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The Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative: A long term commitment to save the steppe and its saigas, an endangered couple

The Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (ADCI) is a large scale project to conserve the northern steppe and semi desert ecosystems and their critically endangered flagship species like the saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*) and the Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*). ADCI is implemented by the Kazakhstan government, the Association for Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK), the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS),



Betpakdala saiga female during calving.

Photo by Eva Klebelsberg

the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB; BirdLife in the UK) and WWF International. The German Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM) is supporting the project through the long-term integration of two experts who have working for the Association for Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan since the beginning of 2007.

The "Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative" ("altyn dala" means "golden steppe" in Kazakh), started in 2006 and focuses on an area of about 55 million hectares (the size of France) which includes the range of the Betnakdala saiga

ADCI's main objectives are:

- to address the main threats to the future viability of the Betpakdala saiga population and its habitats, such as poaching as well as habitat conversion and fragmentation
- to establish a network of protected areas of various categories and corridors to conserve the migration routes and habitats of saigas and other key species like the Asian wild ass, goitred gazelle, great bustard and sociable lapwing.
- to identify and put in place key enabling conditions such as the genuine involvement of local communities and other relevant stakeholders, as well as ensuring tangible contributions to people's livelihoods and rural development.
- to gather baseline understanding of the Kazakh steppe and semi-desert ecosystems and their species in order to inform the planning and implementation of these conservation measures.
- to raise awareness and understanding for steppe and saiga conservation nationally and internationally.

Continuation at p.2.

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All contributions are welcome, in any of our six languages. Please send them to esipov@sarkor.uz, saigaconservationalliance@yahoo.co.uk or to one of the editors. We publish twice a year.

This publication is available online at www.saiga-conservation.com, <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, Russian and Uzbek.

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Continued from Page 1:

Progress so far:

Saiga conservation: The ADCI has set up three ranger teams that are equipped with cars, tents, binoculars and other necessary field equipment. The rangers will support the state ranger brigades in the field, try to prevent young people from becoming poachers through intensive work with schools and local authorities (like the traditional “board of elders”) and collect data on key species observations for the project’s monitoring system



ADCI Rangers in Betpakdala .
Photo by Orken Shaimukhanbetov

Large calving ground found

The most astonishing success of recent months was the identification and protection of a saiga calving area which is thought to be the most important one described for the Betpakdala population in recent years. Recently, the Betpakdala population’s calving areas have been split into small groups and no mass aggregations have been observed. But three weeks ago the ADCI field team found an area with at least 4,000 females calving simultaneously within a period of about twenty days. The rangers and scientists remained in the vicinity of the herds and closed the roads through the area to avoid disturbance and poaching, and cooperated with the state rangers of the nearby Irgiz-Turgay Rezervat. They also collected data on the distribution, size and behaviour of the herds. During this expedition three more smaller calving sites were identified. In the next few months the rangers will try to follow the herds and help ADCI to get a clearer idea of their migration and pasture use.

In April 2008 the ADCI team participated for the first time in aerial saiga counts, which are conducted annually through the “Saiga and Wild Ungulate Conservation Programme” of the Kazakhstan government. ADCI is currently supporting the Kazakhstan Committee of Forestry and Hunting to improve the monitoring of the Betpakdala saiga technically and methodically and obtain more reliable numbers in the long term. Due to the lack of “modern” equipment like GPS and altimeters and the use of a methodology which has not been adapted to the current low numbers, data obtained in recent years seem not to be very reliable. However, these data still might give us information about the population trend, which seems to be positive.

Protected Area establishment: A 500,000 hectare steppe and wetlands area, an important saiga summer pasture and calving area, is already included in the governmental “Protected Areas Development Programme” through the lobbying and support of ADCI. The project team has funded and developed the required scientific assessment of the area, which describes the protected area’s biodiversity resources. Now we are developing an economic and technical feasibility study. The protected area is likely to be finally established by 2010.

ADCI is currently identifying new sites to be included in the governmental “Protected Areas Development Programme” through a “gap analysis”; a method to identify areas with ecosystems underrepresented in Kazakhstan’s protected area system, important habitat for saigas and hot spots of biodiversity. This summer the Altyn Dala Team will conduct an expedition to one or more of these sites to see what is there and what relevance these places have for saigas.

The goal of Altyn Dala is to establish a protected area network of about 3 to 4 million hectares within the Betpakdala saiga range.

Ecosystem understanding for conservation planning: The northern hemisphere’s steppe and semi desert ecosystems and their biodiversity are still poorly understood. But there is strong evidence that the saiga plays a significant role for animal and plant communities of this natural grasslands and semi deserts. Saigas are thought to disperse the seeds of steppe plants over large distances, to fertilize the soil with their droppings and tread the seeds into the soil enabling them to germinate. The lack of cyclic grazing has led to massive changes in the vegetation, degradation and expansion of a poor and low diversity vegetation cover. Recent studies by the RSPB and ACBK indicate a tight relationship between the critically endangered (IUCN 2007) Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) and the grazing of steppes by wild ungulates. The most important breeding areas of this rare bird are in Kazakhstan, where it breeds on the ground depending on low, unevenly grazed vegetation for nesting and taller tussocks for the chicks to hide in. This is a natural situation which is not produced by intensive grazing of domestic livestock.

Large rodents like the Steppe Marmot (*Marmota bobak*) and susliks (*Spermophilus sp.*) might also depend on extensive grazing by wild ungulates. Their decline is likely to influence the numbers of their direct predators, first of all birds of prey like the pallid harrier (*Circus macrourus*), long-legged buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*) or the steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*). Also the nearly complete disappearance of the Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) and the Eurasian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*) might be related to the small numbers of saiga.

During the winter, when snow covers the ground and rodents and other smaller mammals are impossible to hunt, wolves depend on the saiga herds. They hunt old or weak individuals of the species, which, when healthy, run quite fast and are difficult to catch. The current imbalance in the predator-prey relationship forces wolves to come closer to villages to feed on sheep or other domestic animals. This causes problems to local herders and in consequence leads to massive killing of wolves.

Through the establishment of cooperation with universities and research institutions and its own research and monitoring activities, ADCI tries to collect baseline knowledge for the planning of protected areas, corridors and conservation measures:

- ADCI is currently developing a research project on steppe succession and ecosystem regeneration together with the University of Greifswald and Kazakhstan’s research institutes and universities
- The Sociable Lapwing project of the RSPB and ACBK conducts research on ecosystem requirements and interaction with domestic and wild ungulates.
- A study on the socioeconomic situation, land use and demographic trends within the range of the Betpakdala saiga population is currently being conducted by ADCI with the support of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Cooperation) GTZ.

