

SAIGA NEWS

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

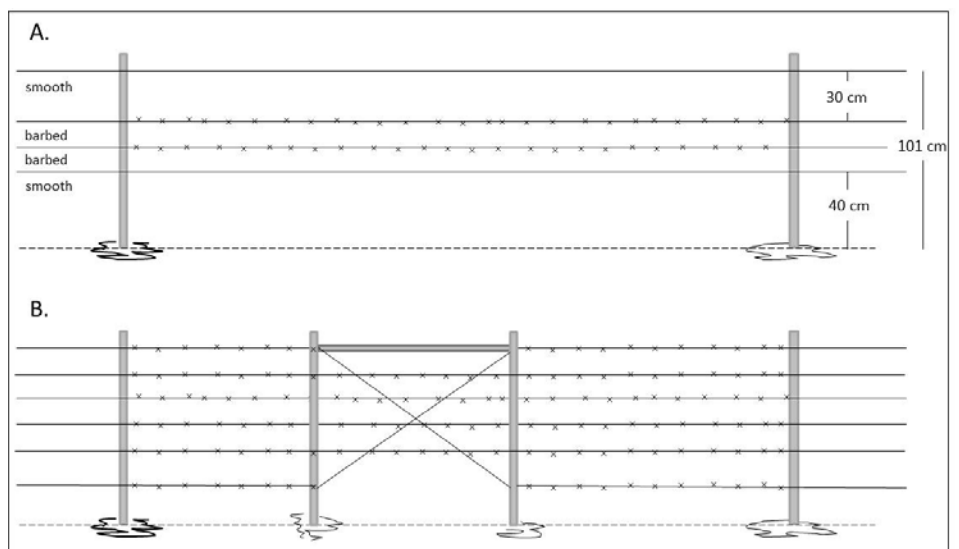


Photo by Eugeny Polansky

Barriers as a threat to saiga migration in Kazakhstan

Steffen Zuther, ACBK, steffen.zuther@acbk.kz

In earlier issues of Saiga News (SN ##15, 16) it was reported that a fence had been built along the border between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on the Ustyurt plateau, which potentially affects the migration of the Ustyurt saiga population. This was proved by data, transmitted from satellite collars which had been deployed on some animals in 2011 and 2012. These data showed clear movements of saigas along the fence, until they could squeeze through the wires or find a gap.



Examples of wildlife friendly fences made of barbed wire.
Option B was officially approved for the Ustyurt plateau.

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Окончание (начало на стр.1.)

Another problem for saiga migration is the construction of a new railway connecting Zhezkazgan and Beyneu, thereby crossing the ranges of two saiga populations, Betpak-Dala and Ustyurt. This railway, which is a project of the Kazakhstan railway company (Kazakhstan Temir Zholy), is supposed to be fully operational by 2016, but in 2013 a large part of the construction work has already been completed. The embankment and main rails are already finished.

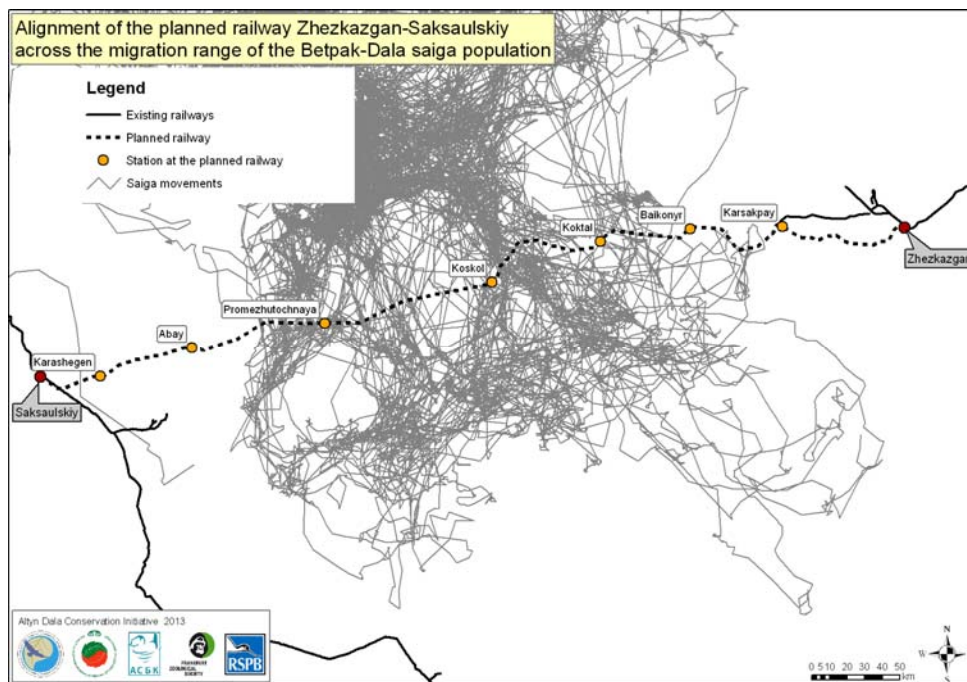
Due to these threats, international expert Kirk Olson was invited by ACBK to visit Kazakhstan to meet relevant stakeholders and find out details about the border fence and railway and identify possible mitigation measures, which would minimise the effect of these linear infrastructures on saiga. This work was initiated by CMS and supported jointly by two projects working in Kazakhstan, the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative funded mainly by Frankfurt Zoological Society and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Ustyurt Landscape Conservation Initiative funded by USAID and implemented by Fauna & Flora International.

During a two week mission, several relevant government agencies, engineering companies, financial institutions and Kazakhstan's border service were consulted. All stakeholders generally were supportive of the interests of saiga conservation and open to discussing mitigation measures. These efforts led to the production of a comprehensive report, which contains several options to mitigate the negative effects of linear infrastructure objects on wildlife movements as well as detailed recommendations for the border fence and railway. For the border fence, the report suggests that most appropriate solution is to remove the lower wires of the fence, in order to increase the space between the ground and the lowest wire, allowing saigas and other animals to pass underneath the fence.

The issue of the railway is more complex. One aspect of the problem is that it functions as a physical barrier for wildlife. For this, ACBK has proposed the inclusion of special crossing points for saigas, where the slope of the embankment is much flatter to fit with the surrounding environment. This ought to

decrease the barrier effect and make it easier for the animals to cross. 86 such crossing points were included in the planning documents. But beyond that, further infrastructure is associated with the railway, especially stations with settlements as well as roads parallel to the railway, which could potentially cause significant disturbance to saigas. Conflicts might also arise with livestock and dogs, and settlements might become a home or refuge for poachers. Therefore, one of the recommendations was to remove the stations planned to be located where there are currently no existing settlements, but in frequently used saiga habitat. This recommendation has been submitted to the responsible governmental bodies and is being reviewed.

Regarding the border fence, the border service has in the meantime agreed to include passages for saiga by



Overview of part of the planned railway crossing the Betpak-Dala population range. No settlement currently exists at the “Promezhutochnaya” station.

removing the lower wires of the fence at one-kilometre intervals over a distance of about 138 kilometres, starting at the bank of the Aral sea, thereby creating 138 passages.

Updates

Veterinary workshops conducted in Kazakhstan

Steffen Zuther & Alena Shmalenko, ACBK, steffen.zuther@acbk.kz

As a reaction to the mass saiga die-offs in recent years, two workshops for veterinary agencies were held in Astana in November 2013, organised by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and ACBK in cooperation with the Committee of Veterinary Control and Surveillance of the Ministry of Agriculture. The first three-day workshop aimed to enhance cross-sectoral collaboration in cases of wildlife mortality. Experience from the die-off events in the Ural and Betpak-Dala populations had suggested that there was a substantial potential for improvement. Therefore representatives of veterinary institutes, laboratories and local government were invited to Astana to work on improving protocols for reacting to wildlife mortality events and to receive training on wildlife health issues.

Standard Operating Procedures for disease outbreaks in saiga were discussed and agreed at the workshop. A necropsy equipment list and protocol were adopted and distributed among participants. Finally, the idea was developed of establishing a Rapid Response Group for

cases of wildlife die-offs.

The second workshop was more focused on the general concept of “One health” and disease control issues at the wildlife-livestock-human interface. Participants were invited from research institutes and veterinary and agricultural government departments within the saiga range.



Photos by ACBK

Prof. Richard Kock from the Royal Veterinary College London giving lectures at the first workshop.

After an interesting series of lectures and problem-based learning exercises, the Standard Operating Procedures and the concept for a Rapid Response Unit were approved. The workshop closed with a field trip to the scene of the last mass die-off in September 2013.

The outputs and recommendations from the workshops will be discussed with the relevant governmental agencies in order to seek official approval, with the intention that they will be in force later this year.



Photos by ACBK

A lecture at the second workshop.

