

Iran's pastures suffering from overexploitation

Social Desk

Experts in natural resources and forestry have warned that pastures in Iran are facing a dire condition due to overexploitation and destruction. The indiscriminate and excessive grazing by livestock has caused a decline in palatable plant species, leading to the regression of pastures. The summer season exacerbates the problem as high moisture and livestock grazing compact the soil, making it less absorbent and permeable, which sets the stage for erosion. The growth of the human population, along with agricultural, industrial, and urban development initiatives, has pushed the earth's capacity to sustain life to the brink of destruction. The diverse range of plant species found in pastures plays a crucial role in environmental protection and maintaining the natural ecosystem. These plants regulate the flow of water, carbon, and nitrogen in the biological-chemical cycle and provide resources for fossil fuels, energy, wood, food, and medicine. Vegetation also helps mitigate air pollution by absorbing harmful substances released through fuel combustion. Fail-

ure to protect vegetation can lead to poisoning, respiratory ailments, anemia, and neurological disorders in humans. Furthermore, wildlife species depend on specific plant species for their dietary, survival, and reproductive needs. However, growing human population and increased livestock grazing have destroyed natural vegetation areas, forcing animals to migrate to distant territories. The removal of surface vegetation has dire consequences, including soil erosion caused by rainfall impact. Soil erosion threatens human life, decreases agricultural productivity, depletes reservoirs, and generates sandstorms. Destruction of pastures disrupts water flow, leading to rapid surface runoff and devastating floods with severe damage. Environmental activists highlight the strategies adopted by European countries to manage vegetation and control livestock numbers while maintaining agriculture and animal husbandry. Financial support is provided to reduce livestock production. In contrast, Iran has an excessive number of cattle in pastures, contributing to grass uprooting and increased water velocity

during floods. Climate change has altered rainfall distribution, leading to floods. Areas affected by drought suffer irreparable damage due to reduced soil absorption capacity. Effective flood management can maximize water utilization for irrigation, but without proper planning, these opportunities become threats. Floods destroy agricultural topsoil, impacting biodiversity and wildlife habitats. Iran, significantly affected by climate change, experiences floods, droughts, and forest and pasture fires, which affect populations and diversity. The absence of vegetation, abandonment of agricultural lands, and land degradation contribute to the dust issue in various regions. Unauthorized constructions at high altitudes enable dust entry into urban areas. Preserving high-altitude regions is crucial to allow vegetation growth as a natural barrier against fine dust. The destruction of pastures, forests, and water sources leads to soil degradation and wildlife decline. Livestock grazing and deforestation have led to vegetation destruction, desertification, and

fine dust issues in Iran. The loss of plant life and barren soil contribute to health risks posed by fine dust carried by wind and storms. Increasing vegetation cover is crucial to prevent soil erosion, and immediate action is needed to preserve forest vegetation and water reservoirs. Environmental activists propose using machinery that navigates challenging terrains to avoid road construction and advocate for modern scientific methods in mining operations to reduce environmental damage and fine dust emissions. Activists call for a minimum distance between mining sites and freshwater sources and emphasize the preservation of valuable trees and natural vegetation to combat climate change. Land use changes, such as illegal occupations and infrastructure development, have led to the destruction of pastures, exacerbated by population growth and industrial projects. Fires caused by disputes and negligence have intensified pressure on remaining pastures. Sustainable mining practices, preservation of natural covers, and effective pasture management strategies are crucial for addressing these concerns.

Ahmad Beiranvand highlights inadequate pasture management and grazing capacity non-compliance as contributors to vegetation destruction. Insufficient restoration efforts hinder traditional methods, and governmental actions to address degradation have been insufficient. He stresses the need to empower rural and nomadic communities through alternative activities aligned with their expertise. Long-term programs and coordination between customary and official approaches are necessary for securing livelihoods and restoring degraded pastures. Efficient tracking and reporting of grazing permits, establishment of monitoring systems, and online databases are crucial for addressing conflicts over permits. Transferring management responsibilities to users, modifying policy tools, and raising awareness among nomadic communities can enhance user accountability and promote sustainable pastoral practices. Comprehensive measures should be implemented to address the complexities of contemporary nomadic life and promote sustainable practices.