Updates



ICCF The Saiga Conservation Alliance was kindly invited by the International Conservation Caucus Foundation to speak to members of US congress and their staffers about saiga conservation in June 2008. Dr. Aline Kuhl represented the SCA and gave a lecture on saigas as part of the ICCF congressional briefing series together with Karen Ross of the WILD Foundation, who spoke about the Okavango Delta.

US members of congress find out more about saiga

Only 3 out of the 60 participants from congress had ever heard of a saiga antelope, and given that Central Asia and the Russian Federation are high on the US foreign policy and energy agenda, the talk on saiga antelopes was well-received. *To watch both talks on video, just visit <http://iccfoundation.us/e-briefings/20080613karenross/index.htm>.*

On the way to cooperation

In February 2008, a joint conference of Goskompriroda (State Committee for Nature Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan) and the Committee for Forestry and Hunt Farming of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan was held in Tashkent. The conference resulted in the signing of a joint plan of action

for the conservation of the Ustyurt population of saiga antelopes in 2008-2010. Under this joint plan, an Uzbek representative took part in the spring aerial counts in Kazakhstan (see below). *For additional information, please contact Gennady Goncharov, Gosbiokontrol of Goskompriroda of the Republic of Uzbekistan, at gosbiocontrol-ruz@sarcor.ru.*

Joint aerial survey of saigas held in Kazakhstan

An aerial survey of saiga antelopes was held from 14 April to 4 May 2008, involving the following organisations: the Institute of Zoology of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Committee for Forestry and Ranching of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Industrial Association Okhotzooptom, regional departments of the Forestry Committee, the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan, as well as a representative of the Saiga Conservation Alliance from Uzbekistan. The total number of saiga antelopes was estimated as 61,000 individuals, including 32,300 in the Betpakdala population;

10,400 in the Ustyurt population and 18,300 in the Ural population. Compared to the 2007 values, total saiga numbers grew by 11.3%; however the Ustyurt population is declining. The question of the proportion of the Ustyurt population that was in Uzbekistan during the count is still open. Probably numbers vary between years, depending on climatic conditions. To address this problem, it is necessary to carry out a simultaneous count of saiga antelopes in both countries. *For further information, please contact Yury Grachev, the Institute of Zoology of the Republic of Kazakhstan at terio@nursat.kz.*



Saigas under the wing of a plane.
Photo by V.Tugalev



Okhotzooptom and Institute of Zoology team during the aerial survey of the Ural population. *Photo by Dmitry Golovtsov*

The saiga has been listed in the Red Data Book of Uzbekistan

On 5 March 2008, a meeting of the Interdepartmental Commission on the Red Data Book was held in Tashkent, in which a unanimous decision was taken to include the saiga antelope in the national Red Data Book. On 21 April, by the order No 39 of Goskompriroda of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the saiga was included into the Red Data Book with the status of a vulnerable species. Since 1991, saiga hunting has been banned in the Republic of Uzbekistan and the species was included into the list of species subject to special

protection. However, this measure has not yielded a positive result. The revision of the saiga's status and its inclusion into the National Red Data Book was necessitated by a rapid decline of its population in Uzbekistan both during the annual winter migration and on its breeding grounds. *For further information, please contact A.A. Grigoryants, Gosbiokontrol of Goskompriroda of the Republic of Uzbekistan, at gosbiocontrol-ruz@sarcor.ru.*



The Saiga has defenders in Uzbekistan

In order to solve the urgent problem of saiga protection, Goskompriroda of the Republic of Uzbekistan coordinated its efforts with the Supreme Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan to establish the SAI (Specialized Amudarya Inspectorate), on 15 February 2008. Its main mission is the protection of the flora and fauna of the lower reaches of the Amudarya river, including the saiga, the Bukhara deer, the goitred gazelle, the bustard, as well as prevention of illegal logging of saxaul, turanga (poplar), etc. The Ustyurt plateau is part of the Inspectorate's territory. Its staff

consists of six people, who have two UAZ vehicles at their disposal. Taking into account the vast area (over 10 million ha, including Ustyurt and the eastern coast of the exposed bed of the Aral Sea up to the border of Kyzylorda province in Kazakhstan) and the specifics of saiga hunting (see below), it would be ideal to have additional support from various international foundations and organizations in order to ensure protection of this species. For further information please contact Makset Kosbergenov, SAI at pronmakset@mail.ru.

The Chinese government announces an administrative regulation on protection of the saiga resource and the management of medicinal saiga products

On November 12th, 2007, the "Notice on enhancing the protection of Saiga Antelope, pangolin, rare snake species and management of the standardisation of their products for medicine" was announced jointly by the State Forestry Administration, Ministry of Health, State Industry and Commerce Administration, State Food and Drug Administration and State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The announcement is due to the rapid decline of pangolin and rare snake populations, as well as the serious shortage of saiga antelope horns in stockpiles, leading to a crisis in the TCM resource. Occasional smuggling into China have also aroused concerns from the international community. CITES and IUCN have passed resolutions on saiga antelope conservation, requesting the enhancement of management and enforcement.



TCM market. Photo by Li Lishu

As concerns the management and retail status of saiga horns and products, the Notice refers to the following aspects:

1) To guide, encourage and support resource consuming corporations in involvement in the restoration of wild populations and captive breeding of saiga antelopes, pangolins and rare snakes.

2) To verify, list and register raw material stockpiles, standardize storage and designate custody.

3) From now on, the consumption of saiga horn raw materials should be limited to clinical use in designated hospitals and to TCM preparation. No saiga products can be sold outside these designated hospitals. Any unit which requires saiga horn for TCM preparation should have already received the relevant permission document for medicine production from the State food and drug management and supervision agencies.

4) To prevent saiga horn raw material from illegal sources from getting into the legal trade, after verification, registration and standardized storage, the material can only be sold to registered TCM manufacturers and designated hospitals, and can only be used for the production of TCM or other products with permission, or for clinical use in designated hospitals.

5) TCM products which contain saiga horn should be labelled and managed. From March 1st, 2008, all TCM products containing saiga horns should obtain a "China Wild Animal Utilization and Business Operation Label" and put it onto packs of its smallest sale unit before the products enter the commodity chain.

6) Enforcement should be enhanced. Illegal trade and smuggling of saiga horn should be punished severely.

Before this notice was issued, registration and management of the saiga horn stockpile was only limited to raw materials being used by some TCM manufactureres and medicinal supply companies. There was no relevant regulation for retail corporations and individual stockpiles. This new announcement fill the gap in managing retail sales of these species, especially saiga horn. It will promote standardized management and enforcement in the saiga horn retail market.