Support for protected areas in the range of the Betpak-Dala population

Steffen Zuther & Oleg Lukanovsky, ACBK, steffen.zuther@acbk.kz

In 2013, two key protected areas for saiga conservation received new equipment and technical support; the Irgiz-Turgai State Nature Reserve and the Altyn Dala State Nature Reserve, which are located in the west of the range of the Betpak-Dala saiga population in Central Kazakhstan, and were designated in 2007 and 2012 respectively. One of their main goals is saiga protection, as saigas use these areas for a long period every year and frequently calve and rut there. Unfortunately, both areas are facing a substantial threat from poachers, particularly for horn.

In order to support their work and make their performance even more effective, the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) is providing the equipment and training for protected area staff as part of the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative. Three vehicles were donated to Irgiz-Turgai in summer 2013; a modern 4WD car, which is now being used for anti-poaching measures, a UAZ minibus for scientific work, and a tractor for heavy duty tasks, especially in winter.

The Altyn Dala reserve also received additional equipment. For example, computers were given to the reserve's office, mainly for scientific work, and rangers were equipped with GPS devices and binoculars. Furthermore,



Photos by ACBK

Training in GIS for the Altyn Dala reserve's scientific department.

several training sessions were conducted for both rangers and the research department. The rangers were trained in using GPS and maps, both in theory and with a practical exercise. Another session focused on wildlife monitoring and transect counts, again with exercises in the field. Additionally, the research department was instructed on the basics of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), enabling the reserve to produce its own maps.

This programme is supported by the Gregor Louisoder Environment Foundation through ACBK's partner, the Frankfurt Zoological Society, and will continue throughout 2014. Additional training sessions were funded by the Sokolovsko-Sarbaiskoye ore processing production association and the Eurasian Natural Resources Cooperation.



Photos by ACBK

Two of the new vehicles for the Irgiz-Turgai State Nature Reserve.

A story about a children's game that changes the world

Victor Grigoryev, Gala-Film studio, mooglik@mail.ru

Saiga antelopes play an important role in the life and culture of the Karakalpak people in Uzbekistan. Saigas are presented in tales, legends and traditional embroidery designs, acting as a symbol of prosperity, good luck, fertility and an embodiment of the steppe spirit.

The idea to write a song about saigas, a sort of anthem for the SCA's Steppe Wildlife Clubs, came to Koblan Edenbaev - a well-known young composer from Nukus. The song was premiered by Koblan during 2013 Saiga Day festivities.

This year, a PhD student at Imperial College London, Joe Bull, performed an English version of the song and the SCA received funding to create a music video for the song. This is when we got involved, and our creative team started to design the clip. Our cameraman and co-writer Alexander Klepalov suggested using animation. We came up with the idea of looking at saigas from the viewpoint of a children's game, focused around a brother and sister playing.



Photo by Victor Grigoryev

Children are playing with saigas.

The boy plays with toy cars and tiny toy soldiers while the girl plays with toy saigas. The children act like little gods defining the behavior and fate of the toy figures they play with. The game shows kids' attitudes toward the world. Since the boy is on the hunters' side, he endangers the saigas; sending in poachers and erecting physical barriers such as pipelines or railways. The girl tries to confront her brother, protecting the animals in all possible ways. The story revolves around the conflict between cruelty and kindness, cordiality and reckless actions. Eventually, the opposing views of the children cease as soon as both of them start feeling the pain of losing innocent animals and instead want to save them.

The screenplay was written, characters defined and actors selected. Seven year old Rustam and six year old Safina starred in our saiga clip. We managed to find most of the toys we needed easily enough, but saiga figurines were a big problem. After a lot of searching, we decided to make clay figures with wire frames. It was the easiest, quickest and



Photo by Alexander Espinov

Song record by Joe Bull.

most effective option, but we had to call on all of our creative skills. Finally, everything was ready! Gala-Film studio provided us with photographic equipment and I would like to thank Galina Vinogradova (the director of the studio) for that!

The most difficult part of our work - creating stopmotion animation - began when the scenes with the kids were filmed. However, the clip was completely ready after three weeks of working on montage and special effects. I think, we have managed to portray an interesting saiga story that is narrated through a children's game.

Meanwhile, all the difficulties and dangers faced by the girl and her saigas in the clip still exist in the real world! I really hope that this clip will help people to understand how wrong it is to kill saigas, just like the boy was able to realize in our video. Then, there may be a chance to see herds of saigas on the steppe in the future.

This project was possible thanks to support of the WCN and Houston Zoo. The video premiere of the Karakalpak version of the clip took place during Saiga Day in May, 2014 at every village in Uzbekistan's saiga range and also in Nukus city. *The English version of the clip is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0wF8KFmOAs> and Koblan's original version, in Karakalpak, is at <http://www.saigaresourcecentre.com/videos/saiga-gimm-the-saiga-and-the-steppe/>*



Saiga Day-2014

For several years, villages in the saiga range have been celebrating Saiga Day - a festival in honour of saigas. The event takes place in late April - early May during the calving season.

The purpose of Saiga Day is to draw the attention of the younger generation to the threats faced by saigas and to raise public awareness of saiga conservation efforts. Holding this festival is made possible through the support of international funds. In 2014 Saiga Day was supported by the People's Trust for Endangered Species, the Coins for Change, Disney Canada and the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund.

Saiga Day in Kalmykia

Aigul' Aitbaeva, Centre for Wild Animals of Kalmykia, saiga-center@mail.ru

Saiga Day took place in the Yashkul' and Chernozemel' districts of Kalmykia in April. These are the main saiga range areas in Kalmykia, which is why the "Living Heritage" (Yashkul village) and "Bamba Tsetsg" (Adyk village) Steppe Wildlife Clubs were set up here in 2013. These clubs played a major role in the Saiga Day festival this year.

Many school children of all ages from six different schools were invited to the celebration held at Yashkul school. Representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Republic of Kalmykia, the staff of the Centre for Wild Animals and Kalmyk State University came to welcome the participants. Guests from the UK and Kazakhstan also took part in the celebration.

Saiga Day began with the traditional Kalmyk rite that usually precedes every important event. Kids from the "Coeval" children's club demonstrated the worship of the four elements - water, earth, air and fire. Their performance emphasized the importance of preserving Kalmyk traditions, which are based on respect for nature and all living things in general, and the saiga antelope in particular.

"Fly to the sun baby saiga!" was a performance prepared by members of the "Living Heritage" Steppe Wildlife Club, and aroused great interest among the audience. Members of the "Ecos" team drew attention to the changes in saiga numbers



A Kalmyk dance at Saiga Day festival.



A poster presentation in Adyk high school.

over a 30 year period and appealed to the audience to remember the threats to saigas and contribute to their conservation.

The second part of Saiga Day was dedicated to the "Environmental Express – Become a friend to nature" competition, which consisted of visiting each of four "stations": Poetry, Music, General knowledge and Art. Young people showed a good knowledge of Kalmykia's nature and its protection, they composed poems, painted posters and made up slogans about saigas. We also announced the results of a competition to design a leaflet on the theme "Save me, human". School children expressed

love for the saiga and anxiety over its fate at the hands of humans. Members of the "Living Heritage" club posted informative leaflets in their villages.

Saiga Day was also celebrated in Adyk high school and lots of young conservationists from Yashkul and Sarul schools attended the event. The pupils played a highly engaging game called "Fort Boyard", and members of the "Bamba Tsetsg" club performed a concert entitled "Saiga is a beauty of the steppe". One of the most remarkable moments was a performance by poet Gregory Kukareka, an Honored Worker of Culture of the Republic of Kalmykia. He read his poem about saigas which emphasised the importance of the occasion.

It is a pleasure to report that teachers and parents joined in our celebration for the first time this year. Technology teacher Vladimir Byurchiev and members of "Bamb Tsetsg" Steppe Wildlife Club gave a master-class on carving wooden saiga souvenirs during Adyk's Saiga Day. Lastly, club members from Yashkul' village organized a "Save the Saiga" flash mob, which inspired and animated children and adults alike.

In addition to Saiga Day in Yashkul and Adyk, staff from the Centre for Wild Animals gave lectures to pupils and organized excursions to the Yashkul' saiga breeding centre, where children experienced saigas up close. Additionally, a "Saiga" relay race was held for the junior students of Troit' school in Tselin district.

Our successful events give us hope that our joint efforts



Photo by Aigul' Aiboeva

Saiga Day in Adyk high school.

will not be in vain and large herds of saigas will appear on our steppes in the near future.

Saiga Day in Uzbekistan: Scaling up

Natalia Shivaldova, Ecomaktab NGO, nshivaldova@mail.ru

Saiga Day has been running for eight years in the remote villages of Ustyurt and has gained essential support from the State Committee for Nature Conservation, the Republic's Children's Tourism board, and the Regional Studies and Ecology Centre. Steps have been taken to garner support from the Ministry of Education. In April these supporters of Saiga Day joined us, along with Steppe Wildlife Club leaders and school teachers, in a short workshop which discussed shared experiences of the festival and how we could develop the celebrations and involve even more members of the community.

