

SAIGA NEWS

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



Photo by Navinder Singh

Saiga male at the Yashkul' captive breeding centre in Russia

Saigas feature at the 29th Congress of the International Union of Game Biologists

The 29th IUGB Congress (Moscow, August 2009) had as its special theme international cooperation for the conservation of the saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*). Thanks to the generous support of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation and of CIC, many key saiga experts from throughout the saiga's range were able to participate in the Congress, ensuring that the saiga was well represented throughout the Congress programme. We kicked off with an inspirational plenary presentation from Dr Valery Neronov,

the Deputy Head of UNESCO's Russian Committee on Man and the Biosphere, member of the IUGB Scientific Committee, and a long-term campaigner for saiga conservation. Dr Neronov celebrated the recent progress made by local conservationists, international NGOs and national governments, and highlighted the continuing plight of the saiga and the need for more stable financial and institutional support for the species, particularly in Russia.

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This edition is funded by:

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On the fourth day of the Congress, we were able to devote ourselves to saigas for the whole day. The morning saw the saiga section of the Congress, attended by around 90 people, with presentations by eight speakers and discussion of seven posters. The speakers came from a very wide geographical range, from the Ukraine (Dr V. Gavrilenko, giving an interesting presentation on the population dynamics of the long-term captive population in the Askaniya Nova reserve), through Russia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to Mongolia (B. Chimeddorj, who described the major steps forward being taken both in monitoring saigas and in public engagement programmes). The presentation from Mongolia was particularly relevant to the theme of international cooperation, as it demonstrated how locally-based and international conservationists, who may have started with very different approaches and priorities, can come together to agree on a common set of issues and on ways forward to tackle them together.

The backdrop to the sessions was the medium term work programme (MTWP) agreed by the saiga range states in 2006 under the CMS's MOU on saiga conservation, which lists a set of required actions for saiga conservation, prioritised by their urgency and potential impact on saiga status. After hearing all the talks, the section agreed a set of resolutions which highlighted areas in which substantial progress has been made against this set of actions, and areas which are still lacking. A particularly important gap is the lack of progress on international trade issues. The MTWP runs for five years, until 2011, and has proved to be a powerful tool for tracking and channelling international efforts for saiga conservation. The resolutions are published on the Saiga Conservation Alliance's website and in the journal *Stepnoi Bulletin*, #29, 2009.

The afternoon was devoted to the annual meeting of the Saiga Conservation Alliance, the international network of saiga conservationists. A highlight of this meeting was the announcement of the winners of SCA's annual small grants competition.



Photo by IUGB

Participants in the special saiga section of 29th IUGB Congress

This aims to build grassroots capacity for saiga conservation by supporting small self-contained projects within the saiga range states, undertaken by those without access to large-scale international funding, and demonstrably contributing to fulfilment of CMS's MTWP.

This year, the small grants programme was generously supported by the Wildlife Conservation Network (as in previous years) and by CIC. We supported four projects, which well represent the range of activities and geographical locations of the SCA's members' work. See the article later in this issue for more details.

We also adopted a new constitution and governance structure, aiming towards registering the SCA as a Charity within the UK, and heard about progress on the SCA's other activities, including Saiga News.

The final day of the IUGB congress saw another saiga-related highlight, when Nadezhda Arylova, an SCA member and saiga researcher from Kalmykia, Russia, won third prize in the competition for the best presentation at the IUGB by a young scientist. This gives us hope that the future of the saiga is in good hands.

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Updates

2010 is declared the Year of Saiga in Kalmykia

On 30 November 2009, the President of Kalmykia, Mr. Kirsan Ilyumjinov, signed Decree 422 announcing 2010 as the Year of Saiga in the Republic of Kalmykia. The aim is to support saiga conservation in the Republic, facilitate law enforcement activities and develop a set of measures to improve the effectiveness of protection.

An organizing committee is being set up to develop and approval a plan of events, headed by Mr. Ilyumjinov. Vladimir Kirillov, head of the Federal Service for the Monitoring of Natural Resource Use of the Russian Federation, supported this initiative during a meeting with Mr. Ilyumjinov in Moscow on 18 November.

On January, 14th the Government of Kalmykia approved the Action Plan for the Year of the Saiga. This document was signed by Vladimir Sengleev, prime minister of Kalmykia. The Action Plan includes the following activities:

1. To establish a special anti-poaching team for saiga protection;
2. To conduct joint anti-poaching raids between the Kalmykian Ministry of Internal Affairs and rangers of the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve;
3. To conduct saiga monitoring using aerial surveys and thermal imaging;
4. To carry out an experiment re-introduction of captive bred saigas in the wild, and monitor progress using methods such as radio-tracking;
5. To carry out an experiment on artificial insemination of saiga females;
6. To improve cooperation between Russian and international scientists concerning saiga conservation;
7. To organize an international scientific conference on saiga conservation;
8. To carry out research on the artificial synthesis of analogues of the constituents of saiga horn.

The Action Plan also includes various competitions for children, screening of documentary films, exhibitions, etc.



Photo by R. Reading

New born calf

For more detail please visit

<http://www.elista.org/elista/pravitelstvom-rk-utverzhden-plan-meropriyatiy-po-provedeniyu-goda-sa.html>;
<http://www.elista.org/elista/izvestiya-kalmyikii-13.01.10-2.html>

First international saiga ecotour to coincide with the Year of the Saiga

In collaboration with the Rostov-based tour company Saga Tours, and with the Saiga Conservation Alliance, the UK-based company Eastern Approaches is offering a new cultural tour of the saiga range area in southern Russia, to run in August 2010. The tour will include visits to key SCA project sites, including the Saiga Breeding Centre and the Stepnoi Reserve.

We hope that this will be the first in a range of saiga-based eco-tourism initiatives targeted at different interest groups and price brackets, and it is particularly timely that this initiative is starting in Kalmykia's Year of the Saiga. *More information and booking forms can be found at the website www.easternapproaches.co.uk.*

Conservation of the saiga as part of Kazakhstan's national heritage

The issue of saiga conservation was addressed in a recent talk by Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Forestry and Hunting Management, Mr. Igor Koval. He noted that the growth in numbers in this commercially valuable species was achieved owing to the efforts of

State bodies, government funding for protection and establishment of new strictly protected areas. He estimated current population size at 80,000 animals and suggested that further rapid population growth is possible. More details are on the web-site <http://sim.kz/?p=3114>

Uzbekistan's law-enforcement agencies are ready to engage with saiga protection

In October-December 2009, a series of workshops were held, aimed at increasing awareness of the law-enforcement agencies about the conservation of rare animals, using the saiga as a case study. The workshops were held in Tashkent, Nukus and two communities on the Ustyurt plateau, organized by the Institute of Zoology

of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences, the Saiga Conservation Alliance and the State Committee for Nature Protection of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, with the assistance of FFI and financial support from the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund. Participants included representatives of the State Customs Committee, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan and

Karakalpakstan, the Committee for Protection of the State Border of Uzbekistan, the Aral Nature Protection Prosecutor's Office, among others. Discussions included ways to improve interdepartmental cooperation for nature protection, in the light of international and national law and customs regulations. The transport and weapons used by poachers are frequently unregistered; therefore effective wildlife protection depends on cooperation between the nature conservation and law enforcement agencies.

