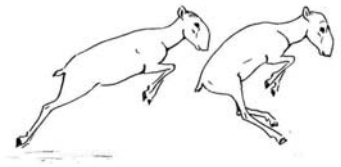


Saiga News



Winter 2005: Issue 2

Drawing by Vladimir Smirin

Providing a five-language forum for exchange of ideas and information about saiga conservation and ecology

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Feature Article - Saiga MOU signed at last!

A major milestone for saiga conservation was reached at the 8th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in Nairobi, on Monday 25th November 2005. This was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the saiga range states on saiga conservation.

The MOU commits signatories to: Provide effective protection for saigas and conserve its habitats; implement the action plan to restore saiga populations and habitats and to enhance transboundary and international cooperation through a regional conservation strategy; facilitate information exchange; set up a competent body to implement the MOU and monitor its activities; report progress to the CMS. The MOU comes into force when 3 or more range states have signed it, these being Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

At the Nairobi meeting, Turkmenistan was the only one of these states to sign the MOU. Other signatories were Mongolia, IUCN, WWF, the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation and the CMS secretariat. The MOU was agreed to by the representative of Uzbekistan, and Uzbekistan has plans to sign the document formally at an upcoming ceremony in Berlin.

The signing of the MOU is the end of a long, hard road for many individuals and organisations, who have worked tirelessly to reach this point. These include Rob Hepworth & Lyle Glowka (CMS), Holly Dublin (IUCN-SSC), Robin Sharp (IUCN SSC European Sustainable Use Specialist Group), Sue Lieberman (WWF-International), Anna Lushchekina & Valery Neronov (UNESCO-MAB) and Elena Kreuzberg (The Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia). They, and the many others who have also worked hard to get the MOU signed, deserve the heartfelt thanks of the saiga conservation community.

The MOU arose out of the international meeting for saiga conservation held in Elista, Kalmykia, in 2002. This meeting laid the foundations for a CMS Action Plan for the saiga antelope, which the MOU is aimed at getting implemented. There have been many set-backs and frustrations in getting to this point, and the story is still not finished, because signatures are still required from the other range states. The inclusion of Mongolia in the signatories is a welcome late development, but there is still a need for further integration of Mongolia in international saiga conservation activities.

Assuming that the MOU does soon enter into force, how can it contribute to saiga conservation on the ground? The MOU will be useful in providing a formal framework for international conservation, and committing both range states and international NGOs to take action and report back on what they have done. It is to be hoped that this will galvanise all concerned into investing in saiga conservation, and will open up new funding opportunities for saigas, particularly by enabling CMS to facilitate interventions more effectively, knowing that there is demonstrable range state support for saiga conservation.

The only caveat to this is that there is a need for a re-evaluation of the current situation of saigas on the ground, to ensure that the precious conservation effort that we hope will be sparked by the MOU is correctly targeted to the highest priority activities. Of course opinion on what the priority actions are is divided. My view is that a strong focus on habitat protection is not as crucial in the short term as ensuring that unsustainable hunting is stopped. Saiga habitat in the main is probably in better condition now than it has been for a decade, while poaching is still ongoing and largely uncontrolled. It is also fundamentally important that the signing of the MOU, and the activities that follow, have the effect of opening up opportunities for involvement in saiga conservation, rather than constraining them. And so with hope and expectation that the MOU marks a turning of a corner, rather than another milestone on the road to extinction, we look forward to a future in which significant, well targeted and cost-effective investment has a real and lasting impact on the status of the saiga in all its range states.

E.J. Milner-Gulland, Imperial College London

For press coverage of the signing see: <http://www.iisd.ca/cms/cop8/nov23.html>
http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/index.cfm?uNewsID=51880

on the move to
2010



Photo from <http://www.iisd.ca/cms/cop8/nov23.html>
Robert Hepworth (CMS) and Makhtumkuli Akmuradov (Turkmenistan), following the signing of MOU on the Saiga antelope. Behind them are delegates of Uzbekistan and Mongolia, the Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, IUCN and WWF International.

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All contributions are welcome, in any of our five languages. Please send them to esip@tkt.uz or to one of the editors. We publish twice a year.

This publication is available online at <http://saigak.biodiversity.ru/publications.html>, www.iccs.org.uk/saiganews.htm and <http://www.wildlifewarden.net/wcs/mini/Saiga-Chinese.pdf>, as a pdf, or in hard copy on request in Chinese, English, Kazakh, Mongolian and Russian.