Many of the most popular competitions made it back onto the festival program again this year, for instance the "Ecological Express" with its various themed stations. The National Traditions station, was especially popular with the audience again; this year children learnt how to weave cane mats and make thick felt from camel-hair. An important aspect of this station is that the younger generation seeks the advice and assistance of their parents and grandparents, who are the true keepers of national traditions. In this way, Saiga Day allows the ties between generations to be restored and strengthened, and forgotten national traditions and

handicrafts to be recovered. Another important innovation in the scaled-up festival in Jaslyk village was that a team of school teachers enthusiastically participated in the competitions alongside children's teams.

A "Saiga defenders" marathon was an interesting addition this year at school # 54. This initiative was suggested by senior students; members of the "Akboke" Steppe Wildlife Club. They decided to gain first-hand knowledge of how saigas feel when running in the steppe under a boiling sun. Of course, the organizers thought out a safe route for the children. There were tables with drinking water along the road, and the runners were accompanied by a vehicle with a doctor. Runners could drop out of the race any time, yet all the children were very enthusiastic and



Photo by Natalia Shivaldova

Ecological Express, National Traditions station, Kyrk-kyz village.

committed. Eventually, the teams reached the finish line without loss... The marathon was followed by a discussion of participants' impressions and everybody drew the analogy with saigas crossing the steppe. Children began to understand better how well saigas have evolved and this only increased their respect for this amazing creature.

When the sun was setting and the heat of the day was over, Jaslyk residents (children and their parents, teachers, gas company workers, police and village elders alike) moved to the open-air stage. Muscial numbers alternated with prize-giving to competition winners. Village dignitaries - the Chairman of the Community Council, the headmaster and elders - presented the prizes, lending great solemnity and meaningfulness to the event. The programme ended in Jaslyk with a dance of little saigas, performed by kindergarten children.



Photo by Natalia Shivaldova

Winners of saiga football cup from Jaslyk.

When the music had stopped, and the guests were going home, I asked Sadyrbai Shaimenov, the junior school vice-principal what the Saiga Day festival meant to him. He answered: "It is an important event for our school and for our whole village. We approach this with great responsibility and creativity. This year practically all the teachers in our school helped us to prepare for the festival. Everybody understands that this is our opportunity to make our contribution to the cause of saiga conservation. What can we do? We can develop love for our nature and its unique



Photo by Natalia Shivaldova

Saiga Day participants from Nukus city.



Photo by Natalia Shivaldova

The little artists from Kyrk-kyz village.

species. And also we can change consumer attitudes towards saigas so that they are more caring and protective".

At Kyrk-kyz, the celebrations started with a hymn to the saiga, sung by members of the "Green patrol" Steppe Wildlife Club in their native language, hand in hand. The hall was turned into a gallery of drawings, posters, and craftworks in which the saiga was the main character. The diversity of artistic techniques used to depict saigas was amazing and included embroidery, mosaics made of seeds, plasticine and glass figures, and picture books, all devised and made by children.

One children's performance stands out. Scene one: a saiga family is frolicking on the grass; the father and mother are rejoicing in their kids. Scene two: a man with a gun shows up; the father-saiga stands in defence of his kids and is killed. Scene three: the little saigas rise in defence of their mother and direct their tiny horns at the poacher and the man is forced to retreat. During this mini-performance I turned my eyes from the actors to the audience. The adults were wiping tears from their eyes; little ones, literally "with mouths agape", did not tear their eyes away from the actors. The reaction of senior students was striking; at first they seemed to be a little disengaged... Then they riveted their gaze, tears sparkled in their eyes but they held them back; it is not appropriate for boys to weep. This is what "the force

of art " can do, the educative content of this event probably had a ten times stronger effect than an ordinary school lesson.

We were also impressed by a competition to "Create your own saiga", in which a drawing of a saiga is cut into a jigsaw puzzle. With their eyes closed, the children have to assemble the puzzle. The winners were the quickest and most accurate at assembling all the puzzles. We also saw another, very touching and heartfelt ballet about little saigas, a wonderful gallery of drawings and craftworks using glass beads, thick felt and straw to depict saigas.

However, the pinnacle of the festival was a musical greeting from the popular Karakalpak singer and composer, Koblan Edenbayev, and a video created specially by the Gala-Film team for Saiga Day (ed. see above). All the children, hand in hand, sang along with the singer in the video. After the festival was over I spoke to two young teachers, Nasiba Abdramanova and Nigora Narimbetova, who lead the Steppe club in school # 31 and organised the festival. My first question was, of course, about the dance performance about little saigas which astounded the whole audience.

Photo by Natalia Shnalidova



Start of the Saiga Migration game.

"Who was the author of this performance?"

"We thought up the plot all together, children and adults. We made the costumes and choreographed the dance jointly".

"And why did the saigas have to defend themselves from a poacher on their own?"

"There was a lot of debate about this", says Nigora Narimbetova, "but the children decided that we needed to show how defenceless the saigas are against a man with gun.

Let those people who go to the steppe to kill poor animals be ashamed". Truly "truth comes from the mouths of babes"...

This year the festival was coloured with new hues; in some places it became more emotional, in others – more crowded, and in some places – more profound and serious. But overall it opened a door to the world of wonderful and beautiful nature which requires protection and understanding.

Mongolian saiga poacher sentenced

B. Chimeddorj, WWF-Mongolia, chimeddorj@wwf.mm

On 22 January this year Mongolia saigas were poached in Tovgor, Khukhmorit district, Gobi-Altai province in Mongolia. The crime was detected within a very short time in a joint investigation by the "Irvs-3" anti-poaching team, the Saiga Rangers' Network and the Police Department of Gobi-Altai province. The court hearing was held recently and the individual was found guilty and sentenced accordingly. This unacceptable crime was committed by A. Ganpurev, from Khukhmorit district, Gobi-Altai province, and the court sentenced him to three years and ten days

imprisonment. The court hearing was held in public in Khukhmorit district.

Previously, open court hearings have been held in Sharga and Tugrog districts concerning cases of illegal poaching. Protection of nature and wildlife has to be everyone's concern. It's a pity that greedy people continue to interfere with Mother Nature by engaging in illegal poaching. Holding open public court hearings, as in this case, sends a clear signal to potential poachers that crimes will be punished, helping to deter such crimes.

Photo by G. Olombatar



Confiscated wildlife products.

Update on the Saiga Resource Centre

Leejiah Dorward & Peter Damerell, SCA, www.saigaresourcecentre.com

The Saiga Resource Centre (SRC) continues to be developed with the aim of creating an online hub for saiga conservation around the world. The website has an extensive and growing archive of publicly accessible pictures, videos, literature and educational resources related to saiga conservation. There are also "expert profiles" of the scientists and conservationists working with saigas and "project profiles" of the different saiga conservation projects being run. These expert and project profiles help share information on the work being done around the world and help saiga conservationists communicate with people working in similar areas or on similar projects.

Current work on the SRC aims to improve the website's non-english pages to make the content more accessible to Russian, Kazakh and Chinese speakers. We are also aiming to improve the literature section by making it easier to search for specific information, as well as uploading a large library

of non-english literature. The site's forum is also almost ready to be launched which will allow easy communication and discussion between saiga researchers and conservationists around the world.

If you are working on saiga research or conservation please contact the SRC to become a member and add your own expert and project profiles. Only by having many saiga conservationists on the website can we expect to build a strong network of conservationists around the world.

To become a member of the Saiga resource centre email saigaresourcecentre@gmail.com with your full name and you will be issued with a username and password for the website. This username and password will allow you to access the Specialist Resources section of the website (<http://www.saigaresourcecentre.com/specialist-resources/>) where you can add your details as a saiga expert and the details of any saiga projects you are involved with.

Media reports

The Stepnoi Reserve offers a protected 'maternity ward' for saigas

Saigas can be seen in the Stepnoi Reserve, Liman District, Astrakhan province, in Russia, throughout the year. Over the last few years they have also been calving in the reserve. This year the Department of Nature Management and Environmental Protection of Astrakhan province and the Stepnoi Reserve managers decided to provide round-the-clock protection around the perimeter of the calving herds. The area was declared a saiga 'maternity ward' and signs prohibiting entry to the area were erected. According to preliminary estimates, the calving herd consisted of 3-3.5 thousand individuals. It was decided to extend the protected area to the borders of Stepnoi Reserve when females with

calves began to stray out of the calving zone. The Liman District police assisted the reserve inspectors with their round-the-clock guard for the saigas.

For more details, please visit <http://nat.astrobl.ru/press-release/otel-saygaka-na-territorii-zakaznika-stepnoy-astrahanskoy-oblasti>.

From Editorial board: At the recent Day of the Ecologist in 5th June, the Governor of Astrakhan province awarded Vladimir Kalmykov, the Director of the Stepnoi Reserve, with a certificate of honour for his conservation successes. We extend our congratulations to him for this prestigious award!