From the Kalmyk newspapers

On 23 May 2008, the newspaper "Izvestiya Kalmykii" [the News of Kalmykia] published an editorial entitled "A demographic crisis", which stated that calving in saiga antelopes had begun later than usual this year, in mid-May, and had taken place on cold days. Hence the number of newborn calves was much lower than in previous years. According to the researchers of the Chernye Zemli State Biosphere Reserve the number of females coming to the calving areas in this reserve and in the Tingutinsky (Stepnoi)

zakaznik was much lower than last year (about 7000, compared to ca. 12,000 in 2007). The experts believe that this is due to climatic conditions (the drought last year forced the saiga antelopes to leave the area) and to the absence of appropriate protection due to a lack of interdepartmental coordination (the process of the transfer of management from Federal agencies under Rosselkhoznadzor to the regional Ministry for Nature

Protection is still underway). However, current climatic conditions – high forage levels after a rainy spring – inspire

optimism, as in the summer saiga antelopes will not have to move far from strictly protected areas in search of food.

Young scientists discuss the problem of saiga conservation at an international school-workshop in Saratov

On 5-7 May 2008, a regular international school-workshop of young scientists “The natural and anthropogenic dynamics of steppe ecosystems and approaches to the protection of nature in changing environmental conditions” was held at the Saratov branch of the Severtsov Institute of Problems of Ecology and Evolution (IPEE). Leading experts on the steppe gave talks to the young scientists and an excursion was organised. The young specialists gave presentations on natural and human factors affecting the steppe zone, the structure of ecological communities, steppe fauna and issues in the protection of steppe ecosystems. Two presentations by post-graduates from the IPEE, K.O. Larionov and N.Yu. Arylova, were devoted to the saiga as a representative of ungulates of the steppe and semi-desert zones of the north-western Caspian region. These presentations aroused active interest and discussion among the school participants. Materials from the workshop were published in a special issue of the journal “Povolzhsky Ekologichesky Zhurnal”. For more information please contact Natalia Arylova, IPEE of Russian Academy of Sciences at arylova@gmail.com.



Participants in the international school-workshop.
Photo by Elena Danzhalova

Yunnan, China: Two suspects arrested for illegally trading saiga horn

On January 20th 2008, Miss Li from Zhejiang province was arrested at the airport when she was leaving Kunming, and two saiga horns were found in her baggage by the security control. Li said that she had paid 1,800rmb (~ US\$225) to buy the two horns from a merchant, Mr. Zhou, at the Juhuyuan Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) market in Kunming, for the medical treatment of her mother-in-law. Based on this information, the provincial forestry police found 28 saiga horns in Zhou's store at the Juhuyuan TCM market that evening. People from Xinjiang had come to the market and sold raw horns for TCM three years ago, Zhou told the police, and then he had paid 6800rmb/kg (~US\$850) for 30 horns. Identification results from the Institute of Zoology of Kunming, Chinese Academy of Sciences show that these 30 horns were originally from 22 saiga antelopes, a Class I State Protected Animal. Two suspects are currently under criminal detention.



Saiga horns seized in markets.
Photo by Zhao Yao

Gansu, China: A case of illegal sale wild animal products with the seizure of 6 saiga horns

Xinhua Net, Lanzhou, January 16th 2008: Based on information provided by an international wildlife conservation organization, the forestry police of Gansu province uncovered a case of illegal sale of

wild animal products. Six saiga horns, 1 fox skin and 90 ivory products were confiscated. 12 suspects all confessed their guilt.

A poacher with a dead saiga detained in Kalmykia

On 8 January 2008, the district officers of the Department of Internal Affairs in Yashkul district of Kalmykia detained a former resident of Khulkhutta, M.V. Romanenko, 43, who was driving a

VAZ-2107 car, reports the *Parlamentsky Vestnik Kalmykii [The Parliament Bulletin of Kalmykia]*. Mr Romanenko was found to have used a motorcycle to poach a saiga.

Okhotzoprom rangers detain poachers shooting saigas in the vicinity of Baikonur cosmodrome

On 17 January 2008, several groups of poachers were detained in the Karazhusan area of Kyzylorda province, reports Ilya Guk, a correspondent for the Kazakh newspaper Express-K. First the inspectors detained a ZIL vehicle, in which they found four dead saiga antelopes and two 12-calibre sporting guns. Later, they detained the drivers of three cars, in which two dead saiga antelopes

were found, as well as two 12-calibre sporting guns and one 7.62-caliber "Saiga" rifle. The statements and evidence were submitted to the Department of Internal Affairs of Kyzylorda province. *For more details please visit the page* http://www.express-k.kz/show_article.php?art_id=14461

Saigas in the News

Kazakhstan: CentrAsia. 27.06.2008 [Abridged version]
<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1214553420>

Saiga saga

Who/what killed the population of the Kazakhstan saiga. In the span of fifteen years the numbers of this animal have dropped from 1.3 million to 60,000 individuals.

The humanisation of the court system is to blame for the death of saiga antelopes...

...as well as history, climate and our neighbours. This was the subject of a press conference devoted to the protection and breeding of rare and vanishing species of wild animals and the saiga, which was held in Almaty.

In 1993, saiga numbers in Kazakhstan reached 1,300,000 individuals. However, by 2003, only 21,000 saiga antelopes were recorded there. There are many reasons for this decline, including the cold winter of 1993, when many animals migrated to Uzbekistan. These antelopes even went inside human houses, but people killed them. In 1995, a human-caused disaster broke out. Scientists do not understand what happened, as yet, but the emission of some substance during the launch or reentry of a rocket into the atmosphere caused mass mortality. However, the heaviest blow was dealt by the State, when it allowed the trade in saiga horns. Poachers did not even cut the bodies of these animals; they just cut off their horns. The entire steppe was dotted with dead saiga antelopes. The horns were sold to China.

It was only in 1999 that the State bureaucrats heard the helpless voices of environmentalists, who all those years were shouting about this tragedy. A prohibition of the saiga shooting was issued.

Currently, there are ca. 61,000 saiga antelopes. The decline of the Ustyurt population still continues. There were 15,000 animals in this population last year; only 10,000 remain this year. Zoologists believe that the reason for this decline is that the animals migrate to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in winter, where they are not properly protected. Our neighbours acknowledge this fact.



Betpakdala saiga calving.
 Photo by Orken Shaimukhanbetov

This year, a new State Programme has been launched on the conservation and sustainable use of water resources, wild life and development of strictly protected natural areas for the years 2008-2010. This programme is the continuation of a similar programme implemented in 2005-2007.

Throughout the country, the equipment of the service that protects rare and vanishing species of animals is being improved. Currently, this service has 40 vehicles at its disposal. A special database is being developed, which will contain a dossier on each hunter in the country. Besides, a long-term environmental project, Altyn Dala, aimed at the conservation of the wildlife of Kazakhstan and poaching control, has been launched. Non-governmental organizations such as the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan and WWF are also involved in this activity. Besides, NGOs and governmental agencies carry out joint work on the establishment of protected zones.