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Updates

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL



Efforts for saiga conservation and the management of the saiga horn trade are discussed at a CITES meeting in China

A meeting about saiga trade and conservation was held by the CITES Secretariat on 31st August 2005 in Beijing, as part of the activities linked to the Silk Road CITES Implementation and Enforcement Seminar (August, 22-24, 2005, Urumqi, China). During the meeting, officials from various Government departments and organizations (Conservation Department of the State Forestry Administration (SFA), CITES office of SFA, the State Food and Drug Administration, Customs General Administration, Ministry of Health, State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), representatives of the China Wildlife Conservation Association, Chinese State Endangered Species Scientific Commission and the Wildlife Conservation Society) had a brief introduction to efforts underway for controlling smuggling, management of TCM saiga products, government action for management of saiga-horn markets and other relevant research. They also discussed a resolution for saiga trade and conservation:

1. To enforce the management of new medicine applications and develop substitutes.
2. To explain to physicians the current status of saiga and to limit the use of saiga horn.
3. To evaluate saiga horn stockpiles in China and establish a marking system for market monitoring.
4. To develop the captive population as a way of satisfying demand from TCM.

For more information contact A. Kang yglingq@online.sh.cn

A meeting of the Darwin and INTAS saiga project teams in Moscow

The teams working on the Darwin Initiative project "Using saiga antelope conservation to improve rural livelihoods" and INTAS project "Reproductive ecology of the critically endangered saiga antelope" had a joint meeting in Moscow on August 15th-16th 2005, to discuss their projects' progress so far and plan for future collaboration.

From Russia, we heard about the education and public awareness research being carried out by the Centre for Ecological Projects of Kalmykia (R.Medzhidov), about the pioneering anti-poaching work of the rangers of the Stepnoi Sanctuary (A.Khludnev), and the successful year that the Centre for the Study and Conservation of Wild Animals of Kalmykia (CSCWAK) (Yu.Arylov) has had. G. Erdnenov of the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve presented data on saiga ecology from their monitoring programme and V. Voznessenskaya of the Institute of Ecology and Evolution discussed the results of hormonal monitoring of pregnant females, jointly undertaken with CSCWAK.



The participants in the saiga meeting. From left: V. Neronov, A. Khludnev, N. Arylova, Iu. Arylov, A. Lushchekina, A. Bekenov, R. Medzhidov, V. Voznessenskaya, A. Kuhl, G. Erdnenov, E.J. Milner-Gulland, T. Aylett, A. Esipov, Iu. Grachev, D. Mallon, E. Bykova

From Kazakhstan we heard the latest on the saiga's population status from scientists at the Institute of Zoology (A.Bekenov and Yu.Grachev) – populations appear from the aerial surveys to have stabilised somewhat, and a calving aggregation was found and studied this spring by our team on the Ustiurt plateau, unlike last year. V. Ukrainsky of the Kazakh National Agricultural University presented information on his altitudinal surveys in communities in Betpak-dala, and T. Aylett of Fauna and Flora International explained the thinking behind their new small grants scheme for villagers in Ustiurt.

The presentations from Uzbekistan (E.Bykova and A.Esipov) gave insights into the social and ecological situation in the southern part of the Ustiurt plateau where saigas overwinter, and also suggested that saigas may be resident there year-round. D. Mallon of the IUCN Antelope Specialist Group and V. Neronov of the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme gave informative talks on international conservation efforts for saigas. We also had talks from the three young scientists carrying out research for the project, from Moscow (A.Voznessenskaya), Elista (N. Arylova) and Imperial College London (A.Kuhl).

Finally a showing of Alexander Misailov and Igor Shpilenok's film "Saiga – Karma Stepei" was much appreciated (see below).

For more information on either the Darwin or INTAS projects, contact E.J. Milner-Gulland, e.j.milner-gulland@imperial.ac.uk, and www.iccs.org.uk

Participants in meetings held in Russia reiterate the urgency of action to save the saiga

The All-Russian conference "Depredation of wild animals in Russia" was held at Korolyov, Moscow region, on June 3-4th, 2005. During the meeting, a resolution was adopted entitled "On saiga antelope conservation". This placed a great emphasis on the urgent steps required to preserve the saiga as a threatened component of Russia's fauna.

In Moscow on October 10th 2005, a workshop was held by the Biodiversity Conservation Commission and the Mammalogical Society of the Russian Academy of Science, entitled "Experience of keeping and captive breeding saigas in Russia". The meeting summarized experience gained in captive breeding saigas in Russia, enabled specialists involved in saiga conservation to share experiences, and developed a strategy for ex situ saiga conservation.

More information on both conferences is available at <http://www.saiqak.biodiversity.ru/>

US Fish and Wildlife Service supports Russia's saiga antelope conservation efforts

On June 22nd, 2005 the US Fish and Wildlife Service announced the award of several grants, totalling US\$23,400, to support projects providing rangers in the "Chernye Zemli" Biosphere Reserve with radios and field equipment, installing border signs around the reserve, and partially financing the construction of a visitor centre at the Yashkul breeding centre, Kalmykia.