Saiga population in Kazakhstan increases by a third

Following the results of the 2014 spring aerial survey of saiga numbers in Kazakhstan, it is possible to assess the success of conservation measures taken to protect them. The aerial survey was carried out under the State Programme on conservation, reproduction and sustainable use of Kazakhstan's fauna, on April 9th - May 1st, 2014, by the Association of the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan with staff from the central and regional branches of Ohotzooprom.

In total the field team took 230 flight hours to cover all three of Kazakhstan's saiga populations: Betpakdala



Newborn saiga.

Photo by Eugeny Polonsky

(Karaganda and Kostanai provinces); Ustyurt (Aktyubinsk province); and Ural (West Kazakhstan province). Saiga numbers increased by 37% compared to last year, totalling more than 256,000 individuals. The lowest number of saiga antelopes was recorded in 2003, at just 21,000 individuals.

For more details, please see:

<http://www.newskaz.ru/society/20140613/6604841.html> and http://www.kazakh-zerno.kz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=92273&Itemid=108.

Illegal saiga hunting in Kazakhstan linked to organized crime

According to information from the prosecutor's office of the Kyzylorda region, Kazakhstan, there have been two recorded instances of illegal saiga hunting since the beginning of 2014, in which poachers killed and dehorned 20 animals. The prosecutor's office states that an organized crime group is engaged in shooting saigas in the Kyzylorda region. The criminals hunt for saigas in three phases: one group shoots the animals, another saws off and collect horns and the third sells them abroad.

The prosecutor's office suggest that in order to conserve saigas, established horn distribution channels to Almaty and on to China, need to be blocked. The reality that saiga horn hunters do not act alone is evidenced by the fact that they are well-equipped and use up-to-date off-road vehicles, so ranger patrols are not always able to catch up with them.

The prosecutor's office suggests that poachers sell the meat to their acquaintances or in markets, where it is passed off as mutton, horse meat or beef. However, they noted that poachers who kill saiga for meat are often not as well-equipped as horn hunters; and some of them ride motorcycles to go hunting even in winter.

For more details, please visit: http://kazakh-zerno.kz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=88400&Itemid=108.

Detection dogs deployed to help in the search for smuggled saiga horns

At the end of April, at the Regional Canine Training Centre of the Customs Control Committee of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Almaty, Kazakhstan, training to detect saiga horn began for four newly acquired detection dogs and their handlers. The training was supported by the 'Ustyurt Landscape Conservation Initiative' (UCLI) a five year program implemented by the Association of the Conservation of Biodiversity

of Kazakhstan (ACBK) in collaboration with Fauna & Flora International (FFI), a UK based NGO. The four malinois (Belgium shepherd dogs) were acquired from the USA and Czech Republic and prior to their arrival in Kazakhstan underwent training to detect 4 different drugs (heroin, cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamine) which are commonly searched for at border crossings. Upon arrival and after orientation with their new handlers, the dogs and handlers underwent final training together to detect the smell of saiga horns.

According to lead instructor Mark Rispoli, founding Board Member of the California Narcotic Canine Association and owner of the Makor-K9 training centre, this is the first use of detection dogs for saiga horns; even more unique is the combination of training for both saiga horns and narcotics detection.

After graduation, with a ceremony including other dogs trained to detect printed money, the dogs and their handlers were deployed to their new stations in the Customs Departments in the Mangistau region, East-Kazakhstan region and Kordai customs station. One dog will be stationed at the Regional Canine Training Centre.

The use of dogs to detect saiga and other smuggled wildlife is planned for border customs stations throughout Kazakhstan. It is expected that a special course in training dog handlers and their dogs to detect saiga horns will be developed, based on the experiences of the Regional Canine Training Centre. Trainers experienced in wildlife scent training will become dog team instructors for other law enforcement agencies such as the traffic police, state environmental inspectors, Okhotzooptom (game species management authority), and other organizations which are tasked with preventing wildlife crime.

The ULCI was been made possible due to financial support from the 'Sustainable Conservation Approaches for Priority EcoSystems' (SCAPES) programme of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

For more details please visit:

<http://www.acbk.kz/ru/news/4340/>,
<http://m.tengrinews.kz/en/crime/American-dog-trainers-bring-detector-dogs-to-Almaty-help-Kazakhstan-stop-saiga-253485/>.



Photo by Karlygash Makarova

New graduates of the saiga detection dog training program are fully trained and ready to work.

A saiga postage stamp has been issued in Uzbekistan

The Uzbekistan Post Office has issued a series of stamps featuring rare species which inhabit the country and which are listed in the Red Data Book of Uzbekistan. The series consists of 3 stamps, one of which depicts a saiga antelope.

For more information see

<http://peterstamps.ru/news/2091>, <http://infocom.uz/2014/06/05/vypushhena-novaya-seriya-pochtovyx-marok-fauna-redkie-zhivotnye-uzbekistana/>.



Articles

Drawn Together – The People and Wildlife of Uzbekistan

Rory McCann, www.rorymccannmurals.com

Olga Esipova, esipovaolya@gmail.com

This spring, a completely new approach to saiga conservation was piloted in Uzbekistan. British wildlife artist Rory McCann travelled to Karakalpakstan, to paint a mural depicting the wildlife of the steppe. Uzbek young conservationist, Olga Esipova, assisted Rory with translations and painting. The idea was to raise awareness of saiga conservation through the creation of a mural with the participation of local children. The mural was painted in one of the regional schools, and lots of students were involved. This project was made possible by the generous support of the Coins for Change program, Disney Canada, which funds vital conservation work all over the world.

“The Saiga mural is truly magnificent in every sense of the word. Our school appreciates your wonderful work. Rory is an absolutely amazing artist; his paintings must be inspired by his soul! Even though Olga is only at the beginning of her conservation journey, she has already achieved a lot. I’m sure that soon she will reach the top! Thank you both for your diligence and gift of pleasing people with your art. Your painting is worth more than words!”

- Aisulu Dzholdasbayeva, school 37, Nukus

Rory McCann: I am a UK-based wildlife artist, working mainly on large scale mural projects in schools. I have also worked as an artist in Australia, the Seychelles, Oman, and Japan. Our objective in Uzbekistan was to work with local school children to paint a huge mural depicting the wildlife of the Steppe habitat. This, we hoped, would help to improve their attitudes towards local conservation efforts, especially those focussed on the saiga.

The project was a success before it had even really started. Our aim was to use the mural painting to engage the children and get them interested in their local wildlife and conservation efforts. This wasn’t exactly an uphill struggle; the children came to check on our progress regularly and in droves. They had an insatiable curiosity to know more about the wider world but would also listen intently while we told them about their own wildlife treasures. They wanted to take photo after



Photos by Alexander Esipov

Rory McCann – wildlife artist from UK painting wildlife of the Steppe.



Authors are Rory McCann , Olga Esipova and students of school # 37, Nukus city.

photo, have small scraps of paper signed, but more than anything, they wanted to ask questions. It struck me that because of the incredible enthusiasm and curiosity that children have at this age, that it's the perfect time to get them interested in biodiversity and conservation. This will then hopefully lead on to them being environmentally conscious adults, helping the environment wherever they are able.

We had 8 days of painting. We started with drawing out the key species of the steppe habitat, with the saiga as the main focus. At this stage, we had various children painting alongside us. We were able to coordinate their painting efforts while also dealing with the ongoing flood of questions from our spectators. In addition to painting with an ever-changing assortment of spectators, we were accompanied by swifts circling the room (and occasionally adding their own splash of colour to the wall), and classes of children who were being taught traditional dances in the same room.

I leave behind me a mural that will hopefully act as a source of inspiration and a tool for education for many years to come; instilling positive attitudes towards wildlife and conservation in many thousands of young people. I take with me a great many happy memories, of painting the beautiful wildlife of the Uzbek steppe, of unexpectedly being an integral part of a local wedding ceremony, and most of all – of interacting with the wonderful school children of Nukus.



Children have joined in.

The saiga antelope's hopes for survival depend, in some part, upon them. My hopes are high. This was a wonderful project to be a part of. I have to thank E.J. Milner-Gulland for sowing the seed and helping it grow; Carlyn Samuel, for working out the evidently complicated logistics; Elena Bykova and Alexander Esipov for their amazing hospitality and company; Olga Esipova for her superb painting, inexhaustible energy when translating and great company; and the staff and children at the school # 37 in Nukus, for their kindness, curiosity, enthusiasm and smiles.

Olga Esipova: I am an 18 year old student of English philology from Uzbekistan. Over the last couple of years I have been volunteering for the SCA because the wildlife of my region amazes me and I believe that my work helps to conserve it for the sake of future generations. Meanwhile, I am interested in art as well and have some experience in painting. No wonder that I was very enthusiastic and got really excited once I was given the opportunity to participate in the mural project in Nukus.



Rory playing the ukulele for the school children.