Compassion with Wildlife: Public campaign launched



The Department of the Environment (DoE) of Tehran Province launched its second public environmental protection campaign, titled "Compassion with Wildlife," on Friday, May 26th, in the restricted hunting area of Damavand's *Koohsefid* (White Mountain). Alireza Mazinani, the director of the DoE in Tehran Province, announced the campaign's goal is to encourage public participation and collaboration in preserving wildlife and habitats for animals and plants in the region, according to IRNA. Mazinani emphasized the ecological and economic importance of animal habitats, citing the value of wildlife and biodiversity. The campaign aims to raise awareness and engage people and target groups in protecting natural resources and wildlife habitats throughout Tehran Province.

Since the beginning of the year, more than eight species of animals, totaling around 45 individuals, have been rehabilitated and released into Tehran Province habitats. Mazinani stressed the shared responsibility of preserving the environment and nature for future generations, contributing to sustainable development goals and upholding Article 50 of the Constitution.

The director expressed gratitude to citizens, nature enthusiasts, and environmentalists supporting the campaign and urged people and officials to actively participate in the ongoing and future programs addressing various environmental aspects.

Ali Amrollahi, head of the Natural Environment and Biodiversity Conservation Department of the DoE in Tehran Province, outlined additional objectives of the "Compassion with Wildlife" campaign. These include constructing water troughs, disinfecting old water troughs, and planting specific indigenous species in managed areas to enhance wildlife protection and increase vegetation coverage. Amrollahi also reported the release of several birds of prey into the wild and the implementation of measures such as new water troughs and disinfection of old ones.

In the first public campaign for environmental protection in Tehran Province, the "Waste-Free" campaign commenced on April 27th, focusing on cleaning the Jajrood River from the Latian Dam to the Mamloo Dam. These campaigns are set to continue until the end of September this year in other parts of Tehran Province, following a scheduled plan.



Splash of color: Tehran bazaar's pencil seller

In a dimly lit corner of Tehran's Grand Bazaar, Mohammad Rafi is surrounded by all colors of the rainbow in his tiny shop that sells nothing but art pencils. The world may have gone digital, but Rafi has stayed true to his passion of the past 35 years, surrounded by thousands of pencils in every hue and shade imaginable, AFP reported. With the pencils stacked from floor to ceiling, his tiny cubicle has become a photogenic splash of color, hidden deep in the market known as a "city within a city." "I don't know how many pencils there are but I have about 200 colors available," said the proud 50-year-old owner of the Medad Rafi (Rafi's pencils) shop. Finding his shop requires a veritable treasure hunt

through the maze of alleys and passages of the storied market in the heart of the Iranian capital. Rafi himself takes up much of the three square meter shop in the market's arts and crafts section where he has welcomed generations of customers. "Every time a customer shows up, I enjoy it, even if they don't buy anything," smiled Rafi. He then spent 10 minutes advising a schoolgirl in search of two pencils, one blue, one orange, who tried out different types, doodling on a drawing pad on the counter. "Depending on what they want to do with it, I advise customers on the color, the texture or the brand," said Rafi, who only sells the pencils individually, not by the box.

He is proud to cater to all budgets, offering domestically made pencils and ones imported from Europe and America. "The most expensive pencil costs 100,000 tomans (around two euros)," he said, "but it is one of the best." A drawing lover since childhood, Rafi has always adored pencils and, after his technical studies in the 1980s, began his professional life in a pencil manufacturing company before opening his shop. He knows that, in the days of high-tech and touchscreens, the humble colored pencil has had its golden age, looking back nostalgically at the past century when all children carried them in their school bags. Unlike many other shop owners in the bazaar, he will not pass on the busi-



ness to his son, a trained physician who "is not interested in this work." Until he retires, however, Rafi plans to keep serving his loyal customers, meeting their every creative need, including even

"some pencils that are no longer produced." "Fortunately, I have a large stock," accumulated over the years, Rafi said, proudly brandishing the oldest pencil he has, "made 72 years ago."



For decades, Mohammad Rafi has remained true to his passion for selling colored pencils
● AFP