See: http://usembassy.ru/embassy/releaser.php?record_id=48



New visitor centre at the Yashkul breeding centre, Kalmykia. Photo by Anna Lushchekina

A new patron for saigas

The oil and gas company "ITERA", which is carrying out exploration for oil and gas in Kalmykia, has joined forces with national and international agencies to conserve the saiga in the Republic. The company has given funds for the development of the 800 hectare territory, which has been allocated by the Kalmykian government for the saiga captive breeding centre. ITERA's press office has stated that the conservation of the Kalmykian saiga population is one of the company's priorities for its ecological activities.

See: <http://www.tver13.org/archive/archive.htm>

A new documentary film about the saiga is shown in Russia

A new film by the Russian cinematographers Alexander Misailov and Igor Shpilenok was shown this year, entitled "Saiga – karma of the steppes". The histories of saigas and the steppes are inseparably linked. Extermination of the saiga and cultivation of the virgin lands in the second half of the last century threatened the existence of both.

This film includes monologues by poachers, rangers and local people, archive news-reel footage and heartfelt poetry. This emotional story of the animal whose life is closely linked with that of man, and with human commercial appetites, will not leave viewers indifferent. This film was first shown to community representatives at the Centre for Wild Animals of Kalmykia, and was then shown on Kalmykian television.

See: <http://www.biodiversity.ru/programs/saiqak/news/061005.html>

Russian customs officers prevent the illegal export of saiga horns to Mongolia

On August 12th, 2005, officers of the Naushkinskaya custom-house in Transbaikalia, Russia, intercepted an attempted illegal export to Mongolia of 67 saiga horns weighing about 11 kg. The horns were confiscated from a Mongolian citizen. Given the evidence, a prosecution has been instituted under the law on "illegal movement of goods through customs borders of the Russian Federation", which provides for a penalty of up to three times the value of the confiscated goods. See: http://www.amic.ru/news/?news_id=687

Poachers are punished

Two poachers who illegally hunted saigas in the vicinity of Bosoi village, Shalkarsky region were detained by officers of the Nature Protection police of the Department of Internal Affairs, Aktyubinsk district, together with forestry officials, in November, 2005. They had shot two saigas, and were fined about 600 thousand tenge (approximately US\$ 4.4 thousand) as a consequence. Because a criminal case under clause 288 of the criminal code of the Republic of Kazakhstan has been initiated, the hunters have been bailed under condition that they do not leave the area.

Since the beginning of the year, 7 incidents of poaching have been uncovered in Kazakhstan. Criminal proceedings are being instituted. The regional court of the Shalkarsky area delivered a verdict on 2 Uzbekistan citizens in June 2005. They were found guilty of illegal hunting on the Ustyurt plateau in Kazakhstan. Despite the existence of a ban on saiga hunting, these men killed 9 saigas, for which they were sentenced to 2 years imprisonment and a fine of 1.4 million tenge (approximately US\$ 10.4 thousand). See: <http://www.earthwire.org/kz/account.cfm>



Group of rangers.

Photo by Jean-Francois Lagrot

A new saiga conservation programme is adopted in Kazakhstan

Government Resolution # 267, dated March 25, 2005, approved the "Conservation Programme for rare and endangered animal species and saiga for 2005 – 2007". This programme was developed by the Institute of Zoology of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State Committee of Forestry and Game Management of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to the Minister, 180 million *tenge* (approximately US\$ 1.3 million) will be assigned to the implementation of this program from the national budget in 2005.

Saigas in the news

China: *China Daily*, 31st May 2005

Vanishing species get help on two fronts

Traditional Chinese medicine practitioners and nature conservationists came together last week to exchange views and discuss ways to preserve the Saiga antelope. They agreed on the need to work together to help restore the decimated wild saiga population, not only for ecological reasons, but also for the sustainable development of a fundamental area of TCM.

"We should start to control the use of Saiga horns in TCM medicines. Non-sustainable use will only make it disappear in the dictionary of Chinese herbs one day," said Zhang Fakui, chairman of the China TCM Association.

In recent years, the State Food and Drug Administration has approved a batch of new TCM prescriptions to treat hypertension and colds, which use Saiga horn as a major ingredient. "Using Saiga horn to treat such common diseases will undoubtedly further increase demand and put a strain on already critically endangered resources," said Professor Zhou Chaofan, a research fellow with the Institute of Basic Theory at the Chinese Academy of TCM. Saiga horn should only be used to treat life-threatening acute diseases, he suggested. And other uses should be strictly controlled. Conservationist Aili Kang suggested using non-endangered species and synthetic alternatives.

The primary reason for the shocking drop in wild Saiga numbers outside China is over-hunting by poor rural farmers needing to feed their families in Central Asia. However poachers who shoot the males for their horns can make substantial revenues, as horns sell for US\$100 per kilo. In recent years, the Chinese media have reported 15 cases of horn smuggling intercepted by Chinese customs.