I remember the moment when we arrived at Nukus school. The school was much bigger than I expected – I was told that approximately two thousand students studied there. Everybody was surprised to see us and nobody seemed to know why a group of strangers had suddenly arrived. We wanted this project to have as big an impact as possible, which would not be achievable without children being involved. That is why, instead of starting painting straight away, the first thing we did was a short presentation where we introduced our project and ourselves. It worked perfectly. The children were intrigued and keen to learn more about biodiversity. They wanted to be involved and asked bunches of questions!

There was no time to lose though. Quite soon we started drawing and the day after a few students joined us. I had never painted on a rough bare wall before and neither had the children. It felt a bit uncomfortable at the beginning but the more we painted the more we enjoyed it. More and more school children, their teachers and parents came to help us or just to watch us drawing animals. They learned something new about wildlife and conservation each time they visited us. The week passed unbelievably quickly and it was our

final day in the school. We almost ran out of time and had to work really hard at the end but still managed to finish the painting.

The whole project was a total success. We could see happy children proud to have such a beautiful mural in their school and be a part of it. The painting inspired an interest in art and conservation as well as a love for nature. The ability to see changes in children's minds and understand that the project has already made a difference was the greatest reward for me. I believe that this successful experience can be transferred to other saiga areas in order to improve responsibility and attitudes towards saigas among the local people.

I would like to thank my parents – Elena Bykova and Alexander Espov for bringing me into the project and their tireless support all the way through; Rory McCann for being both a great teacher and a good friend, his contagious enthusiasm for painting and wonderful ukulele playing; the children and staff of school № 37 for making our experience



Photo by Alexander Espov

Our artwork gradually wins popularity.

so pleasant and their help that is impossible to overestimate.

To look at the mural video please follow:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8up_3OQTkI and
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqDhLVLhVG4&feature=share>.



Photo by Alexander Espov

A mural on the wildlife of the Steppe habitat in Uzbekistan.

The traditional medicine market for saiga products in China

Qian Huang, Aili Kang, Fenglian Li

WCS China Program. Contact: qhuang@wcs.org

In Sep 2013, the Torugart port checkpoint and customs of Xinjiang province successfully intercepted a vehicle smuggling 35 boxes of saiga horns, containing 4,470 horns, into China. This was one of the largest illegal wildlife product smuggling cases in China in recent years. An analysis of online media reports from 2010 to 2013, including this case, indicates a minimum of 12 saiga horn smuggling cases totalling more than 1,901 kg of confiscated horns. Estimating three pairs of horn to weigh approximately one kilogram, this is equivalent to 5708 male saigas.

Saiga horns are highly valued in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for their perceived effectiveness in reducing fever. Modern pharmacological studies also suggest a significant medical effect in curing acute diseases (such as flu) and even chronic diseases (such as cancer). Currently, there are more than 60 commonly used prescription drugs that cite saiga horn as a key ingredient. The high demand for saiga horns in China makes it their largest importer. The saiga horn trade is one of the factors driving saiga poaching, which contributed to the 95% decline in saiga populations from 1950s to 2000s, a decrease

exacerbated by sex bias as a direct result of selective poaching for male saigas. It is therefore vital that consumer demand is studied and addressed.

WCS China has conducted two projects in TCM markets in China. One, in 2006-7, targeted wholesale markets, retail markets and border markets in 14 provinces (see map). We found that 92% of sellers (242/262) in the wholesale market were very cautious when talking about selling saiga horns, indicating a high level of awareness of the illegality of the trade. Sixty percent of 121 shops sold horns harvested within two years of the survey, during a time when no legal international trade took place, implying the illegal hunting and trafficking of saiga horns. Following this nationwide survey, WCS implemented a long-term monitoring program from 2009 to 2013 in the Qing Ping TCM markets of Guangzhou, a major trade route for TCM in China.



Map. Survey sites visited by WCS-China.

In 2007, China published a "Notice on Strengthening the Protection and Management of the Medicinal Products of Saiga Antelope, Pangolins and Rare Snakes", which regulates the trade in endangered animal products under a strict legal framework. However, our monitoring results suggest the need for further action. Market monitoring will remain an essential component to eliminate the demand for, and sale of, saiga horns, and ensure adequate policy change and effective law enforcement. Additionally, more scientific research on the captive breeding of saigas should be conducted to deal with the technical difficulties involved in artificial saiga reproduction.



Photo by WCS China

WCS staff and volunteers conducting market surveys.

The purchase of saiga horns has three main purposes; as medicine, a gift, or an investment in a valuable and potentially rare commodity. From our long-term monitoring, we have observed some trends in the saiga horn market. In the past two years, the demand for saiga products has peaked before the Chinese New Year as a result of the tradition of giving gifts. Whole and half horns, which are commonly used as gifts, were observed more frequently in the market close to the Chinese New Year. The price for whole and half horns has increased 1.5x from 2009 to 2013.

The Chinese government has previously responded to the illegal trade in saiga horn by issuing and updating national policies.



Photo by WCS China

Horn pieces (left) and whole horn (right) on sale in a TCM market.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the Saiga Conservation Alliance for its guidance and partnership in our ongoing work to address one of the major threats to saiga populations. We also express our gratitude to all the volunteers who assisted in our market surveys. We are grateful to E.J. Milner-Gulland from Imperial College, Jack Lam from WCS Vietnam Program and Lishu Li from WCS China Program for reviewing this article.

Release of saiga males into the wild during the rutting period in Astrakhan province

N.A. Franov, V.V. Gagarin, M.V. Shilenko

"Astrakhan" State Development Hunting Farm, nfranov@rambler.ru

The population of saigas inhabiting the North-West pre-Caspian region (Astrakhan province and the Republic of Kalmykia) still remains at an extremely low level. According to a number of estimates, their population currently numbers less than 7,000 and continues to slowly but steadily decline. In the context of this general decline, a sustained decline in the number of breeding males, which by some estimates make up just 1% of total numbers, is a matter of special concern. It should be noted that in the past, even after the most severe winters, breeding males never dropped below 3-5%, with subsequent growth to 10-25% of the population. Currently this recovery does not take place. An inevitable consequence of this situation is the growth of the number of barren females, aggravating the general negative population trend.



The saiga male born in 2013 before it was released from the breeding centre.

In 2001, the Hunting Department of the Russian Ministry of Agriculture decided to set up a saiga breeding centre as part of the Astrakhan State Development Hunting Farm and in 2003, the first group of saigas was delivered there (*see*. SN # 11). Today there are 31 individuals of different ages.

In 2013, to support the restoration of the north-west pre-Caspian population, the Nature Management and Environment Protection Service of Astrakhan province adopted a two year programme of reintroducing of saiga males from the Astrakhan breeding centre to the wild in Astrakhan province. The programme contains a detailed justification for releasing males to the wild in the rutting period, a description of preparatory measures (including quarantine, vaccination, temporary holding in large enclosures); the release methods (including satellite tagging of released animals), an assessment of initial outcomes and prospects for further activities. The programme is based at the saiga breeding centre, where experience suggests that in captivity one male can impregnate 20-25 females. This suggests that in a natural environment, release of one breeding male could result in the birth of an additional 30-40 saigas.

In January 2014, for the first time, two captive-bred male saigas born in 2012 and 2013 were released from the breeding centre into the wild population within the Stepnoi reserve. It was expected that the male born in 2012 would

participate in the rut in the current year and the male born in 2013 would adapt to its new habitat and, having reached sexual maturity, would participate in the rut next year.

To monitor the released saigas, two collars with Pulsar radio-beacons of the Argos/GPS satellite system were purchased out of the provincial budget and Astrakhan Farm's revenues. The average operating lifetime of the collars' batteries is six months.