The problem of the saiga is being solved at the international level, too. In May 2007, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan signed an intergovernmental agreement on saiga conservation. A similar agreement with Uzbekistan is at the coordination stage.

Currently, poaching is the major reason for the decline of saiga antelopes. In 2007, more than 2500 incidents of poaching were recorded, but only 120 incidents were brought to trial. Due to the humanisation of our court system, most poaching cases do not end in criminal punishment. At best, the punishment is a conditional sentence. The confiscation of vehicles is ruled out. Zoologists have appealed to the Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs, but no changes are envisaged. The environmentalists are confident that "the confiscation of jeeps, which are used for hunting, would sober up many poachers." They state that according to legislation "the means of poaching is a vehicle used for driving the animals to exhaustion." However, it is impossible for the rangers to prove it! Only if poachers filmed in the process of poaching! Quadbikes and snowmobiles were only recently included into the list of poaching vehicles.

Inspectors have complained many times that their vehicles were worse than those driven by hunters. Besides, hunters often represent the elite of society. This may have far-reaching implications. This is why the zoologists demand that penalties should be toughened for all people without exception. In their turn, they do their utmost. And even more.

Alina Bekirova

Information

The fine for killing one saiga antelope is about 150,000-200,000 tenge. If a person is found once with a dead saiga this is sufficient for imprisonment for three years. Law No 18 of the Kazakh government of 8 January 2004 established the size of the fine for illegal hunting of ungulate females with an embryo. Currently, the fine for the unborn saiga is 70,000 tenge.

Articles

Conservation of saiga antelopes in Kazakhstan

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Saiga conservation has become a nation-wide problem in Kazakhstan due to a sharp decline in numbers. There are three saiga populations in Kazakhstan, namely, Betpakdala, Ustyurt and Ural, which inhabit ten administrative regions: Aktyubinsk Atyrau, Zhambyl, West Kazakhstan, Karaganda, Kyzylorda, Mangistau, South Kazakhstan and part of Akmola and Almata. The main reason for this decline is poaching by local people, year round and throughout the entire range of the saiga.

The government of Kazakhstan is taking measures to prevent the disappearance of the saiga in this Republic. The year 2001 was the turning point, when 14 million tenge was allocated from the Republic's budget for the conservation and monitoring of saigas. In subsequent years, the amount of financing has grown steadily.

The Committee for Forestry and Ranching of the Ministry of Agriculture and Institute of Zoology developed a "Programme for the conservation of rare and endangered wild ungulates and saiga antelopes for 2005-2007". This Programme was coordinated with local government at the provincial level and adopted by government decree in March 2005. In the same year, 182,5 million tenge was allocated for implementation of this program. In 2006, the amount reached more than 205 million tenge and in 2007 it exceeded 200 million tenge (ca. USD1000,000).

Amendments were made to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Code of Administrative Violations to strengthen the measures against illegal hunting of saiga antelopes; in particular, through the addition of a penalty for the purchase or sale of animals or their products, if hunting the species is prohibited. This deprives poachers of the opportunity to escape responsibility by claiming that they had bought the products from unidentified persons.

Order 206 of the Committee, adopted on 22 September 2005, bans saiga hunting, as well as the collection, storage, purchase or sale of their horns and other products throughout the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2011, except for scientific purposes. This order was registered at the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Within the Programme, work has been carried out on the more effective implementation of protection measures aimed at increasing the saiga population by more than 10% per year, so that the population will reach commercial size. The saiga's range areas were determined and measures were taken to eliminate limiting factors (poaching, wolves). In all saiga areas, teams of hunters were organized, which shot 5000 wolves between 2005 and 2007.

Saiga protection in areas where they aggregate is carried out by "Okhotzoprom". Nine mobile groups consisting of 83 inspectors work on a shift basis, using forty-three off-road vehicles and four sport motorcycles.

Regional offices of the Committee and law-enforcement agencies are involved in saiga protection. The mobile groups are equipped with basic arms, satellite phones, videos and cameras and mobile radios. "Okhotzoprom" even purchased a MI-2 helicopter, which is currently being used for saiga protection.

In 2005-2007, State inspectors from the regional offices of the Committee, law-enforcement officers and "Okhotzoprom" employees uncovered 34 poaching incidents, during which 210 saiga antelopes were illegally killed. Evidence concerning these incidents was handed over to law enforcement agencies and criminal proceedings were instituted against a number of law violators. They are required to pay compensation for the damage inflicted.



Okhotzoprom inspectors at a field air station near Bosoi village, during the aerial survey of the Ustiurt population, spring 2008. Photo by Dmitry Golovtsov

Within the Programme, public service films have been made to publicise saiga protection. The films were shown on national TV (Kazakhstan, El-Arna and 31st Channels). It is worth noting that as saiga numbers increase, the possibility of poaching also grows. In this connection, local residents are being informed via national and local mass media outlets about the measures being taken by the state for the protection and restoration of this species, as well as about the unreasonableness and cruelty of poaching. The publicising of facts about saiga poaching in the mass media contributes to the development of a negative attitude among local people towards violators and to the establishment of social pressure for the application of adequate measures against them.

As part of an international project, an educational guide "The miracle of Kazakhstan's steppes" was developed for

schoolchildren and widely distributed (for details, see Saiga News #4). In 2005 a series of articles devoted to the conservation and restoration of saiga populations was published in the column "Save Saiga" of the newspaper "Kazhstanskaya Pravda".

"Okhotzooptom", together with the private charitable foundation Seimar Social Fund, has released a film about the saiga, which was called "Following in the tracks of eternal nomads". It has also worked with international and local environmental organizations to produce an animated cartoon "The saiga saga" in Kazakh, Russian and English.

On 27-29 July 2007, as part of the mid-term plan of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Programme, the Committee and "Okhotzooptom" arranged a trip for a group of journalists and cameramen from the Kazakhstan, Khabar and Astana TV companies to locations where spot-checks are carried out, aimed at the protection of the Betpakdala saiga population. The journalists had the opportunity to fly in an AN-2 plane around the area, at the border of the Kustanai, Aktyubinsk and Karaganda provinces. The cameramen filmed saigas from the air and journalists interviewed officials from the Committee, the Aktyubinsk regional office and "Okhotzooptom" inspectors. Materials were prepared for TV based on this trip.

We also involve non-governmental organizations in saiga protection. As part of their SOS Saiga project, the Seimar Social Fund purchased four KAMAZ trucks, 10 UAZ off-road vehicles, radios, cellphones, GPSes, night vision devices, etc. The "Ak Boken" public foundation also takes part in the implementation of measures for saiga conservation.