The practice of adding ground antelope horn to TCM prescriptions can be traced back 2,000 years. Of all antelope horns, that from the Saiga has long been considered the most efficacious. Owing to its important position in TCM, experts in the field have been greatly alarmed at the news that the Saiga is on the brink of extinction. As far as finding an alternative or a synthetic compound is concerned, TCM specialists have their worries. But in 2001, researchers found that goat horn could be used as an alternative to Saiga horn in some prescriptions.

Introducing saigas from Kazakhstan and Russia to establish captive breeding centres producing saiga horn for medicinal supplies is another alternative to alleviate exploitation of what remains of the wild population.

Zhi Yong

Full version at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-05/31/content_447068.htm

Uzbekistan: *Tribune-uz*, August 22, 2005.

On saigas and humans

...the blood-stained soil resembled a giant butchery. Two weeks before the new year of 2005, people made short work of defenceless animals in the hope of earning a living, and thus depriving their descendants of the hope of seeing living saigas. Near the Kungrad-Beineu railway, hundreds of saigas migrating in search of warmer habitats were fired at point-blank last winter. Nobody even tried to protect the poor animals.

The poaching had its reasons. The horns of mature males fetch US\$30-70/kg and have an unlimited market in China, Singapore, and Malaysia. Zoologists raised the alarm: almost all the mature males aged 3 or over had been killed, and poachers began to hunt young animals for horns. Previously, they never killed young saigas as it was commercially unprofitable.

Through a number of middlemen, saiga horns enter China, where the price increases tenfold. Formerly, the carcasses were not normally used and only horns had value. But living has not got easier and now saiga meat is also consumed. In Ustyurt, the price of meat ranges from UZS (Uzbek Soum) 800 – 1,500 per kg (US\$0.8–1). And as there is a steady market, it seems poachers will keep on killing saigas.

In order to save the saiga it seems more reasonable to establish a transboundary nature reserve or national park on the Ustyurt plateau, which would incorporate the adjacent areas of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. However this would require considerable financial means and political will.

It seems fair that the Kazakhs are reproaching the Uzbeks, because apparently the Kazakhs are the only ones to protect our common species – saigas – while we Uzbeks destroy all the productive results of their back-breaking work each winter, because on average at least a third of Ustyurt's saiga population winters on Uzbek territory. Scientific research reveals some interesting facts. People settled on the Ustyurt plateau just 30 years ago, coming from various places. And there is nobody to tell them that saiga has inhabited Ustyurt since the distant past. The people also brought their culture, which was developed during the Soviet era, and therefore was very different from that of nomads in terms of their sustainable use of natural resources and perception of themselves as an integral part of nature.

This problem, however, can be resolved. Russia and Kazakhstan are good examples of this. Some international projects involving Uzbekistan are well underway. There are people who want to solve the problem. Now it is time to move from the formulation of recommendations to their practical implementation. However, this would require reasonable support from the community and government. But what do we have in reality?

For many people poaching is a way to survive. On the other hand, the lack of government control over hunting and sales has corrupted local people and made business possible. Groups of poachers are operating in every part of the Ustyurt plateau. In the village of Karakalpakia, there are over 100 motorcycles.

All along the Kungrad-Beineu railway, on either side and near the villages, the traces of modern vandalism can be found. The whole eastern part of the plateau, a traditional migratory route for saigas, is covered with bones and hornless skulls. Piles of white saiga bones resemble a dinosaur cemetery. The villagers hunt for saigas all year round and do not realize that they are killing a beautiful thing, part of their life. The thinning herds of saigas are rushing about the plateau looking for shelter.

Sergey Naumov Full version at: www.tribune-uz.info



Saiga skulls with cut off horns on the Eastern escarpment of the Ustyurt plateau. Photo by Alexander Esipov

Kazakhstan: *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, September 12, 2005

The “Queen of the steppes” needs help

Conservation of native wildlife and stewardship of our environment are urgent tasks, which are being discussed at the national level. Last spring, Rauan Shayokin – a member of the Parliamentary Council (Majlis) – initiated hearings on ‘Problems and prospects of state wildlife fund development’. Rehabilitation of the saiga population was among the issues addressed at the hearings.

For many people who were born in Central Kazakhstan the memories of their childhood and youth are associated with this steppe antelope. Therefore a gradual disappearance of the species left nobody indifferent.

According to the members of the Majlis, there is direct evidence that activity for saiga rehabilitation has produced good results. First, the state programme has minimized the pernicious influences that have prevented Kazakhstan's saiga population from growing. Funds have been assigned annually from the national budget to rehabilitation of the saiga population. A total of 686 million tenge (about US\$5 million) are allocated for implementation of a conservation and rehabilitation programme for rare and endangered ungulate species (including saigas) in 2005- 2007. This program is intended to establish new protected areas and develop existing ones, by improving boundary control and establishing 24-hour patrols by rangers, as well as funding other measures to conserve saiga populations.