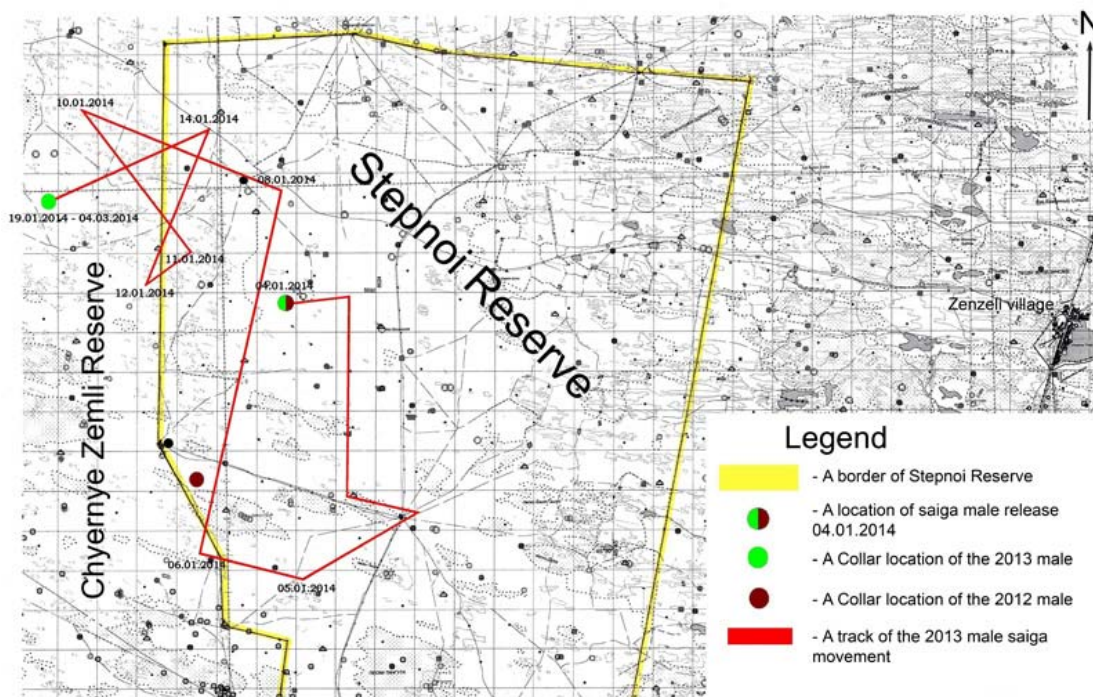
Individual transportation cages were used on a vehicle with a tented cargo body. After transportation, the males' condition was assessed as satisfactory, no physical injuries were noted and the animals' coats and skin were in good condition. (Fig. 1).

The staff of the Stepnoi sanctuary searched for a wild herd and determined the most appropriate conditions for release. The saigas were released on January 4, 2014, when a 50-head female-only herd of saigas was encountered. The release was captured by a film crew from Astrakhan TV (http://lotosgtrk.ru/news/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=2710).

The first data on the movement of the 2013 male were received on January 10. The male moved constantly, covering an average distance of 13 km/day, and had apparently joined one of groups. The area covered was mostly between Atsan-Khuduk village, Republic of Kalmykia, the Volga area of the Stepnoi reserve and the Dvadtsatka livestock breeding farm in the Astrakhan province (*see* map).

Visual observations during the first few days after the saigas were released showed a constant increase in the number of saigas (herds of 150-200 animals were observed) due to an influx of animals from adjacent areas. The 2013 male was observed through binoculars in one of these herds, containing about 70 animals; no other males could be seen in this group. Externally, the male's condition appeared satisfactory. On January 17, the "released" male was noticed in the Volga area of the Stepnoi reserve on the border with the

Chyernye Zemli Reserve; this observation was confirmed by information from the satellite. But by this time the male appeared exhausted. From 19th to 22nd January, this male's signal came from just one point within the Chyornye Zemli reserve and from February 23 it stopped sending data. On March 4, a search was started jointly by rangers from the Stepnoi and Chyernye Zemli reserves. The collar was found 12.5 km east of the Volga area, 6 km within the Chyernye Zemli reserve. It was torn up and near fur and bone fragments. The male must have fallen prey to wolves. Unfortunately, the transmitter on the collar of the 2012 male transmitted quite irregular signals and malfunctioned, having been damaged during the saiga's transportation to the release site. The collar was found undamaged in the Stepnoi reserve (near the Dvadsatka farm), with no sign of a



A schematic map of the release and movement of the 2013 saiga and the locations of the radio collars.

struggle or saiga remains, suggesting that the saiga had been killed elsewhere and the collar left there by someone. Overall, taking visual and satellite observations together, it appears that the 2013 male had probably integrated into the wild population, actively travelled with the herd and probably, in spite of its young age, participated in the rut for 14-15 days before falling prey to predators (presumably wolves). We can speculate that the 2012 male also took part in the rut, but the equipment malfunction does not allow us to be confident in this assumption.

Thus, in line with the programme on reintroduction of saiga males, the first release of captive-bred saiga males into the wild can be considered a success, confirming the necessity of urgent action to increase the size of saiga populations. In our opinion, proposals to include the saiga in the Red Book of Endangered Species will not only fail to help in saiga conservation but conversely, will complicate the work of saiga breeding centres. This will lead to the refusal of hunting-related organisations to participate in finding a solution to the problem of saiga conservation (even though they have done much to conserve the species). It is common knowledge that so far no animal included in the Red Book, either in the USSR or in Russia, has been restored to its initial population size. In addition, experience indicates that competent management of saiga populations both in situ and ex situ, and particularly these two approaches combined, is the key to a sustainable recovery of endangered species.

The authors express their gratitude to the personnel of the Stepnoi and Chyernye Zemli reserves who have provided assistance in the implementation of this programme.



Photo by N.A. Franov

A collar bitten by a wolf.

Ancient hunting constructions on the Ustyurt Plateau

Vadim N. Yagodin, Sh.Sh. Amirov

Karakalpak Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the RUz; RI of human sciences
Under the Academy of Sciences of the RUz, yagodin@gmail.ru

Ancient hunting constructions on the Ustyurt Plateau were first mentioned in archeological literature in the middle of the 20th century. In 1952, near the ancient settlement of Khantersek (Yarburun), a member of the Khorezm archaeological-ethnographic expedition recorded a construction which S.P.Tolstov hypothesised was intended for "battue" hunting [Ed: when animals are flushed out and then driven towards the hunters or traps by beaters] of herding species of ungulates such as saigas.

A long-term archaeological research programme on the Ustyurt Plateau was initiated in the early 1970s by the Archaeology Department of the Karakalpak branch of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbekistan Soviet Socialist Republic. The research included investigating monuments including ancient hunting constructions; arrowhead-shaped walls called arrans or kites [Ed: brief information about arrans found in the Karakalpak part of Ustyurt was published in SN # 16]. Aerial photography and subsequent mapping resulted in the discovery of a huge system of ancient constructions called the North Ustyurt kite system, published by Yagodin and Betts. The kites are arranged as a chain beginning at the Eastern escarpment of the Ustyurt plateau,

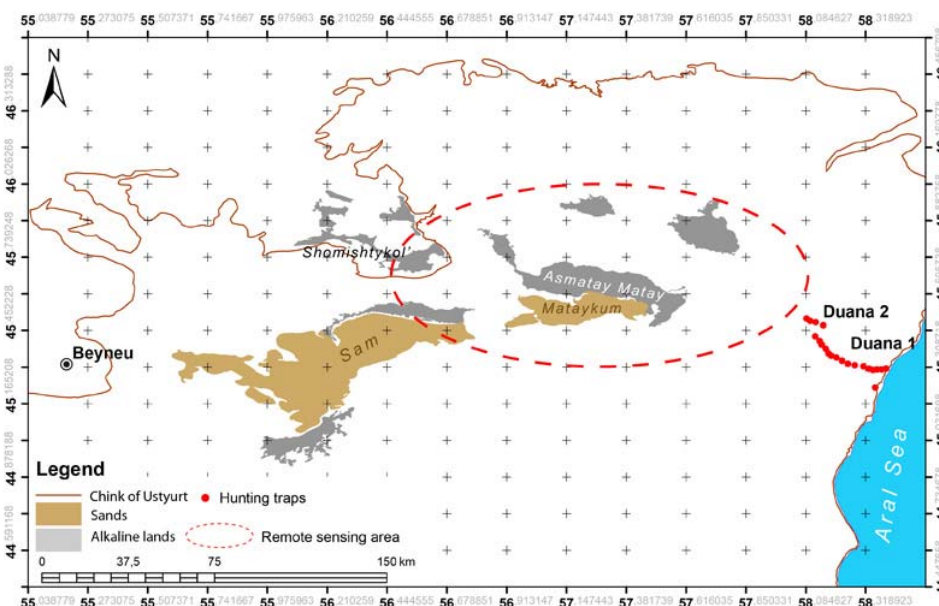


Fig. 1. The area of the Ustyurt Plateau subject to remote sensor monitoring.

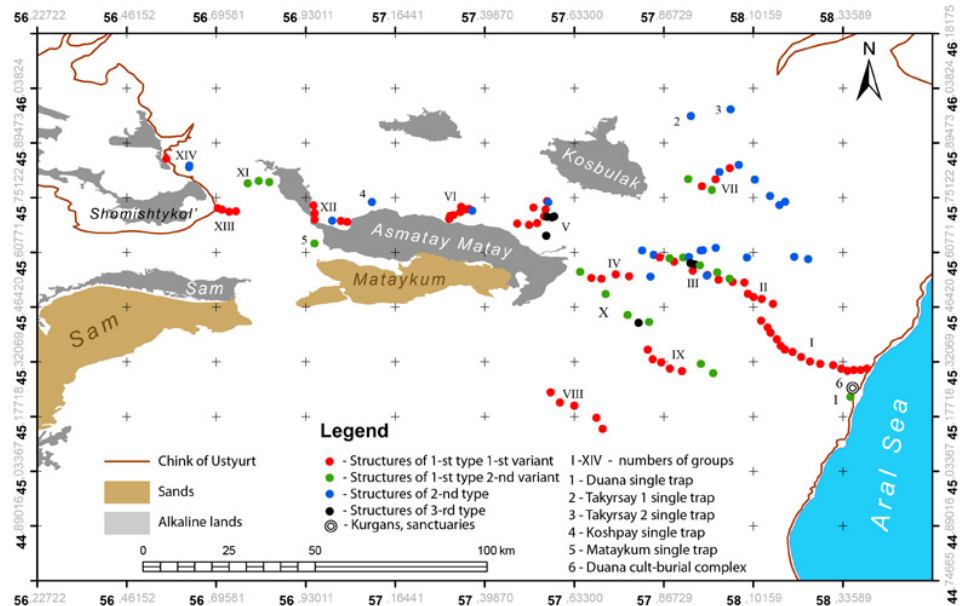


Fig. 2. Plan of the North Ustyurt system of kite, based on a satellite image.