The Committee is strengthening cooperation with customs and frontier services in order to stop saiga-horn smuggling out of the country.

This package of measures is yielding noticeable results, which is confirmed by the regular monitoring funded from the State budget. Saiga counts are carried out in all three populations according to the Methodical Guidelines on aerial counts of saiga antelopes in Kazakhstan, approved by order No 82 of the Committee on 9 April 2003. Scientists from the Institute of Zoology of Kazakhstan, Okhotzooptom, and the relevant regional offices of the Committee are involved in these counts. Officers from the Central Administration of the Committee monitor the on-site implementation of these measures.

According to the reports of "Okhotzooptom" and the Institute of Zoology, saiga numbers in 2003 to 2007 are as in the table.

The Committee's activities have resulted in a steady growth of saiga numbers. There has been a decline in the Ustyurt population by 1,400 individuals (-7.7% compared to 2006). Currently, this is the only population that migrates beyond Kazakhstan, to Karakalpakstan (Uzbekistan), which results in gaps in year-round protection. This situation necessitates international collaboration in saiga protection.

In 2004, the Committee and WWF discussed the coordination of saiga protection and the development of a partnership, and signed a Cooperation Agreement. In September 2006, as the state agency responsible for saiga conservation in Kazakhstan, the Committee convened an international conference for the range states in Almaty, jointly with the CMS secretariat, which led to the coming into force of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of the Saiga Antelope (MoU). Representatives of the saiga range states – Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, China, Mongolia, as well as international organizations, participated in this conference. At this conference, Kazakhstan signed the MOU.

Bilateral agreements between Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are necessary for the effective implementation of the MOU. In May 2007, the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan signed a similar agreement with the government of Turkmenistan. The biggest challenge is the Ustyurt population migrating to Uzbekistan, which requires joint protection measures and population surveys. In this connection the Committee has prepared a draft bilateral intergovernmental agreement; a similar agreement with the Russian Federation has been prepared for the Ural population. These documents have been presented to the Russian and Uzbek sides and signing is expected in 2008.



A newborn calf in Betpakdala, spring 2008.

Photo by Orken Shaimukhanbetov

The following aspects were reflected in the draft agreements:

- development and implementation of urgent measures for the protection of saiga antelopes and their habitats;
- organization of counts and population monitoring;
- coordination of legislation concerning the protection, use and trade in saigas and their parts;
- exchange of information concerning protection and use of saiga antelopes; joint conferences involving all concerned

Table. Saiga numbers by population in 2003 to 2007 (in thousand individuals)

Name of population	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Betpakdala	1,8	6,9	9,9	18,6	22,8
Ustyurt	12,8	15,0	19,6	17,8	16,4
Ural	6,5	8,8	10,1	12,9	15,6
Total	21,2	30,7	39,6	49,3	54,8

The expansion of the network of strictly protected natural areas in Aktyubinsk, Kyzylorda and West Kazakhstan provinces is planned, in order to make saiga protection more effective along their migratory routes. Act No 109 of the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 14 February 2007 established the Irgiz-Turgai state nature reserve as a legal entity, with a staff of 66 inspectors.

In order to coordinate the efforts of organizations involved in saiga protection and the steppe in general, the Committee and the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan (ACBK), together with Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), the Royal Society of Bird Protection (RSPB) and WWF, launched a wide-scale initiative called Altyn-Dala (see feature article). Large-scale involvement of stakeholders from governmental, public and international organizations, creation of a network of strictly protected areas of varying statuses in the range of the Betpakdala population, allocation of ecological corridors, establishment of an effective system for their protection, active work with local residents, etc., are planned.

On 26-28 April 2007, as part of the Altyn-Dala Initiative, ACBK organized a workshop on the assessment of aerial survey methods for saigas. FZS experts Dr. M. Norton-Griffiths and A.J. McConville, Deputy Chairman of the Committee H.Sh. Musaaev, and representatives of Okhotzoptom, the Institute of Zoology,

ACBK, and the Committee's regional offices took part. The workshop developed recommendations for the improvement of the survey methodologies in order to obtain more accurate data on saiga numbers in Kazakhstan.

Act No 914 of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 8 October 2007 approved the "Program of the conservation and sustainable use of water resources, wildlife and development of a network of strictly protected natural territories to year 2010", which envisages continuing work in the sphere of protection and rehabilitation of saiga antelopes. The establishment of a new protected area in the south of Kostanai province, the Altyn-Dala state nature reserve with an area of 489,000 ha, is envisaged as part of this programme.

Thus, the Kazakh government, through the Committee, is doing its utmost to provide monitoring, conservation and rehabilitation of saiga populations and is investing significant funds to that end. The work, involving a wide range of Kazakh and international organizations, has yielded notable results – saiga numbers have stabilised and are now on the increase. The Committee and its Kazakh partners, including ACBK, are open for cooperation with all organizations and individuals interested in the conservation of this species.

The saiga captive breeding centre – A centre for ecological education

Viktor Fedosov

Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia, kalmsaiga@elista.ru

There is no place for the saiga in a dead steppe. The bitter smell of wormwood, ringing warble of skylarks, whistles of ground squirrels, steppe eagles flying high in the blue sky, herds of antelopes, the nest of a pair of cranes *Anthropoides virgo*. It is impossible to be unmoved by any of these marvels of the steppe. Everything is interrelated in this steppe ecosystem and there is nothing superfluous, more important or less needed. Therefore, the Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia (which has been supported for many years by the Large Herbivore Foundation (LHF) and in 2008 by the Rufford Small Grants Foundation) does not just limit its activity to saiga conservation. It is just as important to conserve the diversity of life in unique steppe landscapes. The Centre addresses this problem by carrying out ecological education programmes. Regular excursions to the Yashkul Breeding Centre are arranged to this end.

The saiga breeding centre is situated away from the city and major roads; nevertheless it is very popular. More than 120 people – schoolchildren, the general public and scientists – visit this reserve each year. They are most interested in the saiga herds. To prevent disturbance to the animals, they are observed from a specially equipped tower. These observations cultivate a sense of responsibility for the saiga's future survival. It is impossible to love and care for the unknown and unseen. A trip to the saiga breeding centre is accompanied by stories told by the guide. Booklets and brochures entitled "Do you know everything about me?" and "Save the saiga – our living heritage" are available for visitors.

Ecotourism requires new exhibits. Therefore, Yashkul breeding centre has some new animals. Two years ago, three young wild boars were presented to the Center.



Excursion of Kalmyk schoolboys at Yashkul breeding centre.

Photo by Yury Arylov



They have grown big and now offspring are expected in the boar family. A new enclosure is urgently being built for the pregnant female.