The workshop resolved to exchange information at the national and international levels on cases of illegal hunting and smuggling of saigas and derivatives, as a way of coordinating the actions of the relevant organizations. It was suggested that an information centre could be set



Photos by Alexander Espinov

Participants at the workshops in Tashkent

up based at the State Committee for Nature Protection of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, as premises and equipment are already available, provided by the GEF/UNDP project aimed at conserving tugai forests in the Amudarya delta. Another decision was to carry out joint expeditions including wildlife inspectors and officers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with a particular focus on the saiga breeding areas and migration periods. Workshop participants recognized a need for additional training and information materials about wildlife protection for law enforcement officers.

For further information please contact Elena Bykova, esipov@xnet.uz and Maria Karlstetter, Maria.Karlstetter@fauna-flora.org.



Photos by Alexander Espinov

Participants at the workshops in Nukus

Traditional Medicine Holds the Key to Saving the Saiga

The International Conference and Exhibition on Traditional Medicine (ICTM) was held in Guangzhou Baiyun International Convention Center, China on 9th-22th November 2009, organized Guihong Zhang by the Ministry of Science and Technology, with support from 14 other relevant departments. Participants included over 2,800 scientists, government staff and entrepreneurs from 18 regions, as well as more than 340 medicine companies exhibiting their products. Dr. Xie Yan, Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) China Program and the SCA 2009 small grant team (see later article) attended the conference and distributed Saiga conservation materials.

Dr. Xie Yan gave a presentation entitled "The Traditional Medicine Community Holds the Key to Saving the Saiga Antelope". Dr. Xie outlined the current situation and conservation status of the saiga, and then emphasized the huge demand for saiga horn, which has contributed to the devastating poaching of the wild population. Finally, she encouraged traditional medicine practitioners, researchers and other participants to adopt responsible practices so as to conserve the saiga antelope and other endangered



Photo by Guihong Zhang

Dr. Xie Yan, Director of WCS China Program delivering a talk on ICTM

species used in traditional medicine, including conducting research into alternative products. After the presentation some conference participants expressed a desire to cooperate with WCS on saiga conservation. For more information please contact Guihong Zhang, gzhangwcs@gmail.com.

The Wildlife Conservation Network Expo

By Jenny Leon

The first week in October 2009 saw the 8th WCN Expo in San Francisco, which involved with organisations representing animals from the little known Tree Kangaroo from Papua New Guinea to charismatic elephants of Africa. Elena Bykova and I represented the Saiga Conservation Alliance (SCA) to raise the profile of saigas and seek funding opportunities. The week began with a series of workshops for the conservationists, where we gained invaluable advice on marketing (including some specific recommendations for improving the layout of Saiga News), as well as updates on the latest developments from Google Earth and the best ways of networking at fundraising events.



Photo by Martin Varon

SCA table at Mission Bay Conference Center San Francisco



Photo by Martin Varon

Impressive presentation by special guest Dr. Jane Goodall

We put these new skills to the test at the first donor event of the week, the Friday night cocktail party. Around 150 donors were invited to the event where Dr Jane Goodall, one of the most famous and inspiring conservationists, was the keynote speaker. The following day was an early start to travel into San Francisco for the Expo, which was an event open to the public. The SCA stall was in prime position to attract both those entering the event and those coming and going from the lecture theatre where conservationists from each of the WCN partner groups gave a 30 minute presentation about their species and conservation activities. Elena received many compliments about her presentation which contained a variety of informative and emotive facts and photographs about saigas, the range states and the conservation work carried out by the SCA. We were also reacquainted with our most eager supporters – the ‘zoo kids’ from Oakland

zoo who literally ran at the stall when they saw us. It was incredibly exciting and motivating to see how interested this group were, and it would be fantastic to look into establishing a more formal link with the zoo in the future. The group first heard of saigas at the Expo 2 years ago and have since become obsessed with saigas, showing how effective this event can be at raising awareness. The final donor event of the week took place on a bright Sunday in the Los Altos hills at the home of WCN founder Charlie Knowles. This event allowed us to continue conversations started at the Friday night cocktail party, make new acquaintances and catch up with current supporters of the SCA. Conservationists had the opportunity to introduce themselves, their species and the conservation organisation to the party, intense competition broke out amongst the groups for ‘the most’ interesting fact about their animal; cotton top tamarinds claim to be ‘the cutest monkey’ and saigas laid claim to ‘the most extraordinary nose’! The entertainment included two fantastic bands, delicious food provided a WCN volunteer and ‘Leopards etc’; an organisation that bring wild cats to events to educate the public.

Overall the event was a huge success with many new interesting contacts made. As well as hopefully inspiring a few private donors to support saiga conservation we also met many other conservationists and professionals who gave us exciting new ideas and recommendations such as development of ecotourism to allow donors to visit the saiga range states and possible development of a market for handicrafts.

This was an incredible event to be involved in and I was very proud to be representing saigas, I’d like to thank the WCN staff and dedicated band of volunteers for giving us this opportunity.

For more information please contact Elena Bykova, esipov@xnet.uz and Jenny Leon, jenny.leon08@imperial.ac.uk.

A week for animal protection!



IFAW, the International Foundation for Animal Welfare, organises an annual week for animal protection all around the world. Activities towards this week were held at Gashun secondary school, Kalmykia, from 21st September to 2nd October. A special place in these activities was devoted to the saiga, as IFAW has been a

long-term supporter of saiga conservation. Competitions for the best ecologically-themed picture, posters, stories and poems were held for the pupils, showing that schoolchildren are not at all indifferent to the world of our “junior brothers”. For additional information please contact T.K. Boskhomkhodjiev and Yu.N. Arylov at kalmsaiga@mail.ru.

Trade in the Russian-Chinese border regions is still high

Every year, monitoring of shops and marketplaces in the border towns of the Primorsk and Khabarovsk provinces in Russia and the Heilungkiang province of China is carried out by WWF Russia, TRAFFIC Far East and the Vladivostok branch of the Russian customs academy. The aim is to trace the trade in rare species of

fauna and flora and their products. The work is carried out during April-September, when the trade is at its peak. This year, the officers surveyed 10 stationary and 13 sporadic markets in rural areas on the Russian side. The studies showed that illegal sale of wild plants and fungi and poaching of wild animals for the illegal trade is quite widespread. Many traders are quite aware of prohibitions on hunting and trade, as well as the possible sanctions; however, the desire to earn additional money encourages people to undertake this illegal trade.

Monitoring on the Chinese side covered markets specialising in animal and marine products, a wholesale Chinese Traditional Medicine market and more than 10 state and private drugstores. Animal products on sale included Manchurian deer, roebuck, saiga, trepan, musk deer, sea lion, wild ginseng and various frog species. The traders were open in admitting that some of their goods had been brought from Russia, including illegally. This suggests that there is significant wildlife smuggling across the Russian-Chinese border.

For more details please follow the link http://www.uralpolit.ru/federal/polit/e_s_r/id_156245.html.



Photo by USFWS

Unlicensed saiga medicine confiscated at customs

A saiga count in Mongolia

Saiga rangers in Mongolia conducted a census of the Mongolian saiga on 11-12 October 2009, under a project funded by MAVA. Observer teams conducted simultaneous point counts throughout the Saiga range, using a hand-held GPS unit. Data included saiga locations, date and time, name of observer, weather conditions, group type, group size, group behavior and habitat category. 380 herds comprising 4022 saigas were observed in an area covering about 70% of the known saiga range. Group size averaged 10.5 animals (Range = 1-73). 85 groups comprising 942 animals (23.4% of the total) were encountered within the migration corridors which maintain the connectivity of the Shargiin Gobi and Khuisiin Gobi sub-populations.



Photo by MAVA

For more information please contact B. Chimeddorj, chimeddorj@wwf.mn.