Advocacy and awareness activities among local people living within saiga habitat or near migratory routes were also important. It's also noteworthy that the livelihoods of local communities have improved. Although economic incentives for poaching are still considerable, local people no longer regard shooting saigas as their main livelihood, because it is now possible for them to get employment. The villagers do not store saiga meat for the winter any more, as many of them now have livestock. Over the last few years, great improvements have been made in customs control over the export of horns from the country. Though these measures have partially solved the problem, the size of the saiga population is still far from desirable.

Based on the results of the Parliamentary hearings, a number of recommendations have been developed for Government. It was suggested that the saiga should be included in the Red Data Book of Kazakhstan and that a 6,000 km² state nature reserve should be established on the right bank of the Sarysu river, in the Karaganda region. However it has been more than a year since the hearings, and virtually nothing has changed. For instance, the issue of establishment of a nature reserve has not yet been solved, because apparently the local authorities are not interested in addressing environmental issues. The efficiency of government actions aimed at the rehabilitation of the saiga population depends in many respects on financing. Support for programme implementation comes from the national budget, although similar expenses are allowed within local budgets. But local authorities do not appear to be interested. R. Shayokin believes that a comprehensive approach, including both government protection and the development of a public movement for saiga protection, is necessary for saiga recovery. Educational and awareness activities are required, targeted at young people. Moreover it is necessary to conduct scientific studies on captive breeding of saigas, to extend the protected area network to cover calving areas and migratory routes, and to set up more efficient monitoring of population status. It is also important to establish good international relations with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, enabling joint efforts aimed at the protection and rehabilitation of the saiga population, because the saiga often overwinters in these countries.

... Only the first step has been taken on a long path leading to elimination of the consequences of mass poaching. But the ‘queen of steppes’ still needs help. The measurable results of the programme can be evaluated in 2007, when its outcomes will be reviewed. Full version at: <http://www.earthwire.org/cache.cfm?aid=96952>

Articles

The Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia

Yury N. Arylov

Director, Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia, Russia

The CWA was established in 2000 by Presidential Decree, with the aim of protecting the genetic diversity of the saiga, in the light of the extremely disturbing condition of the saiga population in the north-east Caspian region. The establishment of the Centre preempted recommendations by the International Meeting for Saiga Protection (Elista, May 2002). The main objectives of the Centre include breeding saigas for release into the wild, research and public awareness activities. The Government of Kalmykia provided 800 ha of steppe land for the CWA's establishment in the Yashkul district, enabling it to keep saigas under near-natural conditions. Construction of the enclosures and other infrastructure was supported by the Government and other organizations, including the Munich and Denver Zoological Societies, the Sustainable Communities Institute (USA), Large Herbivore Foundation (Netherlands), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USA), Zoo Assistance Fund (the Netherlands), People's Trust for Endangered Species (UK), TNT Express (Russia) and oil-and-gas company " ITERA " (Russia).

Currently, more than 60 saigas inhabit enclosures of 62 ha. The CWA is undertaking research on saiga genetics and hormonal changes, and hosts local and international meetings and symposia. We have developed food rations suitable for all ages, including for suckling animals, which has significantly reduced infant mortality. We have substantial practical experience in saiga breeding, and in procedures for saiga immobilisation. Levels of juvenile mortality and traumatic injuries are now minimal.

The Centre successfully cooperates with the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme, the Research Institute of Cattle Breeding of the Russian Academy of Agricultural Sciences, the Institute of Ecology & Evolution of the Russian Academy of Science, among others. Biochemical, serological, bacteriological, and helminthological studies are ongoing. A bank of saiga sperm has been obtained artificially and is cryopreserved at the Institute of Cattle Breeding of the Russian Academy of Agricultural Sciences. As a contribution to the educational objectives of the Darwin Initiative project, in which the Centre is a partner, we have provided research facilities for students of the Agricultural and Biological Faculty of the State University of Kalmykia, the Agricultural College, and other educational institutions.

In parallel with studies of saiga ecology, the staff of the Centre participate in research aimed at improving the productivity of agricultural systems and promoting the sustainable development of the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve. In cooperation with the All-Russian Institute of hydraulic engineering and land-reclamation (Moscow) and with financial support provided by the Moscow bureau of UNESCO, the first stage of this experiment began at the Centre in 2004. The results obtained during the implementation of this Project, "Development of methods for ecological rehabilitation and improvement of natural pasture productivity", raised the interest of the District Administration and created the possibility for the future establishment of additional facilities for storage of the seeds of plants favoured by wild and domestic animals. Improved grazing for both wild and domestic animals is another way by which livelihoods of local communities and saiga conservation can both be improved. The Centre is one of the leading partners implementing a number of international projects on the study and conservation of saigas, supported by organizations such as the UK Darwin Initiative, INTAS and PTES.