A cow is also pregnant. Last year, a young camel was born and now there is a small herd of four camels roaming on the steppe. The animals at first tried to return to the farm where they were bred, but thanks to the care of the staff, they have gradually become accustomed to their new home. Even if the camels remain on the steppe overnight, the farm staff are not anxious because they animals do not go far and are able to protect themselves from predators.

Currently, spacious enclosures are being built for birds. Three ostriches have arrived. The Centre also intends to breed other bird species. A hospital for sick and wounded animals is also planned.

Thus, the saiga breeding centre is turning into a place for ecological education and raising of non-traditional breeds of cattle and poultry. The development of these activities can improve the living standards of the rural population; therefore, it has the potential to contribute to a decrease in poaching. We hope that our wild animals will breed in captivity and we will one day have an opportunity to release them into the wild.

Conservation of a local saiga population on the east coast of the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan

Kosbergenov Makset

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Due to an extraordinarily cold winter, when temperatures dropped as low as -35°C , poachers were deterred from hunting saiga antelopes this year. In previous years, poachers never shot saiga antelopes during calving, but in the autumn when they were fat. But currently hunting takes place at any time including calving, as a result of a general rise in meat prices. During calving, saiga antelopes are easy prey because they are vulnerable and concentrated in a small area. The poachers salt the meat to preserve it and catch calves alive. Well-off people on both sides of the border order saiga calves for USD200 a pair, this demand is growing from year to year.

There is a small group of saigas (about 1000 in 2004) in the Muinak and Takhtakupir districts of Uzbekistan along the border of the Kyzylorda province of Kazakhstan. These districts are rather desolate, far from the nearest populated areas; no oil or gas extraction is carried out there.

There are several explanations for the appearance of saigas in this non-typical place. The first is that these saigas are from Kyzylorda. However, it is unlikely that saigas were able to move through the densely populated districts of Kyzylorda province. The second possible explanation is that they came from Vozrozhdenie Island in the Aral Sea. The most likely explanation is that they descended from the Ustyurt escarpment to escape cold chilling winds, and hide from them in shelters including concrete well tanks and abandoned gas pipes, where we have found numerous resting places and their frozen dead bodies. Saxaul thickets attract saiga antelopes as they provide fodder and good shelter from winds.

The hilly sands on the eastern coast of the Aral Sea are not a typical habitat for these animals; however the group has been breeding there now for a number of years. It is important to find out how many saigas there are in this group. How have saiga antelopes succeeded in surviving in this atypical area? The main reasons are the availability of fresh water (from flooding of the River Kokdarya), remoteness from populated areas (the nearest village is 150-200 km away), availability of shelter in winter and lack of roads.

A peculiarity of saiga hunting in this region is that the hunters and those who collect calves and carcasses travel in separate vehicles, making it impossible to prove their criminal connections. However it is possible confidently to state that a poaching network exists for saiga antelopes and their calves – a criminal, profitable and practically unpunished business. In May 2007, in two raids alone, Special Amudarya Inspectors detained and fined seven people with rifles driving two vehicles in the saiga breeding grounds in the Tokhtakupir district. However, it was impossible to prove their direct involvement in saiga poaching, because three high-speed vehicles transporting carcasses and calves and equipped with portable radios had succeeded in evading pursuit by entering the adjacent territory of Kazakhstan. Taking advantage of good knowledge of the area and close relatives in Kazakhstan, poachers can easily escape pursuit and then return later. Nevertheless, war on poachers has been declared; the law is on the side of saiga defenders and those who fancy easy prey will be given no quarter.

On albinism in the European saiga population

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Albinism is seen in saigas as in many other animals. It is a result of lack of melanin production (from Greek melanos standing for black). Melanin absorbs most solar radiation and is important as

a filter protecting the skin from UV and also for the normal activity of important organs including those involved in vision and hearing.

The unusual appearance of albino animals has given birth to numerous legends and myths. In ancient times, Kalmyk people believed that the master of the steppe, the White Old Man, came in the disguise of a white saiga. If this saiga was killed, the hunter invited trouble upon himself. However, if such legends have a real foundation, this is in animals of white coloration or partly albino animals. The majority of fully albino animals have poor viability and are mercilessly rejected in the course of evolution. Therefore, few albino animals are able to survive and produce offspring.



Kh. Madjiev holding a normal and an albino saiga calf.
Photo by Yury Arylov

Deprived of cryptic coloration and noticeable among their congeners, albino animals attract the attention of predators. Appearance is also important for mating. "Pale" albino males find it

hard to win the favor of females, which prefer the intense coloration of males.

According to the literature, albino saigas do not live to adulthood. There is only one record of an albino female aged 1.5 years in the Kalmyk population, observed during the hunting season of 1976 (I.A. Pogodin, *oral communication*). Records of dead albino saiga calves also exist. Their body weight averages 2.25 (male) and 1.7 kg (female), compared to 3.38 and 3.17 kg, respectively for normal calves. At this body weight, the mortality rate of calves is 0.8.

In May 2007, we recorded an albino saiga calf. We noted a white spot 700 m away, from which adult females were running in different directions. On approaching we noticed a female saiga calf. It was only 2 or 3 days old, judging by a dry umbilical cord. Its weight was 2.4 kg and length 55 cm, while normal females at this age average 3.46 kg and 61.14 cm. The calf was fully albino. There was no pigment in the iris, so the eyes looked red. The hooves were pink, while in normal saiga calves they are black. Besides, there was no black strip on the sacrum (*see photo*). We also spotted another albino saiga calf; however, we failed to identify its age and sex.

In general, the occurrence of albino saiga antelopes during calving is 1 in 5000-10,000 (Pronyaev & Rozhkov, 1988). However, in our case the occurrence of albino saiga antelopes was higher; 2 albinos in 8000 calves. We noted no albinos among adult saiga antelopes. A decrease in the number of saiga antelopes, particularly in the proportion of males due to selective hunting for valuable horns, can lead to inbreeding. We suggest that emergence of albino saigas is related to this factor.

Project round-up

WWF Mongolian Saiga project

A major new WWF-Mongolia saiga project funded by the MAVA foundation started in October 2007. It has already had notable success including training rangers and local people for a community-based monitoring programme, and engaging with government to pass conservation-relevant amendments to existing hunting legislation.



Herder communities participating in a PRA exercise.
Photo by B. Chimeddorj

Additionally a public engagement strategy has been launched including six eco-clubs in local schools. There has been a major upgrade in capacity for law enforcement, and this has paid dividends; an anti-poaching team detected the poaching of a female saiga and three wild asses in November 2007 and one snow leopard in March 2008.