Saiga numbers in Kazakhstan increase again

Akhylbek Kurishbaev, Minister of Agriculture of Kazakhstan, declared at the meeting of the Board of the Ministry on January 18th 2010, that saiga numbers in Kazakhstan had increased by 32.7% in 2009, reaching

81,000 individuals. He also stated that threatened species conservation has substantially improved due to increased anti-poaching activity. *For more details please follow the link* <http://inform.kz/rus/article/2228351>.

Poacher apprehended in the Steppnoi reserve

On 1 September 2009, a case of illegal saiga hunting was recorded in the Steppnoi reserve, Liman district, Russia. The animal was first driven to the point of exhaustion using vehicles, then stunned with sticks and killed. Owing to the well-coordinated work of the reserve rangers and the state inspectors of the Astrakhan

provincial Natural Resource Use and Environmental Protection Agency, the poacher was detained. He was a resident of Yashkul village in the Republic of Kalmykia. A criminal case was launched based on article 258 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. *More details are on the web-site* <http://www.astrakhan.net/?ai=21863>.

Saiga poachers apprehended in Kazakhstan

There have been a number of recent cases of saiga poachers being apprehended in Kazakhstan.

Betpak dala population: On 21 September 2009, rangers of Okhotzoprom State Enterprise detained a 36 year-old resident of Zhaiem village who had illegally hunted saigas from the Betpak-dala saiga population using a motorbike. A search revealed two male saiga carcasses, a rifle, binoculars and a bandolier. Three more saiga carcasses were found hidden nearby. The evidence was submitted to the Nurinsk District Department of Internal Affairs of Karaganda province on 22 September 2009. According to the newspaper Kazakhstan Today of 4 January 2010, officers of the Irgiz District Department of Internal Affairs detained a motorcycle without a number plate, which was driven by a 33-year-old resident of Akespe village, Aral district, Kyzylorda province. During inspection, the officers found five saiga carcasses with cut off horns, a double-barrelled 16-calibre hunting rifle and 50 cartridges. Currently the case is awaiting a decision as to whether to bring criminal proceedings under article 288 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan. *For more details please follow the links* <http://kt.kz/index.php?lang=rus&uin=1133168020&chapter=1153497956>;

<http://kt.kz/index.php?lang=rus&uin=1133168020&chapter=1153506653>.

Ustyurt population: On October 8 2009, two poachers were detained in Julduz village, in whose vehicle there was a saiga carcass without any accompanying documents. On 13 October, a resident of Aktau shot sixteen saigas on the Ustyurt plateau, Aktyubinsk province. The poacher was detained by Okhotzoprom rangers. On 25 October, rangers tried to stop a jeep for inspection. The vehicle attempted to escape and the rangers gave chase. During the chase they noticed three saiga carcasses and a rifle being thrown out of the vehicle. All three men from the jeep were detained and proceedings were instituted against them.

More details are available on the web sites <http://diapazon.tv/2009/10/28/sajjgu-bjut-no-ona-ne-vymiraet.html>;

<http://kt.kz/index.php?lang=rus&uin=1133168098&chapter=1153500005>.

Ural population: On 20 October 2009, a GAZel vehicle with 88 saiga horns packed into cardboard boxes was detained at Saikhim village. The driver explained that he had not hunted himself, but had bought the horns from local residents at a price of 300 to 1000 tenge per horn. He had intended to transport them to Almaty and sell them there. More details are available on the web sites <http://diapazon.tv/2009/10/28/sajjgu-bjut-no-ona-ne-vymiraet.html>.

Official in Kazakhstan reprimanded for issuing an illegal hunting

According to Kazakhstan's anti-fraud police force, the deputy head of the Aktyubinsk regional Inspectorate of Forestry and Wildlife Management, Mr. Gusev, was

severely reprimanded for issuing an illegal licence to shoot saigas. *More details are on the web-site* <http://diapazon.tv/kazakhstan/20245-44-gossiluzhashhikh-uvoleny-v-jetom-godu-po.html>.

Nine Kyrgyz citizens jailed in China for saiga horn smuggling

The charges were robbery-related homicide, smuggling and trade in drugs and smuggling of saiga horns. One of the Kyrgyz citizens was sentenced to death, which was subsequently commuted to 19 years imprisonment. Two of them were sentenced to life imprisonment, and another

four received long sentences. Currently, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan is preparing a bilateral agreement with China to extradite their citizens. More details are on the website the web-site <http://ru.trend.az/regions/casia/kyrgyzstan/1616292.html>.

Saiga antelopes in peril again: Call for Action

The North-West Precaspian (Russia) population of the saiga antelope is once again facing challenges due to the combination of a particularly severe winter and poaching. The 95% decline of the saiga around 10 years ago was one of the fastest population collapses ever observed in a large mammal. In recent years some populations appear to have stabilized at low levels, including the Precaspian population in Russia, which is estimated at around 20,000 animals.

However, the North-West Precaspian population is now suffering from a phenomenon known as “dzhut”. Deep snow is covered by a layer of ice making it extremely difficult for saiga to feed on the vegetation underneath and to move. A dzhut last occurred in 1998/1999 in the Precaspian region, and it is thought that this caused the decline from approximately 150,000 to 50,000 animals that winter. The “News of Kalmykia” suggested on 12th February 2010 that the population size may already have crashed to 8,000 animals, although there have been no formal assessments of the effect of the dzhut on population size as yet. The possibility exists that the current winter conditions will reduce the population to such a small size that it may become unviable.

It has also been reported that poaching is currently rife in the Precaspian region and the illegal trade of saiga meat flourishing. The Deputy Minister for Natural Resources, Environment Protection and Energy Development Yury Kaminov stated that “The situation is out of control. There is information that saiga meat is sold in Yashkul district.”

When the snow is deep saigas cannot escape poachers as well and so are relatively easy prey. In Kazakhstan poachers have been reported to use snow mobiles in these conditions.

The Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment Protection and Energy Development of the Republic of Kalmykia, where the bulk of the North-West Precaspian saiga occurs, is extremely concerned and is calling for help, stating that “Under current conditions, we may lose the saiga.”

Saiga poaching and trade is illegal in all the saiga range states, including Russia, and there is a severe lack of law enforcement. This is particularly acute in Kalmykia, due to a critical lack of funding, linked to the transfer of wildlife management from Moscow to the regions from January 2008. Since then, the number of rangers responsible for biodiversity conservation in the entire Republic of Kalmykia has dropped from 30 to only 6 people. These figures become particularly concerning in the light of the fact that these rangers have to protect many species and that the Republic of Kalmykia is slightly larger in size than Ireland, measuring about 75,000 km².

The administrations of the Republic of Kalmykia and Astrakhan oblast are calling for donor support for their efforts to save saigas. They need funds to purchase petrol for patrol vehicles, to buy better equipped vehicles and to pay local volunteers to help the state inspectors in protecting saiga. They will also carry out a media campaign using posters, TV and radio to inform local people about the situation and to enlist their support.

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Photo by Yury Artylov

The severe winter of 2010. Yashkul' captive breeding centre in Kalmykia, Russia

Articles

Tracking saigas in Kazakhstan

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For the first time in Kazakhstan, saigas have recently been collared for a large-scale telemetry project. The collars are giving daily fixes of the animals' positions, making it possible to follow their movements through their vast range. The findings will be a substantial contribution to the conservation of this species.