Real improvements in the conservation of the European saiga population can be achieved through active participation of all sectors of the population. Therefore it is very important to create Visitors' Centres, where people can learn more about the history of the saiga, its habitat, population dynamics, use, conservation and actions being undertaken both in Russia and abroad. The CWA is one such centre, carrying out public awareness activities in the Republic of Kalmykia. In order to cope with the increasing number of visitors and so as to develop closer contacts with local communities, we have almost completed the construction of a designated Visitors' Centre, with the support of the Large Herbivore Foundation and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Visitors' Centre is a traditional Kalmyk dwelling, resembling a Mongolian yurt, and will contain all the necessary materials for increasing public awareness of the role that the saiga plays in the steppe ecosystem and ways to improve local livelihoods. Information about poaching and other infringements of environmental law will be presented at the Centre, as will the history of the Kalmyks and of the establishment of the CWA. The Visitors' Centre will organise a mobile exhibition containing photographs, books, posters, and equipment for showing videos in remote parts of Kalmykia.

For more information, contact Yury Arylov, Director of Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia, kalmsaigak@elista.ru



Saigas are fed mineral additives, vitamins and concentrates before birth in their enclosure. Photo by Anna Lushchekina



Observation of the rut by students of the Biological Faculty of the State University of Kalmykia. Photo by Anna Lushchekina



The pupils of Yashkul grammar school are friends of the captive breeding centre. Photo by Anna Lushchekina

Saiga antelopes at the Gansu Endangered Wildlife Breeding Centre, China

Aili Kang¹ and Zenian Xu²

¹Wildlife Conservation Society China Program, ²Gansu Endangered Wildlife Breeding Center, China



The Gansu Breeding Centre was established in 1987, and is located at 37.9°N, 102.9°E, between the north Qilian Mountain and the south-west fringe of the Tengger desert (shown by the arrowhead on the map). The area is at an elevation of about 1,766 m with many sand dunes. It is characterized by a continental, dry temperate climate. The vegetation of this area is composed of 116 species of plant, mainly belonging to the *Gramineae*, *Chenopodiaceae* and *Palionaceae* families Liu (1993, 1996a, 1996b).

The area of the Centre is about 170,000 ha. It is managed by the Gansu Provincial Forestry Bureau and Gansu Liangzhou county government. There are 49 people working there. Currently a 700m² public education visitor center is under construction. There are 45 species (380 animals) at the Centre. The main species are: the Saiga antelope, Przewalski's horse, wild Camel, Mongolia wild ass, Tibetan wild ass, Golden monkey, Takin, White-lip deer, Sika deer, Red deer, Tibetan gazelle, and Blue sheep. The enclosure for the animals is around 5,850 m².

The State Administration of Traditional Medicine and State Forestry Administration of the People's Republic of China are carrying out a reintroduction project to restore the saiga population. The project started with 12 animals, introduced in 1988 from captive populations at the Berlin Taie Zoo, Germany and San Diego Zoo, United States.

Research on the captive animals was carried out in 1988-1993 and 2001-2003. This involved behavioural observations on activity rhythm, rutting behaviour, oestrus and parturition (Tan *et al.* 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, Kang *et al.* 2001). In the first period, the saigas were kept in a 23x30m enclosure and fed by keepers. In 1992, the enclosure was enlarged to 27 ha and the animals were allowed to forage freely. By winter 2004, saiga numbers had reached 29 animals. In 2005, 16 lambs were born, bringing the group size to more than 40 animals.

The Centre's plans for saigas in the next few years are to increase the size of the group and to conduct genetic monitoring and reproductive research.

The Centre hopes to develop cooperation with research and conservation organizations to improve information exchange and capacity building.

For more information contact Aili Kang, programme officer of the Wildlife Conservation Society, ygling@online.sh.cn



Saiga males fighting, observed at the Gansu Breeding Centre. Photo by Aili Kang

Field assessment of saiga antelopes in the Gobi-Altai

Joep van de Vlasakker

Large Herbivore Foundation



The Mongolian saiga (*Saiga tatarica mongolica*) is a sub-species endemic to Mongolia. Over the last century, the range of the Mongolian Saiga has been reduced by over 80%. At present, saiga antelopes are only present in Eastern Mongolia, in the Hovd and Gov'-Altai provinces. The main threats to the Mongolian Saiga are habitat reduction, competition with domestic livestock, human disturbance, severe environmental and weather phenomena and illegal hunting and poaching for horn and meat. Due to competition with domestic livestock for optimal grazing areas and water sources; the antelopes are forced to use less suitable habitats. Over-grazing by domestic livestock and long summer droughts cause a lack of good winter forage for the saiga, leading to mass starvation in severe winters. Together with ever-present illegal hunting for horns and meat, the sub-species remains under threat of global extinction.