Children from an eco-club participating in an educational competition
Photo by B. Chimeddorj



Saiga rangers Photo by B. Chimeddorj

The cases are under investigation by the police. In October 2007, the court decided to re-investigate the poaching case of 54 Saigas which took place in 2006. WWF-Mongolia successfully filed a case against the local magistrates who had ignored the original case, and this led to their dismissal for unprofessional conduct. A population survey in January 2008 estimated 3,240 saigas in an area of 13,000 km², an 11.8% increase from 2007. This round-up is just the highlights – the full report from WWF-Mongolia is available on their page of the SCA website.

For more details contact B. Chimeddorj, chimeddorj@wwf.mn.

A new direction in the activity of the Stepnoi Sanctuary



The conservation of any wildlife species, particularly a unique species such as the saiga, which has been the target of large-scale hunting, is impossible without the participation of the local population. In the North-Western Pre-Caspian area, one of the most important areas for saigas is the Stepnoi Sanctuary situated in Astrakhan province. The employees of this sanctuary carry out hard and dangerous work day and night, monitoring the population and carrying out scientific studies. In the last few years, they have achieved a significant success not only in conservation of the saiga (no cases of poaching have been recorded in the area), but also of the entire biodiversity of the area. The establishment of reliable protection in the sanctuary became possible owing to the support of the district and regional authorities, as well as our sponsors, such as PTES, IFAW and LHF.

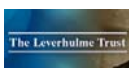
Lately, the staff of this sanctuary decided to expand their activity beyond direct conservation. Owing to a small grant awarded by the Saiga Conservation Alliance, an ecological trail has been created, which enables visitors (schoolchildren, students and Provincial officials, as well as scientists from various institutes of the Russian Federation and overseas) to become fully familiarized with the nature of this small “island of tranquility” in the North-Western Pre-Caspian region, obtain information on the fauna and flora and better

understand what each of us can do to preserve nature. There is an area for people to rest and converse; the waterholes regularly visited by saiga antelopes have been cleaned and artificial nests have been constructed for birds of prey. The ecological education work will be expanded and improved in the future. For further information, please contact Anatoly Khludnev, Stepnoi Sanctuary at limstepnoi@mail.ru.



A map of the of ecological route in the Stepnoi Sanctuary. Photo by Anatoly Khludnev

Project update from Imperial College London



Our Darwin Initiative post-project on “Evaluating approaches to public engagement in saiga conservation”, based in Kalmykia, was completed on 31st December 2007. This project developed links between various parts of society, including schools, Buddhist temples, ecological education centres, local government and saiga conservationists. It also carried out an assessment of the effectiveness of our conservation interventions in changing people’s attitudes towards saigas. E-mail us for a copy of the final report, with our findings from this study.

In 2008, we are working with Kalmykia State University under a BRIDGE grant from the British Council, aimed at promoting links between universities in the UK and Russia, entitled “Participatory

monitoring of saiga antelope population ecology”. Two students from each university are working together on collaborative research projects. One project is investigating the possibilities for participatory monitoring of saigas by local people, and setting up a pilot project. The other is aimed at improving the long-term monitoring of saiga antelopes carried out in the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Research and the Stepnoi Reserve, in order to ensure that the data are of maximum value for science and conservation.

We are about to start (in September 2008) a new project in collaboration with the Institute of Zoology in Kazakhstan and others, looking at the landscape-level determinants of saiga distributions over time. This project will be funded by the Leverhulme Trust and the Royal Society of London. For more details on these projects, contact E.J. Milner-Gulland at e.j.milner-gulland@imperial.ac.uk.



Tell me a fairy tale

The Saiga Conservation Alliance team, funded by WCN, has already been conducting an educational program for the children of Ustyurt, Uzbekistan, for several years. Teachers and children from three schools in villages where poaching levels are highest (Yaslyk and Karakalpakia), as well as their parents, are taking an active part in a saiga conservation programme. We have also expanded our program by involving schoolchildren from a new village (Kubla-Ustyurt) situated in a remote district on the eastern escarpment of the Ustyurt plateau. Performances about the saiga were given in schools in March-April 2008. Considerable work by children, teachers and even parents went into the performance. The children wrote stories about saigas: fairy tales, short stories and poems. The best stories were selected by the jury and used to create scenarios for the performances.



Saiga performance in Yashlyk. Photo by Alexander Esipov

Each performance was different, based on the relationship between saigas and other steppe dwellers, including people, and all the costumes and decorations were made by the children. For example, in school #56, Karakalpakia village, the children made a puppet show. Everything from the puppets to the curtains embroidered with scenes from saiga daily life was made by the schoolchildren. The pupils of school #26 in Karakalpakia created a detective story about some brave boys saving a saiga calf from poachers. The performance at school #54, in Yaslyk, turned into a real festival with music, dances, songs and poems.

The stories written by children were all very impressive, showing talent, deep understanding and knowledge of local folklore and traditions.



Rehearsal of puppet show in Karakalpakia.

Photo by Alexander Esipov

Unfortunately, not all of them were used for the plots of the performances. Next year, we plan to continue our work and to work with the teachers to prepare a book of tales about saigas, written by children in Uzbekistan. We are confident that this will help in changing people's attitudes the saiga and to nature in general. It will provide a strong stimulus for the creative development of teenagers and change the attitude of adults – parents, elder brothers and sisters - to saigas as not only a traditional game species, but also as part of the nation's heritage and local culture. For further information, please contact Elena Bykova and Alexander Esipov, SCA at esipov@sarkor.uz.



Prize-giving for the art competition in Kubla-Ustyurt.

Photo by Alexander Esipov



Traditional embroidery as a source of additional income for the women of Ustyurt

In April 2008, the Saiga Conservation Alliance launched an educational programme on traditional Karakalpak embroidery for the women of Ustyurt (Uzbekistan), in collaboration with the NGO "The Gold Heritage of Aral", and with the financial support of WCN. Its goal is to assist in saiga conservation through the generation of additional income for women living near saiga habitats. It is no secret that housewives determine the spiritual and financial strategy of families. They are the main buyers of saiga meat, which is in high demand due to its relatively cheap price. Due to the complicated economic situation in Uzbekistan, many women do not have constant employment. This is why we decided

to propose that they learn a traditional craft – embroidery – to provide them with an alternative source of income.

From time immemorial, the region has developed a unique and very picturesque material culture, which expresses the individuality of its people in clothes and household goods richly decorated with embroidery. This hand-made embroidery, using natural silk, was deeply symbolic and reflected human and natural life. Skillful female embroiderers created stylized pictures of animals and plants, which spoke about the changes in the seasons and the traditional way of life of local people.



Indeed, it is hard to find more carefully-made embroidery that is as original in its selection of ornament and colour.