Twenty animals were successfully captured and collared over 3 weeks in October as part of the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (ADCI), aiming to preserve the steppe and semi-desert ecosystems of Central Kazakhstan and its key wildlife. The collaring took place in the area of the main concentrations of the Betpak-Dala population around the planned State nature reserve "Altyn Dala" and north of the Irgiz-Turgay state nature reserve.



Photo by Steffen Zuther

Motorbikes were used to drive the saigas into nets

Based on this experience and on the ideas of the field team, a method was developed which proved to be very effective and safe. After a herd had been identified and chased by cars and motorbikes, one animal was separated from the herd by a motorbike and finally driven into a net, hidden on the ground and pulled up when the saiga was approaching. This method guaranteed a very soft capture and allowed immediate handling, reducing the stress to the animal.

Owing to good training and adequate human and technical resources, the stress for the animals was minimised. The maximum chase time was limited to 4 minutes, which is much less than in comparable studies. This strict limit helps in the avoidance of hyperthermia, but also meant that several trapping attempts had to be abandoned when the time limit had passed. Handling could also be limited to a maximum of 4-5 minutes. During this time, the team took body measurements, monitored body temperature, weighed the animal, took blood and fur samples, and fitted the collar. The extremely fast process assured that all saigas were released in good condition.



Photo by Bauzhan Iskakov

ADCI field team for the collaring

More than 20 people were engaged in the fieldwork, led by Orken Shaimukhanbetov, head of the ADCI ranger service, and carried out jointly by ADCI and the State Enterprise Okhotzooptom. Four state rangers were directly involved in the trapping, including two experienced motorcyclists. First, a plane was used to identify the current locations of saiga herds and then cars and motorbikes to catch the individuals. In order to assure correct and harm-free handling of the animals, several training sessions were held led by Dr. Christina Geiger (vet, Frankfurt Zoological Society), who took also part in the first captures of saigas. Goats were used as substitutes for saigas in training.

The most difficult aspect of the fieldwork was the capturing itself since saigas are very shy and flee at substantial distances from the team. Different approaches were discussed, based on experience from Mongolia (WCS and Institute of Biology; see the articles in Saiga News, issues 4, 6), which was extremely helpful in determining chasing times and adjusting handling.



Photo by Albert Salemgreev

Saiga female directly after collaring

We use Globalstar collars, with a GPS to determine the position of the animals and the Globalstar satellite system to submit the coordinates to the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK), implementing the ADCI in Kazakhstan, which is a relatively new technique. Two pairs of coordinates are recorded every day and submitted once a day, which allows continuous tracking. The information is immediately used to plan the anti-poaching activities of Okhotzoprom and the ADCI rangers. Furthermore, it will allow us to identify important saiga habitats and aid in designing new protected areas for saigas.

This ambitious project is a joint action of ACBK, the Committee for Forestry and Hunting (Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan), Okhotzoprom, Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). It is substantially supported by the Gregor Louisoder Foundation, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), and the German Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM).

More information on this project, including preliminary results, will be available later in scientific journals and on the ACBK website (www.acbk.kz).

Satellite tracking of saigas starts in Ustyurt

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Satellite tracking of saigas started in Ustyurt in November 2009. Satellite tracking is a powerful tool for ecological and conservation studies on long-distance migratory animals. It can describe migration routes, home ranges, habitat selection of animals, and barriers for animal movements, and has been widely applied worldwide. The saiga antelope is in particular need of satellite tracking surveys, due to their long distance movements and critically endangered conservation status. The Ustyurt population is transboundary between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and this is a key issue for management and conservation which the project will help to address. Results from this project will be useful in enabling us to understand the mechanisms of the saiga's movements and habitat selection, and will feed into conservation planning for the Ustyurt ecosystem. It will also give comparable data with other saiga populations that have been satellite tracked in Mongolia (*Saiga tatarica mongolica*) and with the new study on the Betpak-Dala population (see above), as well as from other long-distance migratory species, such as the Mongolian gazelle (*Procapra gutturosa*).



Photos by Alexander Esipov

Collaring a saiga female

The capturing and collaring took place in the southern part of Ustyurt population's distribution in Kazakhstan on 10-13 November. We used the same method that was used for the Betpak dala population the previous month (see above). We were helped by many inspectors and local people, numbering more than 20 people. We originally planned to collar 10 saigas, but only 5 were successfully collared due to issues including a broken-down motorbike, low saiga density and limited time, but a further expedition will be conducted next year. We used an Argos system without a GPS, and set the satellite transmitters (TAW-4310H, Telonics) to get location data at an 8 day interval over a 2.5 year period.

This project is collaborative between the Arid Land Research Center, Tottori University, Japan, the Institute of Zoology of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Okhotzoprom Kazakhstan, the Institute of Zoology of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and Imperial College London, UK, and is supported by the Ministry of



Photos by Alexander Esipov

Placing the nets for catching saigas

Mongolian saiga calf survival: an update

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In June 2008, a two-year joint project between the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Mongolian Academy of Sciences was initiated to assess the timing of birth and patterns of calf survival in western Mongolia (see article in *Saiga News* 8). This year, we conducted fieldwork on 8-21 June and targeted capture efforts within the same area of Sharga Nature Reserve as in 2008. The first 2009 calf was captured on 12 June, one day earlier than last year.

We captured and fitted VHF radio collars to 40 newborn saiga calves (Table 1). Of these, 45% were twins. There was no significant difference in body weight between sexes ($t = 0.9$, $p = 0.3$). Calf body weight was slightly, but not significantly, higher than last year (2008: 2.69 ± 0.36 kg; 2009: 2.80 ± 0.41 kg; $t = 1.3$, $p = 0.1$).

The red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) was the most frequently observed carnivore in the study site. During our time in the field, three collared calves were killed by red foxes, one was killed by a raptor, and one collar failed. Three more collared calves died in the two weeks following our field season. These calves are believed also to have been killed by predators (2 by foxes, 1 by a raptor). We also witnessed one raptor kill and four incidents of fox predation on un-collared calves.

Of the calves captured and radio-collared in 2008, 21 still survive. Thus, a total of 54 saiga calves (33 from this year) are currently being monitored. Monitoring consists of a saiga ranger traveling by motorbike throughout the Sharga Nature Reserve and surrounding region listening for signals from radio-collared saiga calves at least two times per week. Locations of the collared calves are recorded and any



Photo by Biyanmaa Chimeddorj

New born saiga in the Sharga Nature Reserve

mortality signals are followed up with an investigation and recovery of the collar. Our efforts in 2008 revealed that prior to their 1st winter, 17 of 39 collared calves perished. Basic summary statistics, using a single-entry known-fate model in MARK, resulted in a pre-winter survival estimate of 0.57 (0.42 - 0.72). In mid-April and mid-May, post-winter follow up surveys were conducted to locate and recover the remaining radio-collared calves. Two more saiga calves had died and two collars were not heard. As in 2008/2009, the remaining 54 calves (2008 and 2009 combined) will be monitored this autumn, and a post-winter survey will be conducted in the spring of 2010.