To address these threats, WWF Mongolia implemented a project "Conservation of Mongolian saiga" in 1998-2001, with the support of the Large Herbivore Foundation - LHF (then called the Large Herbivore Initiative). WWF Mongolia obtained active support from the local (Sum) authorities throughout the saiga range, providing winter hay and setting up an efficient ranger network, currently consisting of 9 rangers. Even though 1 ranger had to cover an area of approximately 120-140 thousand hectares the poaching was almost stopped. This, together with a series of warm winters, led to a population increase to 5300 animals in 2000. However, surveys carried out in 2003 and 2004 suggested that the saiga antelope population had decreased to 1020 in 2003 and only 750 in 2004. Currently the population is estimated at 1,550, in two populations of 1,500 and 50 individuals respectively. During my field trip, about 150 saigas were observed, with flight distances of 1-2 km, a clear sign of human disturbance.



Joep van de Vlasakker and Tuud L., leader of the Saiga project, with the field team (above); Mongolian saiga female runs away (below). Photo by Joep van de Vlasakker / Flaxfield Nature Consultancy

Saiga populations fluctuate and are dependent on winter grazing, which is currently limited by competition with livestock. Livestock grazing needs to be reduced in the saiga range. Poaching is still a problem, and a new phenomenon is occurring of wealthy people with modern 4x4 cars and high quality rifles poaching for 'fun' in the flat steppe zone.

This too needs urgent action. Due to lack of funding, wages of the rangers have not been paid since June 2005. However they are continuing to patrol, using private or sum motorbikes. Shortage of fuel means they can only patrol twice a month. Rangers are thus badly in need of motorbikes and fuel, communication equipment, weapons for self-defence, official uniforms and education materials. The rangers are highly motivated and dedicated to the conservation of the Saiga antelope as a component of Mongolia's heritage.

It is necessary to address these issues, and further develop relationships with local stakeholders. Therefore in 2005, WWF Mongolia launched a follow-on project, with the aims of: 1) Establishing a saiga management system; 2) Developing a communication and education strategy; 3) Implementing an incentive programme with local people and government agencies; 4) Improving law enforcement.

Based on the excellent results of WWF Mongolia's previous conservation activities, LHF will continue to support Mongolian saiga conservation in the Gobi-Altai and has started fundraising for the project. WWF Netherlands has already given financial support and LHF and WWF-Mongolia are setting priorities to start the second phase of the project.

For more information contact Joep van de Vlasakker, Conservation manager of Large Herbivore Foundation, joep@largeherbivore.org; www.largeherbivore.org

Project round-up

Econet established in Central Asia

The final stage of the GEF-UNEP WWF medium-sized project "Econet Central Asia" has begun, implemented under the WWF Central Asian programme. The objective of the project is to devise an ecological network incorporating core zones, movement corridors and buffer zones, using data on biodiversity, socio-economic development and the existing protected area network, based on a foundation of newly analyzed satellite images.



Formal approval of the Econet and its use as the basis for designation of future protected areas will ensure opportunities for the protection of key saiga habitats and migratory routes. It is impossible to withdraw the whole range of the Bekpakdala saiga population from economic use, as it occupies a considerable area. There is also no need for this, as saigas cover long distances migrating from their winter to summer pastures. A sustainable saiga population is not in conflict with sustainable natural resource use involving activities such as grazing, forestry or game management. One option is to lease land for saigas on a long-term basis, ensuring there are no fences that might prevent saigas from undertaking their normal migrations.

On October 4-5 2005, a meeting of the Econet project management committee was held in Almaty. It reviewed project implementation, and presented new concrete plans for the final six months of the project.

For more information contact Dr. Olga Pereladova, Head of the WWF Central Asia Regional programme, OPereladova@wwf.ru



"SOS-Saiga!" project is underway in Kazakhstan

The charity foundation "Seimar Social Fund" has started to implement the ecological programme 'SOS-saiga!', which aims to conserve the saiga population in Kazakhstan. The project started in June 2005 and enjoys the support of the Republican State Official Enterprise Okhotzooptom (State Committee of Forestry and Game Management, Ministry of Agriculture) and the Institute of Zoology (Ministry of Education and Science), Republic of Kazakhstan.

The goal of the project is to help nature reserves, national parks, NGOs and the ranger service to protect the saiga population and ensure its rehabilitation. The objectives are to set up an effective system for monitoring the saiga population, assist in poaching control operations and disseminate information about the problem in the mass-media. As part of the 'SOS-saiga!' program the fund disbursed its first grant for the procurement of 10 'UAZ' off-road vehicles equipped with satellite communication equipment, portable radio, and GPS. Moreover, the «Seimar Social Fund» has developed a series of awareness-related activities. A popular science film is planned, as a way of influencing public opinion.

