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Step by step into the future.

Tzuut ("the famous one") lost his herd in 2015 and joined a group of domestic horses. He had to be taken to an acclimatization enclosure in Takhin Tal, where he was adopted by a Takhi mare. Months later he followed her into the Gobi. Now in his second winter he has grown into a slightly stallion yearling.



Protect the primordial Wild Horse and its habitat.

Dear friends of the Wild Horse



Those who live in the steppe must migrate. Springwater, rain and digestible vegetation are only available seasonally. Big game must follow those resources. It was always like that, and it will remain so. That's why steppe game needs huge areas for long-term survival - larger than even the most spacious national parks - which they can seasonally roam unhindered. A railway line, a road, a new settlement, even a simple cattle

fence can stop this migration. As conservationists we thus need to find ways of opening blockades - those in the terrain and those in the minds. Against many adversities ITG managed to re-establish the primordial Wild Horse (*Equus przewalskii*, or Takhi in Mongolian) in the very habitat in which the last free-roaming individuals had been living prior to its extermination.

But we won't rest on this spectacular success. We stay vigilant and even reinforce our quest for cooperation across borders, looking for allies to help us to conserve the unique steppe flora and fauna of the Gobi and its fringe areas for the generations to come.

Though our focus remains on the Takhi, we care for its habitat as a whole and for keeping old game migration routes open, or re-opening them, to avoid losing this precious heritage of nature. You and other generous supporters enable us to do this work and motivate us not to weaken in our efforts. Will you keep to it, too?

Dr. Reinhard Schnidrig, President of the ITG



The first of this year's two Wild Horse transports on its way to the acclimatization enclosure in Takhin Tal. Each of the four transport crates on the two trucks carries one Takhi. The four mares Nara, Heia, Reweta and Heilige were selected from European breeding programmes to further optimize the genetic diversity of the free-roaming Takhi in the Great Gobi B National Park. For them, a long journey ends here, and the adventure of life as a Wild Horse in the Gobi begins. Read the gripping story by Dr. M. Bobek. Photo: Václav Šilhá.

Prague – Gobi one way: the sixth return of the Wild Horses

Prague Zoo is a Member of ITG and keeper of the global Takhi studbook. It has also become an important sponsor of conservation efforts in the Great Gobi B SPA1. Director Dr. Miroslav Bobek not only managed to convince Czech Developmental Aid to support ITG projects, but also to make the Czech Airforce transport the Wild Horses to Mongolia. These transports count as training flights and as such are free of charge for ITG. Nevertheless, each such flight is a massive logistic and administrative challenge – and not the least a true adventure, as shown by Dr. Bobek's report.

¹SPA = Strictly Protected Area

By Dr. Miroslav Bobek, Director of the Prague Zoo. Photos: Václav Šilha

Seen from afar, it might seem to be a routine matter and quite a standard procedure. Actually, the higher the number of transports and horses shipped to Mongolia the more nervous we grow. One day, the taut string might snap. Until the takhis run out of the transport crates into paddocks at the Gobi we cannot be sure of anything. Each and every detail matters and each and every person has to do their utmost.

And on top of everything, apart from transporting Przewalski's horses from the Czech Republic to the Gobi desert, this year there was one more transport within Mongolia.

Preparations in Khustain Nuruu

Although it was May 4th, we were caught up in a snowstorm in the Mongolian National Park of Khustain Nuruu and the truck carrying material for setting up an enclosure for the Przewalski's horses lost its way. Actually, I was not really surprised. Since we had arranged with our Mongolian colleagues to organise one more transport of the takhis inside Mongolia and bring four

animals from Khustain to the Gobi B, we could have expected that the number of difficulties and problems would at least double.

There are already three hundred and fifty Przewalski's horses in Khustain, near Ulan Bator. The idea of making two transports – first, from Europe and then within Mongolia – was come about during our discussions with our Mongolian partners more than four years ago, and the snowstorm was the least of all the complications on the way to carrying the idea through. Step by step, we had to deal with a number of Mongolian ministers, we had to tackle logistic problems – and then also erect a fence in Khustain and collect in all the takhis intended for the Gobi B. What I stated after the dash alone would make a long book.

Nevertheless, by Friday May 20th, thanks to the great efforts of the two vets, Roman Vodička and Jim Rasmussen, seven takhis were ready in the paddock in Khustain and we could turn our attention to preparations in the Czech Republic.



Dr. Bobek and ranger Batsur are releasing the mare Reweta in Takhin Tal. Only the headlights of the vehicles had to suffice for the lighting.

Under police escort

Just as in previous years, we started in the Dolní Dobřejov breeding station for Przewalski's horses, some 100 km from Prague. There were seven mares, brought here from several breeding facilities in Europe, ready in one of the enclosures of our breeding and acclimatisation station.

Their loading started on Saturday July 16th just after 7 a.m. One by one, Nara, Heia, Reweta and Heilige were placed into transport crates. But the job was not quite straightforward. Reweta took longer than expected to wake up from anaesthesia, which could have been a sign of more problems. Fortunately, these apprehensions were unfounded.