7 km to the north of the Duana cape, and stretching north-east to the salt flats of Kosbulak and Asmatay-Matai. The system was divided into two subsystems consisting of individual kites (Fig. 1) and was intended for so-called 'passive' hunting by catching whole herds of wild ungulates, including saigas, on their seasonal migration routes without the active involvement of hunters.

As satellite survey technologies, computer technology and geoinformatics developed, the system of kites could be investigated over the whole territory, using Google Maps and Bing Maps software, with maps from TopoMapper.com

and Marshruty.ru as a topographic base, and within SASplanet. As a result, along with the two groups of kites studied in the 1970s, twelve more previously unknown groups have been revealed (Fig. 2). As a whole, the kites occupy a huge area up to 155 km long from east to west and 82 km from north to south, stretching from the south-east to the north-west of the Ustyurt plateau (Fig. 2). These groups are divided into three types (Fig. 3):

Type I. Classical arrowhead-shaped constructions. This is the most numerous type of kite and is divided into 'arrows' with the entrance facing north and deviating to the west or east and 'arrows' with the entrance facing



Fig. 3. Types of arrowhead-shaped constructions. Type I – 1, 2; Type II – 4, 5, 6; Type III – 3.

south. This kind of trap was constructed taking account of the behaviour of wild ungulates, located on seasonal migration routes, and required minimal human interference in the hunting process. When entrances were directed northward, the constructions became active during winter migrations as the animals moved southward; those oriented to the south were active during the spring migrations as animals moved northward. There were 68 of the first subtype and only 18 of the second subtype.

Type II. Rounded, ellipsoid or ‘undertriangular’ shaped fences, reaching up to 190 x 170 meters. So far their function is unclear. Total number - 25.

Type III: Constructions located between the Kosbulak and Asmatai-Matai salt flats, completely blocking the passage of animals moving between them, ranging between 430 and 550 metres long. These resemble type 1 kites, containing a ‘sack’ and arrowhead-shaped fence (Fig. 2). These may have been used during both spring and winter migrations. Seven constructions of this type have been found.

The system consists of dozens of constructions covering a huge territory and must have required a tremendous amount of labour to build. Traces of repeated reconstructions are

visible on many kites. It is obvious that the construction of the North Ustyurt system took place over a long period of time and its operation undoubtedly required long stays of large groups of people. In this part of Ustyurt there are numerous burial mounds who, along with nomadic cattle-raising, were engaged in construction and maintenance of the entire North Ustyurt system of kites, and probably in processing hunting products. The first kite-type constructions appeared as far back as in the middle of the 1st millennium B.C. and they continued to be used with reconstructions and improvements until the 7th – early 8th centuries A.D.

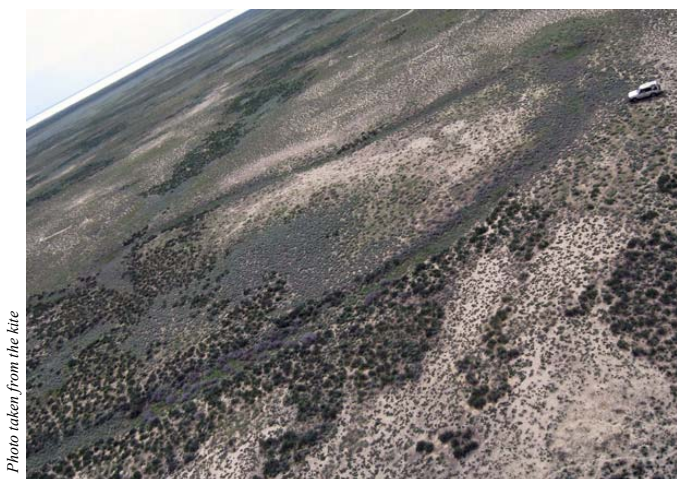


Photo taken from the kite

Fig 4. Constructions from the Bulanbai group, north-east view.



A space image (Bing Maps™)

Fig 5. Repeatedly reconstructed arrowhead-shaped constructions near the Duan burial ground.

Considering the North Ustyurt system of kites within the general system of ancient hunting constructions in the Aral-Caspian watershed, we should note its uniqueness for this region. It was intended for 'passive' hunting, and the presence of large groups of people resulted in the construction of the Duan burial ground and constructions for hunting rituals. The majority of hunting constructions found

elsewhere in Ustyurt and Mangyshlak date from the later periods of the 9th-14th centuries and are intended for more 'active' forms of hunting. They are isolated and do not form single systems and were not on such a large scale as the 'passive' forms, suggesting that they were probably more orientated towards sport hunting.

Saiga heroes



Photo by J.-F. Lagrot

Ed.: When did you first become interested in saiga?

Yu.A.: From the first time I got a bird's-eye view of saigas from an AN-2 plane during an aerial survey in 1963. The saiga population was quite big at that time, so you could see hundreds or even thousands of running animals. The view itself was really impressive. Later on, I participated in many saiga aerial surveys, though my scientific research was dedicated to mountain ungulates and large carnivores. However, I really liked being involved, not only with aerial surveys, but also with field research on saiga ecology. This extraordinary animal fascinated me.

Ed.: When did you start to study saigas and work toward their conservation?

Yu.A.: The study of saiga was a priority in our mammal laboratory. The laboratory was led by an outstanding zoologist Arkady Sludsky (until 1978) who ran a systematic research programme on saiga antelopes in Kazakhstan. Vitaly A. Fadeev had also researched the ecology of saigas between 1966 and 1980. The results of their work were published in a book called 'Saiga in Kazakhstan' (Fadeev & Sludsky 1982). After the untimely death of V. Fadeev in 1987, I became responsible for the laboratory's saiga research and have been doing so ever since.

Ed.: What does your average day look like?

In this issue we speak to Dr Yuri A. Grachev, Senior Fellow at the Institute of Zoology of the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, Candidate of Biological Sciences. Dr Grachev's research interests include the ecology, conservation and use of mammals, mainly ungulates and carnivores. He has worked in this research area since 1962, and is an author of many articles about saigas, including the monograph "Saiga (origin, systematics, ecology, conservation, use)", published in Moscow in 1998. Yuri Grachev is a world expert on saiga ecology and behaviour, and someone who saiga researchers worldwide view with deep respect and admiration.

Yu.A.: When I work in the field most of the time is occupied by observing saigas (using binoculars or telescopes) and driving survey routes. During calving the activities include tagging calves, weighing, sexing, etc. Meanwhile, work in the city requires processing the collected materials, writing reports and articles, attending meetings, conferences etc.

Ed.: Can you tell us an interesting story about saigas?

Yu.A.: Saigas have many interesting habits and sometimes they are totally inexplicable. For example, the way saigas overcome water obstacles... Once our camp was set up on Turgai riverbank in spring (May). There were lots of saigas and they had been crossing the river back and forth for no apparent reason. It seemed that they 'liked swimming'. In addition, one of the saiga herds faced quite a wide lake across their path right before freeze-up in November. The saigas crossed it without stopping, although there was a way round not far from the lake.

Ed.: What are the major problems in your work?

Yu.A.: Primarily it is a lack of funding for research. Therefore there is no opportunity for young professionals to become involved.

Ed.: How can these obstacles be overcome?

Yu.A.: The only way is to increase public funding of science in general and saiga research in particular.

Ed.: What is the best part of your work?

Yu.A.: I enjoy field expeditions, the opportunities to observe animals, and interactions with friends and colleagues from different countries involved in the study and conservation of saiga.

Ed.: What are the prospects for saiga conservation? What should be done first in order to help this species survive?

Yu.A.: The number of saigas is getting larger in Kazakhstan these days after the dramatic fall in the 1990s. It gives us hope for the future. However, poaching continues and there are also cases of mass deaths as a result of disease. Fortunately, some studies of saiga diseases were initiated in recent years. The situation with poaching is much more problematic. It requires a collective efforts of all law enforcement agencies and long-term work with local people. But it seems that the real threat of losing saiga is over for now.

Ed.: You have been working on study and conservation of rare species over the last few decades. What has changed over the years? What are the current trends in this area?