For more information contact A. Saghingaliev, project coordinator, "Seimar Social Fund", ali_sa2002@mail.ru

Radio-telemetry of saigas in the Northwestern Caspian region

An experimental project took place in 2004/5, to release five adult saiga males equipped with radio/satellite transmitting collars to the wild from the Centre for Wild Animals of Kalmykia (see article above). This was supported by the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Chicago Zoological Society. The goal of the project was to observe the adaptation of captive bred animals to the natural environment, and also, whenever possible, to track their movement patterns. The collared animals were well accepted by wild herds. One male was killed by wolves after a successful rutting season (according to ground observations he had established a harem of 17 females), and four others are still alive and under satellite observation.

For more information, please contact the Director of the Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia, Yu. Arylov, kalmsaigak@elista.ru



Collared saiga male. Photo by Nils Bunnefeld

Review of recent saiga publications

Zhirnov L.V., Gunin P.D., Adya Ya., Bozha S.N. Conservation Strategy for ungulates in the arid zone of Mongolia. Edited by Shagdarsuree. Moscow, 2005. Vol.45. 323 p.

This book contains a comprehensive summary of the results of studies covering the biology, ecology, protection and use of wild ungulates in Mongolia, particularly the saiga; it also provides an historical analysis of Mongolia's environmental law and reviews the protected area network. It gives detailed recommendations on improving methods of ungulate protection and sustainable use of ungulates. Contact: Joint Russian - Mongolian complex biological expedition, pgunin@online.ru

Danilkin A. A. Cavicorn (Bovidae). Mammals of Russia and neighbouring regions. Moscow: Association of scientific editions KMK, 2005. 550 p. The monograph provides data on cavicorn species in Russia and neighbouring countries. It includes phylogeny, taxonomy, habitat dynamics, population dynamics and limiting factors, habitat, nutrition, reproduction, population structure, use and protection. Full information is given on saigas. Contact: Association of scientific editions KMK, kmk2000@online.ru

Neronov V. M., Lushchekina A. A., Arylov Yu. N. Ecosystem approach for conservation and restoration of saiga population in the Lower Volga region. Biological resources and biodiversity of the ecosystem of Volaga region: past, present and future. Proceedings of International Workshop. Saratov, 2005. P. 164-166.

The historical changes in numbers and geographical range of saigas in Eurasia are considered. The ecosystem approach is proposed for the conservation and restoration of saigas in the Lower Volga region, as laid out in the Action Plan elaborated at the International workshop in Elista (2002). Contact: Valery Neronov, mab.ru@relcom.ru

Lushchekina A.A., Neronov V.M., Badmaev V.S., Khludnev A.V. Territorial organization of nature protection and perspectives of saiga survival within its habitat on the right bank of the Volga River. Volga region ecological journal. 2005. N1. P. 80-85.

An ecological network on the right bank of the Volga River is proposed to protect the Saiga antelope, and recommended tasks for each stakeholder are set out. Contact: Anna Lushchekina, mab.ru@relcom.ru

Meldebekov A.M., Bekenov A.B., Grachev Yu.A. The Saiga in Kazakhstan: current status and study prospects. Papers of the Institute of Zoology MES RK (zoological and ecological studies). Almaty, 2005. Vol.49. P. 176-182.

This article analyses saiga population and habitat dynamics in Kazakhstan, 1994 -2004. Using the example of the Ustyurt population, it describes the population's structure and reproductive capacity. To improve saiga protection the authors recommend strengthening mobile patrols, extending the protected areas network, captive breeding, and developing a system of ecological monitoring. Contact: Amankul Bekenov, terio@nursat.kz

Medjidov R.A., Kaminov Yu.B., Obghenova O.B. The local population's views on the reduction of the saiga population, and possibilities for saiga conservation in Kalmykia // Steppe Bulletin, 2005. № 18. P. 25-28.

This article presents a summary of a sociological survey aimed at determining the attitudes of local communities to saigas, the reasons for population declines, and level of public awareness concerning saiga conservation actions. The study was conducted in the Chernozemelskiy, Yashkul, and Yusta districts of Kalmykia. Poaching was found to be the main threat to saigas, and incentives for poaching were outlined. Contact: Ruslan Medjidov, centercep@yandex.ru

Bykova E.A., Esipov A.V. Socio-economic reasons of saiga antelope decreasing in Uzbekistan and measure for its conservation // Ecological safety and civil society journal, 2005. №6. P. 31-38.

The results of a socio-economic survey in the saiga range in Uzbekistan are presented. This investigation aimed to clarify the level of poaching in the region, drivers for poaching behaviour and the situation and attitude of local people. A broad-scale survey of settlements in the Ustiurt area of Uzbekistan was carried out, followed by a detailed study at Jaslyk village. The main cause of saiga decline is shown to be poaching by local people, mostly for the horns in the past and meat at present. Contact: Elena Bykova, esip@tkt.uz

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