Table 1. Body weight (kg) of newborn Mongolian saiga

Year	Male			Female		
	Mean \pm SD	Range	n	Mean \pm SD	Range	n
2008	2.79 ± 0.32	2.24 - 3.52	22	2.56 ± 0.38	1.95 - 3.36	18
2009	2.86 ± 0.43	2.32 - 3.83	23	2.74 ± 0.38	2.12 - 3.64	17
Total	2.82 ± 0.37	2.25 - 3.65	45	2.65 ± 0.38	2.02 - 3.45	35

Conservation of the Saiga Antelope in the Great Lakes Basin of Western Mongolia

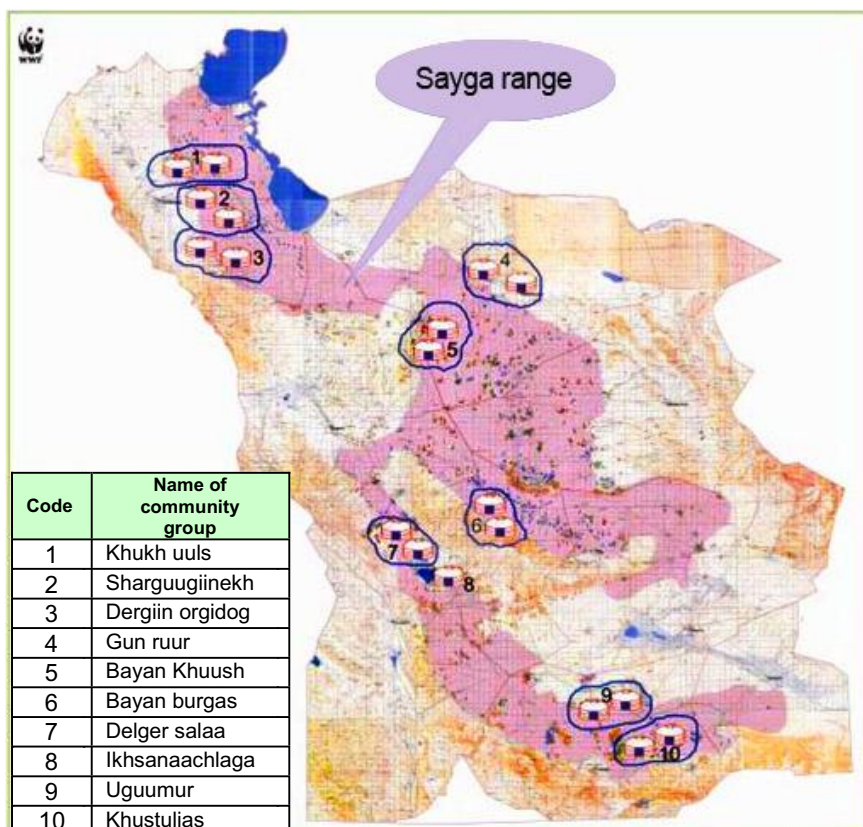
Buyanaa Chimeddorj

WWF Mongolia, chimeddorj@wwf.mn



WWF Mongolia started a major new activity in 2007 with financial support from the MAVA

Foundation. The long term goal for this project is to maintain and restore the saiga population in its former range, by strengthening law enforcement, establishing livestock free habitats, carrying out public awareness and population monitoring. The project has led to date to a noticeable change of opinion in favour of saiga conservation and to an increase in the population by 8% compared to 2007. The Saiga was also able to extend its range in the Shargiin Gobi region to the south and east and in Durgun Tal to the north. The project also contributes to the fulfillment of Mongolia's commitment to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) by catalysing community level action and improving coordination between community groups, government organizations at the provincial (aimag) and federal levels, NGOs and scientists. Other important achievements of the project are improved dialogue and cooperation between the local law enforcement agencies and herder communities.



Map. Location of community groups in Saiga habitat

I. Policy

The project has founded a well trained and equipped Mobile Anti-Poaching Unit (MAPU) and a network of 11 motivated and qualified rangers (SRN) supported by a group of volunteer rangers ensuring a community-based operation. This saiga ranger network was trained in environmental conservation, conservation biology, government policy on conservation, conservation legislation, public relations, data collection, protected area management and monitoring techniques. The Minister of MNET stated that "The Saiga ranger's network is the best and most efficient law enforcement unit in Mongolia..."

The "IRVES" software, which aims to track and monitor wildlife crimes, is in full operation and has been field tested by the Environmental Protection Agency of Gobi-Altai Aimag; it is hoped that it will become an effective tool for



wildlife crime and facilitate integration of data into one database, which should help to improve coordination and communication between all relevant law enforcement agencies.

II. Field Delivery

Rural communities play a key role in saiga conservation and sustainable rangeland use. Local facilitators (motivated herders) are used to provide a basic understanding of community based management concepts to local people and assist them to develop community or user groups and joint rangeland management plans. Ten community groups have been established so far in the saiga range; all are situated in critical saiga habitats (Map 1). The key ambition is to gain support from herders for nature conservation by helping to improve their livelihoods, e.g. by helping to diversify their productive activities, to enhance the quality of their livestock and to improve pasture management. Many people accept that livestock populations have increased, leading to overgrazing, and to the deterioration of vegetation and soil. Fortunately more and more nomads are beginning to understand the situation and are willing to swap high livestock numbers for high quality livestock; this provides new opportunities for saiga conservation.

III. Communication

The project has become a significant contributor to the implementation of the National Standards for education in Mongolia, helping to shape the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science's national framework based on its

experience in cooperating with the Aimag Education team and practical experience in pilot schools.

Awareness and knowledge of saigas has increased among local communities by the establishment of solid partnerships with the mass media, including local TV and Radio. Nature conservation publications and handbooks on the relevant legislation were distributed to local people in cooperation with the Aimag Education Agency and Nature, Environment and Tourism Agency. Ten eco-clubs were established at schools in the project area, led by teachers, which participate in project activities. They are supported by WWF Mongolia's education team and the Saiga ranger network. All the eco-clubs developed their own conservation work plans and small scale projects which are supported by the project.

IV. Illegal Trade in Saiga Horn

We help to uncover illegal activities by providing a reward for informants in cases of poaching and illegal wildlife trade. This policy has been widely advertised throughout the saiga range. We paid awards of 1 million Mongolian Tugriks (about 800 USD) to 2 informants for information which led to the arrest of 4 poachers who had killed 13 saigas. MAPU and the saiga ranger network, working in close cooperation with the Aimag Police and Environmental Agency, detected 3 cases of poaching of 14 saigas in 2008-2009. The cases were submitted to the Gobi-Altai Provincial Court and the poachers were sentenced to between 2 and 5 years in prison. A case related to the illegal trade in 108 Saiga horns was recently revisited by the Khovd Provincial Court, after several rejections, thanks to continued pressure from WWF. The two poachers were sentenced to 3.6 and 5 years in prison.



Photo by Buyanaa Chimeddorj

MAPU receive their credentials

V. Partners and donors

This project is closely connected to the Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism, the regional and local authorities as well as development agencies such as SIDA, GTZ, SDC and UNDP. Most important is the constructive cooperation with herder groups, pilot schools and teachers. There is a project web page at the Saiga Conservation Alliance site, www.saiga-conservation.com. The project team express its gratitude to the MAVA Foundation for financing this project which is an important contribution to species and habitat conservation at both the Mongolian and international levels.

Can we use local knowledge to map saiga distributions?

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Local people often have substantial knowledge about species ecology, which conservationists can use to inform management. We carried out a survey of local people in Kalmykia, in order to map the boundary of the current saiga range, which is not well known. We also investigated the factors affecting people's reporting of saiga observations within this range boundary.

We carried out the study in summer 2009. We asked people whether they had ever seen saigas in their territory; whether, and at what time of year, they had seen them in the last 12 months; and what factors affected whether saigas were present in their areas. We chose to survey people living in outlying farms rather than villages, because they are most likely to come in contact with saigas.