Yu.A.: Generally speaking, conservation of rare species in Kazakhstan has improved due to the expansion of existing protected areas and establishment of some new ones. These are national parks and nature reserves. Additionally, a few projects aimed at studying and protecting rare ungulate



Yuri Grachev and Aline Kuhl are weighing a newborn saiga.

species (argali, gazelles, onagers, Bukhara deer and saiga) have been carried out since 2005.

Announcements

SCA Young Conservation Leader award 2014

June 2014 saw the announcement of the winners of the SCA's Young Conservation Leaders (YCL) Award. This is the first year of what will hopefully become an annual award. The award will support the next generation of saiga conservationists and conservation leaders in saiga range states by funding their work, recognizing their contributions to saiga conservation and by bringing them together to build a network across the whole saiga range. The 2014 award is supported by the Wildlife Conservation Network, and we are grateful to all our donors and supporters who contributed to it via WCN.

Application to the award was open to anybody working on saiga conservation, aged 18-30 and from a saiga range state. Each young conservation leader was awarded \$1000 over 12 months to support their work, as well as having access to support and advice from the SCA network. In May three YCLs were selected, Olga Esipova from Uzbekistan, Aigul' Aitbaeva from Russia and Sergelen Erdenebaatar from Mongolia.

Each YCL was asked to introduce themselves by writing a short summary of how the YCL programme will help them with their work over the next year.

Aigul' Aitbaeva, Russia.

The saiga's plight is very familiar to me as I have lived all my life in the Yashkul district of Kalmykia, part of the range of the north-west pre-Caspian saiga population. In 2011, after graduating from Astrakhan State University, I started working for the Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia. I have been working for the Centre for only three years, but every day I get more experience and become more involved in its work.

My work is very varied, but I focus on environmental education; giving lectures to children about saiga conservation, organizing a variety of activities like the annual "Saiga Day" and conducting excursions for children to the Yashkul Saiga Breeding Center. I run "Living Heritage", a children's environmental club, located in



Yashkul village. In future I would like to establish such clubs in other villages and get more teenagers involved with environmental activities.

The Young Conservation Leaders award will help me develop a colorful booklet called "Amazing Nomad" for schoolchildren in grades 5-7. This booklet will raise children's awareness and interest in saigas and their enthusiasm for saiga conservation. "Amazing Nomad" will be distributed during field visits carried out under the Saiga Conservation Alliance project "Organizing Buddhist prayers and lectures for the populations living in antelope habitat". We will also try to find more money to distribute the booklet to schools in Kalmykia.

Olga Esipova, Uzbekistan.



My work on saiga conservation started a while ago, when I first became interested in wildlife conservation. I began doing translations from English into Russian for the Saiga Resource Centre and participated in field trips to the Ustyurt plateau. That work helped me realize that I could make my own contribution to saiga conservation and since I was passionate about wildlife I was happy to keep volunteering for the SCA.

In the following months I was lucky enough to take part in a few different projects and activities aimed at saiga protection, such as gathering background information on the history and culture of Karakalpakia, writing an article for the Saigacraft website and collecting images of various embroidered designs with explanations of their symbolism.

I also helped to record and produce a video of the saiga song and translate its lyrics into English. I assisted as an interpreter and participated in workshops about camera trapping. My latest, and probably most valuable, experience was assisting in painting a mural, with the saiga as a key feature, in a secondary school [see article above]. I really enjoyed the painting and helping as an interpreter.

I am keen to interact with young people and the YCL award will help me to dedicate my time to working with steppe wildlife clubs and local schools, and to carrying out work on saiga awareness events such as the Migratory Species Day this autumn. I am planning to design some activities for the children, and prepare a lesson and discussion on wildlife conservation. I also would like to run a competition between teenagers from local villages for the best ecological project. I believe that eventually this will help stimulate love of nature in kids and even inspire the next generation of young conservationists.

Sergelen Erdenebaatar, Mongolia.



I live in khovd province in Mongolia and work for the Altai Nuudelchid NGO with WWF. I have been working on saiga conservation since June 2013. One of the most memorable experiences for me was the "Development of a management plan for two protected areas (Mankhan and Sharga Nature Reserves) in the saiga range". For this project I developed a management plan with the participation of local stakeholders and communities. Now the management plan for Mankhan nature reserve has been approved and the management plan for Sharga nature reserve has been submitted.

In November 2013, I was part of the saiga census team and we successfully carried out a census across the main saiga range. I have also participated in surveys to identify the potential for re-establishment of saiga antelope ranges. These surveys will be used to plan future saiga conservation activities and have been used to update the saiga range map.

The Young Conservation Leaders award will help me to carry out further saiga research. I'm planning to identify saiga birth areas from June 13th to 25th with the support of local rangers and two university students. Clear

identification of saiga birth areas is important as attacks from predatory birds and disease are the main natural threats to newly born saigas. We will be surveying in DurgunKhurenTal which is an important area for saigas that hasn't been studied and there are no conservation activities

protecting the area. There is also a lot of poaching near this area so implementing conservation programmes will be very important. The survey will follow planned transects and will be used when planning any further saiga conservation programs.

SCA excellence in saiga protection award, in memory of SCA donor and friend Joy Covey



From left to right: ranger team of the Stepnoi Reserve, anti-poaching team of the Irgiz-Turgay reserve and Batsaikhan Baljinnyam.

This award recognises individuals or teams, from government or from NGOs, who have shown particular dedication and outstanding success in combating saiga poaching over the last 12 months. The applicants were of excellent quality and to recognise their extraordinary achievements we decided to give one main award of \$1,000 and two runner-up awards of \$750, to be used as the winners choose, to the following three nominees:

- First prize: the anti-poaching team of the Irgiz-Turgay reserve, Kazakhstan. The tireless conservation work of this anti-poaching team has contributed to consistent growth in

the Betpak-Dala saiga population over the last 7 years.

- Runner-up: the ranger team of the Stepnoi Reserve, Russia. For their work in extremely difficult circumstances to provide a safe haven for saiga in the northwest pre-Caspian steppe.

- Runner-up: Batsaikhan Baljinnyam, State Environmental Inspector, Mongolia. His strong and collaborative leadership has transformed Mongolia's saiga ranger network into a regionally recognised model of conservation law enforcement.

Congratulations to all the winners!

Zoological Society of London recognises David Mallon for his work on antelope conservation

The ZSL Stamford Raffles Award is presented for distinguished contributions to zoology, either amateur or outside their normal professional activities. This year it was awarded to David Mallon, a great friend and Trustee of the Saiga Conservation Alliance. We reproduce here the citation which he received from the Zoological Society of London on receiving the award:

"In addition to his job as an ecological consultant and lecturer in the UK, David is an unsung hero of international conservation. He is co-chair of the IUCN Antelope Specialist Group, and he carries out a huge range of conservation activities for IUCN and Fauna and Flora International amongst other organisations.

The focus of David's conservation work lies in Central and Eastern Asia, the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East. He has worked on Red List assessments of antelopes since 1989 and has co-compiled the IUCN Antelope Action Plan, covering North Africa, the Middle East and Asia. David's extensive field experience, knowledge, and his



David Mallon with his honorary diploma and medal from ZSL.

remarkable language skills have facilitated truly significant conservation successes.

In particular, David has supported antelope specialists to better involve the international community in conservation and development issues, such as: improving the knowledge of poorly known antelopes, initiating field operations for the conservation of threatened antelopes, promoting capacity

building in range countries, supporting reintroductions of antelopes where extinct, and making regular status assessments for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. All of this work is done on a shoestring, on a cost-only or voluntary basis. ”

**Our congratulations go to David
for this prestigious and well-deserved award!**



Saigas at a watering place in Stepnoi Reserve, Astrakhan district, Russia.

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Editorial team. China: A. Kang (akang@wcs.org) & Fenglian Li (fli@wcs.org), WCS China; Kazakhstan: Dr Yu.A. Grachev & Professor A. Bekenov, Institute of Zoology (teriologi@mail.ru), G. Izimbergenova, ACBK (gulmira.izimbergenova@acbk.kz); Mongolia: Dr B. Lhagvasuren (lhagvazeer@gmail.com) & B. Chimeddorj, (chimeddorj@wwf.mn), WWF-Mongolia; Russia: Professor Yu. Arylov, Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia (saiga-center@mail.ru) & Dr A. Lushchekina, Institute of Ecology & Evolution (saigak@hotmail.com); Uzbekistan: E. Bykova [Executive Editor] & Dr A. Esipov, Institute of Gene pool of plants and animals (esipov@xnet.uz); UK: Professor E.J. Milner-Gulland [Advisory Editor], Imperial College London (e.j.milner-gulland@imperial.ac.uk) & Dr David Mallon [Reviewer], IUCN Antelope Specialist Group, d.mallon@zoo.co.uk; Graphic design by Victor Grigoriev, mooglik@mail.ru.

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