

Dear colleagues,

On behalf of the administration of the Institute of Ecology and Evolution of the Russian Academy of Sciences and its director Academician Rozhnov, who, unfortunately, could not personally attend this important event, let me welcome you to one of the oldest scientific biological institutions in Russia. Many specialists of the Institute dedicated their scientific activities to study and preserve such a unique species, which saiga is. I would like to note that the scientist of our Institute Boris Ivanovich Petrishev, who died prematurely in 2004, devoted his research to the development of techniques for catching, feeding and keeping the saiga in captivity. It was his consultations that proved decisive when creating saiga breeding centers in Russia.

It is known that the accidents which have comprehended a saiga in the years of great changes, led sometimes practically to total disappearance of a species in this or that part of the range. However, the high fertility of animals and care, occasionally manifested by man, helped the saiga to recover relatively quickly. Nevertheless, the critical state of the most important biological resources and the significant disruption of ecosystem functions continue to cause serious concern around the world, and without taking additional measures, the tasks of preserving biodiversity and ensuring sustainable development of the economy facing different countries cannot be fulfilled. Apparently, it is breeding of wild animals in conditions of captivity for their subsequent release and creation of sustainable viable populations in nature is one of such additional measures that are increasingly used in world practice for conservation and restoration of rare species.

If we recall the events of the past days, namely the International Saiga Conservation Meeting held in 2002 in Elista, Republic of Kalmykia, along with measures for the protection of the species and its habitats, monitoring and other environmental conservation measures, special attention was paid to such approach, as saiga captive breeding as one of the alternative methods of species conservation and, first of all, its genetic diversity. In the Medium-term international work program for 2016-2020, approved at the Third Meeting on the Saiga "Memorandum" (Tashkent, 2015), special attention is paid to the issue of saiga reproduction in captivity as a possible mechanism for the restoration of natural populations. According to the Plan of the main measures for the Year of the Environment in the Russian Federation in 2017 approved by the order of the Government of the Russian Federation, along with the creation of new nurseries for the breeding of rare species, including the Far Eastern leopard, the Amur tiger, it is also planned to create such nurseries for the saiga within its historical range.

Also, for the sake of justice, I want to remind colleagues of other significant events that are directly related to today's seminar. Another 20 years ago (1997), with the help of colleagues from the Moscow Zoo, M.V. Kholodova and V.M. Neronov prepared and published an analytical review of the content of saigas in foreign zoos, and a little later (1998) - an article by V.E. Sokolov and M.V. Kholodova on the content of saigas in the zoos of the Soviet Union.

In concluding this small greeting, I would like to draw the attention of my colleagues here to the recently published well-illustrated review which analyzed and summarized practically all available literature sources (there are more than 200) on the history of breeding and captivity of the saiga in different conditions (zoos, breeding centers with semi-natural environment, and small captive breeding facilities). The review has been prepared by the specialists of our Institute. Information on the arrangement of aviaries in various nurseries, methods of catching animals in nature and their transportation, feeding of adults and young animals, etc. is also briefly presented here. The results of attempts to return saigas from conditions of captivity to nature are presented. Particular attention is paid to the work carried out in the centers created in Russia. The review is published in English with an expanded summary in

English. Taking this opportunity, I suggest that the Saiga Conservation Alliance consider the possibility and find the means to translate the full text of this review into English. I believe that this will be extremely important and useful for everyone who is engaged in breeding and keeping the saiga in captivity.

At last but not least, with a regret I have to note the absence at this seminar representatives of the Ukrainian biosphere reserve Askania Nova, one of the oldest centers for maintaining and breeding saigas and whose experience can not be overestimated. It is also a pity that representatives of the Tarkhankut Nature Park located on the Crimean peninsula where a small group of saigas was imported from Askania-Nova in 2014 could not come. This is perhaps the most "young" center for saiga conservation in conditions close to natural.

But, despite this, I am sure that the work of the seminar will be fruitful, and its results will help further development of such aspect of saiga conservation as its breeding and maintenance in conditions of captivity both for the preservation of the gene pool and for subsequent release into the natural environment.

V.M.Neronov

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