There are three factors that affect whether people report having seen saigas: 1) The saigas have to be present. We hypothesised that this depends on biological factors such as vegetation and water availability. 2) The observer has to see the saigas, if they're present. We hypothesised that this depends on factors such as how long they have lived in the area and how often they travel on the steppe, at what time of day, and using what mode of transport. 3) They have to report to us that they have seen the saigas. We hypothesised that this depends on whether people want to be truthful, which may be related to their poaching activities.

We compared the range area we found to previous estimates of the saiga range in Kalmykia, and to expert opinion. When compared to the earlier range boundary

(from Lushchekina and Struchkov 2001), the new boundary shows a dramatic decrease in the total saiga range in Kalmykia. However, a local saiga expert (Kh. Manzhiev) suggests a slightly larger range area (Figures 1 & 2).

There was no seasonality in the pattern of where and when people reported saigas. This suggests that saigas are no longer migrating within their range depending on the season, and saigas can be found outside protected areas at all times. This is an important finding in terms of the need for year-round protection for saigas outside reserves.

Very different factors affected whether people reported seeing saigas in a particular area in the past, compared to in the last 12 months. The main factors affecting whether people saw saigas in the past was how long they had lived in their house, rainfall (the less rain, the more likely saigas were there) and nearby water availability (the closer the water, the more likely saigas were there). This suggests, as expected, that saiga distributions in the past were mainly driven by biological factors affecting habitat suitability. However, in the last 12 months, the only thing that affected whether saigas were reported was the village people lived in, with people in the Yashkul' area much more likely, and in Komsomolsk' area somewhat more likely, to report seeing saigas than people in other areas. This could be due to range changes, but it could also be an indication that

people were less willing to reveal saiga presence in some areas. Another way to tell if people are being accurate is to see how variable the reports from a particular area are - one would expect people living in the same area to be consistent in their reporting, if they are being truthful. The Khulkhutta region was particularly variable in its reporting, but Erdenevskiy was also not very consistent. This may be connected to these areas being particularly known as poaching areas.

Local people suggested that poaching and lack of water were key issues controlling saiga distributions nowadays. Although rainfall is actually increasing in Kalmykia, water availability has decreased due to artificial water sources falling into disrepair. This highlights the importance of clarifying the difference between precipitation and availability when understanding limiting factors both for wildlife and livestock.

This study has been useful both in clarifying the boundary of the current saiga distribution and factors influencing saiga presence, but also highlighting the issues with accurate reporting by local people. This is important to bear in mind, both in order to target conservation interventions effectively and in order to improve our use of participatory monitoring to collect ecological data.

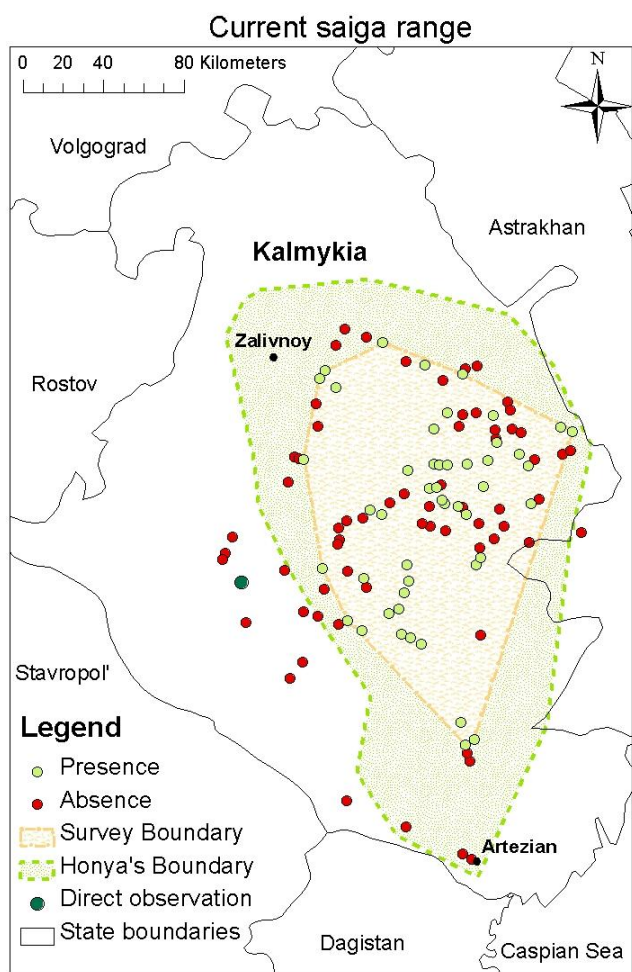


Figure 1. Map of Kalmykia indicating occurrence points, range boundary obtained from the questionnaire survey and the boundary drawn from expert opinion (CZBR scientific officer – Kh. Manzhiev)

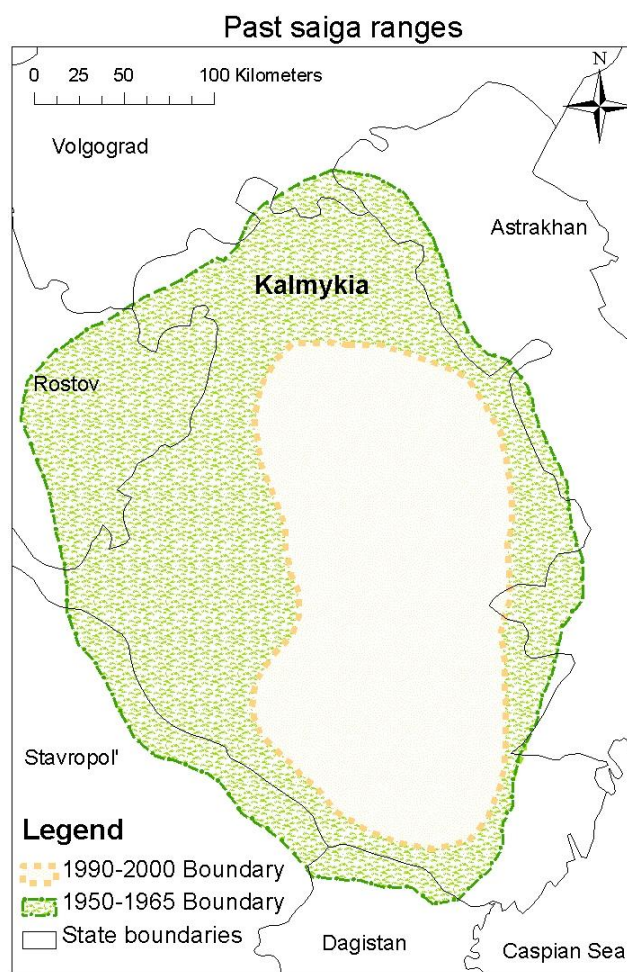


Figure 2. Map depicting past distributions of saigas from 1950-1965 and the most recent boundary prior to this study from 1990-2000 (Lushchekina & Struchkov, 2001)

A horned female saiga at the Centre for Rare Animals of the European Steppes

Victor A. Minoransky

The Association of Living Animals of the Steppe, Southern Federal University, Russia

Saigas are strongly sexually dimorphic. Females differ from males in a number of traits including the absence of horns. In place of horns, females usually have a bony protuberance from which horns very rarely grow. Data from the pre-Caspian region suggest a rate of 2-3 horned individuals per 10,000 females. There is one such female at the Centre for Rare Animals of the European Steppes (hereinafter the Centre).

The Centre was established in Kubdryuchensky village, Rostov province, Russia, in 2003. Its aims include the conservation of rare species through captive breeding and reintroduction. It keeps a range of species, of which one of the most numerous is the saiga. Currently there are 47 individuals and the species is breeding successfully at the Centre (See Saiga News Issue 3).

