinations. From 1999 when the first groups of hunters entered in study area, some jobs have been supported like handy crafts making, translation, driving, local guiding & hotel managing. One of the hotel owners in the area in an interview told that, after first year of the activity from pure income, he bought new facilities and furniture for his hotel. The tourists for their each travel spent \$US 4000. It includes travel expenses, accommodation, food cost, guides and gifts buying. According to Iran's special legislation and laws, which prevent western style enjoyment, this is a good opportunity for money making in bad economical situation in the country. At least the potential for this activity in the study area can make more than \$US 1 million per year and it is sustainable for each year without negative impacts on the environment. It can include 300 people every year and there is much possibility to invite other interested groups for other species of birds. Hunters and visitors say if there is possibility for their travel to Iran for hunting they will come several times as possible. In our records there are a few persons who traveled to Iran for 3 times in one year. Also it could be a successful pattern for other eco-tourism activity like birds watching groups. It seems that public awareness is under harmful and effective news attack in comparison with first line of the war. News broadcasting agencies, televisions, radios, newspapers and other kind of media has effectiveness negative effects on people's brains washing.

Most of visitors and hunters are worried about security things in Iran. They think that travel to Iran is not too safe as a right choice. After their travel all of them could find that the imagination was wrong. Most of people in communities and groups for services and guide are very kind and helpful. Although, most of them believe DOE cost for bird's rates is too expensive exactly in comparison by



other countries. The facilitator company on behalf of the hunters charge \$US 20 for one bird and they should pay at least for 15 birds in advance.

6 Suggestions

In the last part of the documents, the authors would like to suggest some solutions for prevention of negative effects on eco-tourism activity in conflicts situation.

It is too clear that we cannot prevent governments to war, easily, but there are some simple way to reduce the negative effects and making a capacity building for better using from opportunities.

- 1- Introducing the eco-tour activities for the governments and NGOs for investments in good livelihood for local community's life.
- 2- Establishment of an eco-tour agencies news network for right news.
- 3- Having several correspondents in destinations for final coordination.
- 4- Establishment of some conventions for the government commitments in eco-tours atmosphere saving.
- 5- Books publication for introduction of eco-tours capacities.
- 6- Having an annual conference between the country members for using of their experiences.
- 7- Protection of countries environmental potentials and landscapes.
- 8- Real cost charge for the eco-tour activity. It should not to be low or high.

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