The implementation of this project does not require sophisticated equipment and much expense; practically every woman with imagination and patience can do this work at home. The pilot project will last for one year and be based in Yaslyk village. We prepared a room for training, a large group of women interested in receiving training gathered there and a local leader was identified. Preliminary lessons have been given and the first high quality products have already been made. In the future, lessons will focus on more complicated elements of embroidery and we will start trial sales of the products. We also plan to create a stylized saiga image to use in promoting its conservation. For further information, please contact Elena Bykova, SCA at esipov@sarkor.uz and Gulnara Embergenova, the Gold Heritage of Aral at altyn1@rol.uz



The first steps. Embroidery training in Yashlyk
Photo by Alexander Esipov



A new project on saiga protected area assessment has begun in Uzbekistan

There is an existing reserve (zakaznik) for saigas in Uzbekistan, called the "Saigachiy" reserve, but it exists only "on paper". There is a need to upgrade its status and identify its objective. The new protected area should cover diverse methods of biodiversity conservation and find a good balance of land use between regional development and long-term conservation. It is essential that the new protected area should be managed with the direct involvement of the local population.

The Saigachiy zakaznik was created specifically for the conservation of saiga calving areas in 1991, with an area of 1 million ha. It is currently not functioning because it has no capacity in terms of staff, infrastructure, transport etc. The local people living nearby know nothing about it. This is why it is necessary to re-organise the zakaznik into a more effective form. In April 2008 the Saiga Conservation Alliance, Institute of Zoology RUz and Fauna & Flora International, with the financial support of Disney Wildlife Foundation and WildInvest, began a new project preparing a justification for the reorganization of the Saigachiy zakaznik into an effective protected area. The project team see this as the first stage in the transformation of this "paper park" into a real active mechanism for saiga protection in Uzbekistan and as a prerequisite for the establishment of a transboundary protected area system in



The broken sign of the Saigachiy zakaznik.
Photo by Alexander Esipov

the Ustyurt plateau for the effective protection of saiga breeding areas and migratory routes. For more information contact Alexander Esipov & Elena Bykova at esipov@sarkor.uz and Richard Allcorn at Richard.Allcorn@fauna-flora.org.

Review of recent saiga publications

Abaturov B.D. The saiga population in Russia and problems of its conservation. *Vestnik Rossijskoj Akademii Nauk [the Bulletin of the Russian Academy of Sciences]*, 2007, Vol. 77, No 9, p. 785-793.

It is quite obvious to experts that conservation must be based on deep scientific understanding. Meanwhile, in reality deviation from this approach is a rule rather than an exception. Based on the analysis of trends in saiga numbers, the author shows that the conservation of any animal requires not only direct protection, but also a system of interrelated measures for habitat conservation and control of human activities.

Arylova N.Yu. Conserve Saiga in Russia! *Ecology and Life*, No 1 (74), 2008, p. 60-65.

Today, the saiga's destiny is within a hair's breadth of extinction. Despite the complete prohibition of hunting, saiga stocks in Kalmykia have dropped by 90% in the last 10 years. Surveys of local residents and experts revealed that the reasons for this are poaching, habitat disturbance, obstacles on migratory routes, wolves and steppe fires. However, poaching is the main reason and the key obstacle to population recovery. The author cites examples of various saiga conservation initiatives both at the international and national levels, and emphasizes that saigas can be saved only if local residents, nature conservation organizations and law enforcement agencies all stand up to protect this unique species.

Klevezal G.A. Principles and methods of age determination of mammals. Moscow: KMK Sci. Press Ltd. 2007. 283 p.

In the book readers will find the main methods for age determination in mammals. In the first part of the book different methods are described, with an indication of their resolution, advantages and disadvantages and areas of application. Special attention is paid to aging living animals

Announcements

SCA Small Grants Programme 2008



We are delighted to announce that the Saiga Conservation Alliance's Small Grants Programme will be running in 2008, supported by the Wildlife Conservation Network. The aim of the programme is to provide an opportunity for small-scale, short term saiga conservation projects to take place, that would not otherwise be funded.

Eligible projects will:

- Be concerned with the conservation of the saiga antelope in the wild (not in captivity)
- Have a direct and clear impact on the status of the saiga antelope
- Be a maximum of one year in length (to be completed by the end of November 2009)
- Have a budget between US\$1000 and US\$2,000
- Be clearly self-contained, rather than being a small component of a larger project.
- Be affiliated to the Saiga Conservation Alliance, and bound by the rules of its constitution, and the reporting requirements that are laid out therein.

You can obtain more information and the application form at www.saiga-conservation.com or by e-mail from esipov@sarkor.uz or saigaconservationalliance@yahoo.co.uk. The closing date for applications is 30th September 2008, and the projects will run for one year from 15th November 2008.



Saigas in Stepnoi Sanctuary. Russia.
Photo by Anna Lushechina



Monitoring progress of the MOU on Saiga Conservation

Report on progress towards the CMS MOU in the period January-June 2008

Report compiled by E.J. Milner-Gulland for the SCA

Summary

There has been good progress for saiga conservation in this reporting period. The standard and quality of reporting has also improved dramatically, which means that we are able to monitor progress more effectively.

Several new projects have started in Uzbekistan and Kalmykia, supported by a range of new and continuing funders. The major new MAVA-funded project in Mongolia has begun, coordinated by WWF-Mongolia, and this has led to substantial activity on a number of fronts, particularly anti-poaching and public engagement. In China, a new piece of legislation has closed a major loophole in reporting of horn stockpiles. In Kazakhstan, saiga conservation activities are ongoing. We have no information about activities being carried out in Turkmenistan in this reporting period.

For several of the action points in the MTWP, little discernable action has taken place in this reporting period, or in any previous reporting period; this is of concern, particularly for those measures which were listed as A1 (urgent and high priority). It is necessary to ascertain whether these actions are still considered high priority, and if so to focus on making progress before the next MOU meeting.

Priority A1 activities that show no concrete progress are:

Action 1.1. Russia signing the MOU.

Action 3.1. Compliance with CITES recommendations by Russia and Kazakhstan, and lifting of the moratorium on exports.

Actions 9.1/14.2. Establishing captive breeding facilities in Mongolia.

Action 11.2. Public awareness and engagement in the Ural population.

Action 11.3. Conservation planning for the Ural population.

The other A1 actions in the MTWP have seen some action in some range states. In general, there has been encouraging progress towards the goal of fulfilling the MTWP before the next meeting of the signatories to the MOU.

The full report is available at <http://www.saiga-conservation.com/mou.html>. Please send your reports for the period July-December 2008 by **15th December 2008**. Please be *as specific as possible* about the actions undertaken, dates, funders and implementers. Do not include actions which have previously been reported or those which are yet to commence. If projects are ongoing, please mention specific events within the framework of those projects or state which activities have continued throughout the period.

Acknowledgements

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