The horned female was born at the Centre in 2005. She gave birth normally in 2007, but in 2008 she did not conceive, unlike the other females in her group. Observation suggests that she avoided the males. In 2009 the female again stayed apart from the rest of the group during mating, but this time did conceive. She gave birth in 2009 much later than the rest of the group and the calf was weak and died of exposure at the age of 2 months.

The female's horns are quite different to a male's horns (see photo). They are extremely asymmetrical. The right



Photo by Svetlana Tolcheeva

A horned saiga female

horn is 11 cm in length and is relatively straight, though angled forward and to the outside. The left horn is almost horizontal to the skull and slightly forward, pointing up and forward at the end. It is 1.4cm long and 1.8 cm in diameter at the base, with a dark colouration at the base. Based on the reproductive history of this individual we suggest that the presence of horns in females is related to hormone imbalances.

Reclamation of the pasture at the Yashkul captive breeding centre

Viktor Fedosov

Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia

The Yashkul captive breeding centre has been operational since 2003, in the Republic of Kalmykia, Russia. It occupies 800 ha of semi-desert rangeland. Sparse vegetation grows on poor soils under a water deficit, with vegetation cover of about 50-60%. The soil is rather heavy in texture, high density and saline, which prevent complete absorption of rainwater. Artemisia (wormwood) is the dominant plant. These conditions are ideally suited to saiga antelopes. A herd of 68 animals is kept in enclosures occupying 62 ha (see *Saiga News* Issue 2).

Despite the fact that saigas have only been using the pasture since 2003, the year-round nature of their usage has led to vegetation changes that are clearly visible in differences between the vegetation inside and outside

the enclosure. The animals selectively consume Artemisia and other herbs, leading to their replacement by couch grass. Outside the enclosure, where domestic cattle graze, the Artemisia cover remains. The cost of supplemental feeding of the saigas in autumn-winter is high.

Heaving grazing in Kalmykia, particularly by sheep, led to the degradation of pastures in the second half of the 20th century. This caused the loss of many valuable fodder plants and an increasing problem with desertification. To address this problem, the Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia (which runs the Yashkul centre) and the Williams All-Russian Fodder Crop Research Institute have been working to improve pasture productivity.

We have established an experimental nursery of arid fodder plants at the Yashkul centre, containing both local plants and those introduced from Central Asia and elsewhere. These include glasswort species, Eurotia, black saxaul, oats and leban (*Vitex pubescens*).

Despite the significant differences between Kalmykia's soils and those of their natural habitats, most of the introduced plants have successfully established and produced high fodder yields. The fodder produced is well liked by the animals and of high quality.

In autumn 2007 and 2008, seeds were harvested from the experimental plots which were subsequently used to expand the area under cultivation. In spring 2008, Eurotia was planted in one of the enclosures, which was temporarily out-of-use. In future, we intend to expand the growing of valuable fodder crops.



The experimental plot at the Yashkul captive breeding centre.

A new discovery at Askania Nova

Victor A. Minoransky

Association of the Living Nature of the Steppe, Southern Federal University, Russia

During the 29th International Congress of Game Biologists in Moscow, August 2009 (see feature article), one of the resolutions was that coordination of activities between saiga breeding centres should be established, and experiences shared. To this end, a delegation from Rostov region, Russia, visited Askania Nova UNESCO Biosphere Nature Reserve, Ukraine (see *Saiga News* 9), on 20-23 September 2009. The delegation included staff of the Association of the Living Nature of the Steppe, the Rostov Biosphere Reserve, the Donskoi stud farm and the Department of Conservation and Use of Wildlife, Water and Biological Resources of Rostov province.



Meeting participants at the monument to the founder of Askania Nova Biosphere Reserve Woldemar Falz-Fein

Askania Nova is a unique place with a long history, many generations of hard work, a vast area and many species living in near-natural conditions. It attracts a large number of scientists, naturalists and tourists (more than 126,000 people visited it in 2009). All this plant and animal diversity,

together with the old well on an ancient road, are guarded by seventeen stone statues left by Scythian steppe nomads.

During our visit, there were about 300 saigas in enclosures, of which 70 were born in 2009. Most of the animals were in one herd, though individuals and small groups could be occasionally seen. Aware of their shyness in the wild, we were interested to see how close the saigas allowed humans to approach. The director of the nature reserve, Victor Gavrilenko, took us to the steppe and were able to approach in his Niva vehicle as close as 25-40 m. This enabled us to observe the animals at close quarters.

The Reserve's staff told us about their activities and provided exhaustive answers to all our questions. In turn, our delegation shared its experience of breeding saigas, bustards and other animals in enclosures, which we had accumulated on the Don. We discussed difficult problems such as how to protect the Reserve's steppe vegetation and how to fund our activities. We also visited the Ukrainian Research Institute of Cattle Husbandry, which is nearby. For many years this institute has maintained links with the Reserve and helps in its research.

We signed an agreement on cooperation, exchange of animals, preparation of a joint publication and carrying out various educational, tourism and conservation events. These are particularly relevant in 2010, the UN's International Year of Biodiversity.

We invited a delegation from Askania Nova to visit us in Rostov at any time. Our invitation was accepted with gratitude and we hope to welcome our guests from the Ukraine in spring 2010. By that time we aim to have prepared a joint project on the establishment of an international union of saiga breeding centres, and presented these ideas to the Convention on Migratory Species and the relevant national agencies. The Living Nature of the Steppe

Association may become an active member of a union such as this, but we need additional help from the Rostov provincial administration to expand and develop facilities at the newly built captive breeding centre on Lake Manych-Gudilo, near Rostov Biosphere Reserve. It is also important to establish a saiga biology laboratory, similar to that which existed in Astrakhan province in the 1960s, when saigas

were common in our country. This would improve breeding techniques, including artificial insemination. The experience of Askania Nova in its relationship with the Ukrainian Research Institute of Animal Husbandry may be a successful example to follow in developing a scientific research programme.

Photo by Svetlana Tolcheeva



Herd of saigas in Askania Nova

Project round-up

Profile of the 2009 Saiga Conservation Alliance Small Grant winners



WCN and CIC supported the 2009 small grant programme of the Saiga Conservation Alliance, allowing us to select four exceptional in-country saiga conservationists for financial support. The programme supports grassroots conservation activity for saigas in the wild, funding self-contained projects costing <\$2000. All projects must explicitly address priority actions within the medium term work programme of the Convention on Migratory Species' MOU on saiga conservation, ensuring that they make a real difference in an area that has been highlighted as particularly timely and necessary. This approach also publicises the MOU and its importance to a wide audience, including the applicants themselves and international audiences. The main aim of the competition is to build capacity in-country, particularly targeting people who are not able to access international support from large NGOs for their work. We provide continuing networking support for previous winners, hoping that by bringing them into the SCA family, we can help them to access resources and inspiration to continue their work.

The Saiga Conservation Alliance Steering Committee chooses the projects to support based on a set of clear criteria, with each member independently scoring all the projects, and then choosing the top proposals based on

these scores. This year we had four excellent proposals. We feel that the winners very nicely illustrate the breadth of conservation activity that the SCA undertakes, and the broad geographical range involved.



