

The Deosai Plains

The Deosai National Park is a high-altitude alpine plain (plateau) and national park in the Northern Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan.

Deosai Plains are situated at an average elevation of 4,114 metres (13,497 ft) above sea level and considered as the second highest plateaus in the world.

Etymology

'Deosai' means 'the land of Giants' in Urdu. Balti people call this place 'Ghbiarsa' referring to 'Summer's Place' because it is only accessible in summer.

Geography

The Deosai National Park is located between Kharmang, Astore and Skardu in Pakistan. It has an average elevation of 4,114 metres (13,497 ft) above sea level,[2] making the Deosai Plains second highest plateau in the world after Changtang Tibetan Plateau. The park protects an area of 3,000 square kilometres (1,200 sq mi). It is well known for its rich flora and fauna of the Karakoram-West Tibetan Plateau alpine steppe eco region. In spring, it is covered by sweeps of wildflowers and a wide variety of butterflies.

Travel routes to the region

Deosai is accessible from Skardu District in the north, Galtari Kharmang District in the south-east and the Astore District in the west. Deosai is located approximately 30 km from Skardu city and it is the shortest route to visit Deosai. Most foreigners visit Deosai via Skardu. It takes one hour to reach Deosai top via Sadpara Skardu. Another route is from Astore valley via Chilim. It is also accessible from Shila valley. The people of Galtari travel via Deosai. While it is a National Park, the Gujjar-Bakwarwal travel large distances to utilize the Deosai National Park as grazing lands. There is another route called Burgi la via Tsoq Kachura valley Skardu.

Geology and soil

The soils of this area are severely eroded, of a coarser nature and mixed with gravel and stones of various material and sizes. In flat areas between mountains, soil is deep with marshy vegetation.

Fauna and Flora

The Deosai National Park was established in 1993 to protect the survival of the Himalayan brown bear and its habitat. Having long been a prize kill for poachers and hunters, the bear now has a hope for survival in Deosai where its number has increased from only 19 in 1993 to 40 in 2005. In 1993, after playing an instrumental role in the designation of Deosai as a National Park, the Himalayan Wildlife Foundation (formerly the Himalayan Wildlife Project) was founded with a substantial international financial support. The Himalayan Wildlife Foundation ran two park entry check posts and a field research camp in Deosai for approximately ten years. Documentation was

completed by the Himalayan Wildlife Foundation for handover of management of the Park to the, then, Northern Areas Forest Department with the department starting to manage the park since 2006. While pressures that existed in the 1990s, such as hunting and poaching have subsided, the brown bear is still under threat due to pressures such as increasing numbers of tourists and use of park areas for grazing.

The Deosai Plains are also home to the Himalayan ibex, red fox, golden marmot (locally called Phia), gray wolf, the Ladakh urial, snow leopard and over 124 resident and migratory birds. Birds in the park include the golden eagle, lammergeier, griffon vulture, laggar falcon, peregrine falcon, Eurasian kestrel, Eurasian sparrow hawk and snowcock.

The following species are found in Deosai:

Artemisia maritima, *Polygonum affine*, *Thalictrum alpinum*, *Bromus oxyodon*, *Saxifraga flagellaris*, *Androsace mucronifolia*, *Aster flaccidus*, *Barbarea vulgaris*, *Artemisia maritima*, *Agropyron longearistatum*, *Nepeta connate*, *Carex cruenta*, *Ranaculyus laetus*, *Arenaria neelgerrensis*, *Astrogalus leucophylla*, *Polygonum amplexinade*, *Echinop nivetus*, *Seria chrysanthenoides*, *Artemisia maritima*, *Dracocephalum nutsus*, *Anapalas contorta*, *Chrysopogon echinulatus* and *Dianthus crinitus*. There were also observed some medicinal plants which are locally famous i.e. *Thymu linearis* (Reetumburuk), *Saussures lappa* (kuth), *Ephedra intimedia* (Say), *Viola canescens* (Skora-mindoq), *Dracocephalum muristanicum* (Shamdun) and *Artemisia maritima* (Bursay) etc. are used as traditional drug therapies.

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