Anatoly Khudnev is Director of the Steppnoi Reserve in the Astrakhan province of Russia, bordering the Caspian Sea. This reserve is a stronghold for the pre-Caspian saiga population, harbouring herds numbering at least 10,000, particularly during the birth season. It neighbours the Chernye Zemli Biosphere

Reserve, and together these reserves provide a haven for saigas, the population of which still suffers from heavy poaching. Anatoly is a retired colonel of the Soviet Army, and his small, loyal team has a punishing schedule that ensures round-the-clock protection for saigas at particularly vulnerable times of year, even though this entails sleeping in their vehicles, as they do not yet have a headquarters building within the reserve.

Anatoly will spend the grant on petrol for his vehicles. The amount of petrol they can afford has a direct link to patrol effectiveness by extending the time they can patrol for, however it is a difficult thing to fundraise for.

We supported Anatoly because we are sure that this investment will have a direct effect on saiga population viability in the wild. The Russian population is under heavy poaching pressure, so this work is badly needed (see the news update in this issue of *Saiga News* for an example of successful anti-poaching activities by the Stepoi Reserve team).



Guihong Zhang has been WCS China's wildlife trade officer since August 2008. Before that, he spent 15 years in the Chinese Government's Environmental Protection Agency. His work focuses on the illegal wildlife trade in Guangzhou, a key trade centre. It includes training, monitoring and engaging key stakeholders (medical practitioners, businesses and the public).

Guihong's grant will be used to conduct a saiga horn trade survey in Qingping Traditional Chinese Medicine Market, Guangzhou, a key venue for saiga horn sales. He will launch an education campaign in this market, to inform stakeholders about saiga conservation and the law, and will write a report for the Guangzhou Forest Department, to help them target their law enforcement activities. We supported Guihong because there is a need for saiga conservationists to engage more strongly with the demand side if we are to build a sustainable future for saigas.



Vera Voronova is an MSc student at Karaganda State University, and Technical Assistant for Karaganda Ecomuseum's project on ecological awareness. She is also a keen ornithologist, and has had many volunteer positions working on bird ecology and conservation, including developing a young ornithologists club at her

university, and working as a scientific assistant at a field station in the Tien Shan mountains.

Vera's grant will be used for designing and constructing information displays about saigas, publishing leaflets about saiga conservation in the Karaganda region and developing teaching materials for local schools and the ecomuseum's website. We supported Vera because the Karaganda region is critical summer range for the Betpak-dala population and there is very little public awareness there. Also, we feel we can help her to build a locally-based saiga conservation and information network, using our prior experience from elsewhere.



Artur Nuridjanov works for the State Hunting inspectorate. In 2008, he carried out an ecological audit of Vozrozhdenie Island (now a peninsula) in the Aral Sea. The detailed results of his audit were published in Issue 9 of *Saiga News*. The area was a closed military facility in Soviet times, and was

abandoned after the break-up of the Soviet Union. It was only revisited by people in 2007, most of them coming to loot the buildings, but they also found abundant and tame wildlife which they started to poach. Artur's audit, for an oil company, found that ecological damage was rapidly occurring but the peninsula still harboured a diverse steppe ecosystem, including a resident saiga population.

This grant will allow Artur to continue his work, by confirming the abundance and distribution of saigas on Vozrozhdeniye Island. He will use the information to lobby government to create a protected area on the Island, before it's too late. We supported Artur because this project is urgent – the situation is critical, but potentially this could be an important haven for saigas and other steppe species.

We are very proud of our winners, and very grateful to WCN and CIC for enabling us to support their important work.

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A New Approach to the conservation of large mammals in Mongolia

In October 2009, WWF Mongolia started the project "*Aerial counts of Mongolian Saiga (Saiga tatarica mongolica)*", with financial support from the MAVA Foundation. The overall goal of this project is to establish aerial counts as a standard method for the assessments of large mammal populations in Mongolia, as an indispensable tool for effective conservation measures. We have started to organize a survey of the saiga antelope as a pilot project enabling us to learn about aerial surveys. The goal of this project is to establish a reliable and replicable methodology for assessing

the Mongolian saiga population and to develop an effective tool for population management. The aerial count of the Mongolian saiga will take place in autumn 2010. We have prepared all the technical and methodological aspects, including locating an aircraft, delineating the census zone, and carrying out a pre-project workshop and flight crew training. Operational plans are in place and all the data sheets have been finalized and printed. *B. Chimeddorj*,
chimeddorj@wwf.mn.

Review of recent saiga publications



Smirin V.M.



Portraits of steppe animals of Europe and North Asia. Science and arts for ecological education. Compiled by A.I. Oleksenko, A.V. Zimenko, P.P. Dmitriev, E.V. Zubchaninova. Published by the Centre of Wildlife Protection, Moscow, 2008. 92 pp., with illustrations.

This new book by a prominent zoologist and nature artist will be of interest to people living in steppe regions, schoolchildren, students, teachers, professional zoologists, environmentalists, nature-lovers and conservationists as an educational manual and a book for the soul. The steppe, which has significantly suffered from human activities, needs care and protection. The combination of two approaches to ecological education and knowledge may help achieve this. The atlas contains facts about steppe species,

sketches, and observations by the outstanding zoologist, nature artist V.M. Smirin (1931–1989), and helps the reader to learn about the way of life and behaviour of animals. The drawings are supplemented with articles written by professional zoologists, who have devoted many years of their lives to the study of the ecology of steppe animals including the saiga, the corsac fox and the steppe polecat.

Follow the link to download an electronic version of this book (.pdf; 7 MB) at:
http://www.biodiversity.ru/publications/books/ecoeducation/Smirin_Steppe_2008_web.pdf

Order your copy by writing to: biodivers@biodiversity.ru;
tel./fax: (499) 124 71 78, 124 50 22

Announcements



The 2nd Meeting of Saiga MoU Signatories will be held in Mongolia in 2010

The UNEP CMS Secretariat is pleased to announce that the long-awaited 2nd Meeting of Signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of the Saiga Antelope (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*) is due to take place in early September in Ulaanbaatar at the kind invitation of the Mongolian government and the Mongolian Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism. Prior to the MoU meeting with Ministerial representatives, there will be a two

-day technical meeting in which experts will discuss the implementation of the Medium-Term International Work Programme, as well as other conservation matters such as monitoring. The exact meeting dates will be announced on the CMS website (www.cms.int/species/saiga/saiga_meetings.htm). Interested participants and experts are encouraged to contact Dr. Aline Kühl, (akuehl@cms.int; secretariat@cms.int) if they would like to receive further information.

Acknowledgements

The Saiga Conservation Alliance would like to express its sincere gratitude to the following individuals for supporting our activities over the last 6 months: Maggie Bryant, Vance Martin and the Wild Foundation, Dr. Marjorie Parker, Michael Hackett, Kent and Gloria Marshall, Chase Steven and Karin, Joy and Tyler Covey, Kennon and Bob Hudson, Linda Tabor-Beck, Jeff Flocken, Brad Roberts and Anne Marie Burgoyne, Montfort Joyce, Kevin and Kim Nykanen, Michael Linvill, East Bay Zoological Society, Marc Gerard, Priscilla Pettit, Brenton Head, Suzanne Whiting, Boris Stanko, Corina Haertel, Andrew Holman, Sally McMullen, Daniel Mulvey, Helen Galland and Jenny Bettensen at Spitalfields City Farm, Sophie Arlow, Christian Wenzel at www.saiga.de. We would like to express our gratitude to the WCN and FFI staff and volunteers, and also to Martin Varon, the brilliant photographer who for a number of years has kindly provided us with WCN Expo week photos for Saiga News. We are grateful to the organisations that have supported this issue of the newsletter – the Rufford Foundation, WCN, CIC and WWF Mongolia.



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