Because of a temporary road closure on the way to the airport and to avoid the risk of being stuck in a traffic jam, this was the first time that the trucks carrying the horses were escorted by the Czech police. This helped greatly to speed up the journey from Dolní Dobřejov to Kbely Airport. On the other hand, police

accompanying a convoy of vehicles bearing the Prague Zoo logo attracted much attention and in no time there were rumours that some very rare animals, most likely pandas, were being taken to the Prague Zoo.

Prague – Kazan – Novosibirsk – Bulgan sum

A military CASA aircraft with the horses and our accompanying party on board took off from the Kbely airport at 2.10 p.m. and things were almost ideal until our first stop in Kazan. I failed to mention the cold inside the plane. Only an outsider would be surprised to get covered in white frost falling gently down from the air-conditioning system. It was unfortunate that due to bureaucrats in Kazan we were running well behind schedule. Up till then we had tried to save each single minute – and there we wasted hours. Luckily, all the mares took the delay well, and so it was our only hope that we would still be able to release them at the Gobi in daylight that was diminishing.

Our delay increased a little more after our next stop in Novosibirsk, due to strong head and side winds. But there was no reason to complain. We even might not have landed in Bulgan sum as the speed of the lateral winds were getting unpleasantly near the permissible limit. The CASA approached the landing at quite an angle. Nevertheless, it landed softly on the airstrip of Bulgan sum on Sunday, July 17th at 10.35 a.m. CEST (17.35 local time). This moment brought the number of Przewalski's horses safely transported to Mongolia by Czech military aircraft to twenty-three.

We were all welcomed by Mr. Ganbaatar, Director of the Gobi SPA, and other colleagues and friends and then we quickly unloaded the crates, went through customs and travelled by cars and trucks to the acclimatisation enclosure in Takhin Tal. And there, half an hour after midnight local time (on Monday July 18th) we released the mares. I was honoured to be the first, together with Mr. Batsur, the oldest active guard in the Gobi B, to open Reweta's crate.

When we went to check the mares the next day, we found them in order, without any bigger bruises, and they seemed quite calm. As if they had travelled the long distance to their new home first class.

Too soon to be merry and celebrate

There had always been a celebration after releasing takhis transported to the Gobi B from Prague. This time, however, there was another transport of horses planned within Mongolia. So there was no time for any festivities. On Wednesday, July 20th we flew by our CASA military plane from Bulgan soum to Ulan Bator and then we travelled about one hundred kilometres to the National Park of Khustain Nuruu.

Funny & comp.

On Thursday July 21st, we had breakfast at four and moved on to the enclosure. Our vet, Roman Vodička, had anaesthetics ready and his Mongolian colleagues, Saikhanaa and Usuchu, shot tranquilizing darts at the first two horses, the stallion Hustai and the mare Funny.

This sounds simple, but it was not quite the case. The horses, just recently captured in the wild, almost broke out from the enclosure during the process. And Hustai damaged the sliding door of an older transportation crate. As the stallion kept giving the door mighty kicks, we had to move him into another newer and sturdier container. We thus got over the first complication, but there were more to come.



Landing of the Czech Airforce's CASA in the district capital Bulgan (Khovd province). Immediately after landing, the transport crates are unloaded and lifted onto trucks. The first leg of the journey from Bulgan to the National Park Headquarters in Takhin Tal was along an asphalt road. Our convoy with horses reached dirt roads three hours after leaving the airport.

The next morning, the mares in the acclimatization enclosure are tired but well.



Happy faces in Khustain Nuruu National Park: four of the Takhi caught weeks before in an acclimatization enclosure have been securely locked away in their transport crates. Khustain Director Dashpurev Tsendereleg (left) and the Director of the ITG office in Mongolia, Enksaikhan Namtar, are congratulating each other. The inner-mongolian transport to Ulaan Baatar is about to start, soon to be followed by the air-lift from there to Gobi B.

Annual event of the Siegfried Foundation

On October 30, 2016, the Jean-Pierre und Sonja Siegfried Foundation extended an invitation to its first annual event. Around 60 invitees came to be informed by ITG on the goals of the Takhi reintroduction and its activities. The Foundation is lead by Stephan and Andreas Siegfried; it collects funds for Takhi conservation and supports ITG activities with substantial amounts. Parent Jean-Pierre Siegfried (†) (on the left) formed the conservation programme initiated by Christian Oswald and Dorjraa Ochir, managed it during the difficult start phase and founded the ITG in 1999. Without this visionary and patron, who together with Christian Oswald and Dorothee Stamm realized the reintroduction vision against all odds, there would probably be no free-roaming Takhi in the Gobi.



The final: from Khustain to the Gobi B

At 10.40 we left the enclosure in Khustain for Ulan Bator. On trucks we carried crates with the stallion Hustai and the mares Funny, Arvin and Bebe. Covering the distance of just under one hundred kilometres took us more than two and half hours. A police escort awaited us at the asphalt road close to Ulan Bator. Luckily, traffic was not too busy on the way to the airport and the police only used the siren just a few times because of some cars in the way and due to one stubborn cow.

After loading the horses and a short press conference, the CASA took off at 16.15 LT and after just under three and half hours landed in Bulgan soum. Again, we were lucky. The side wind was even stronger than before but had not yet reached the limit to make us land at a substitute airport.

And again there was loading onto trucks and transport to the Gobi B. While the stallion – just as horses from our previous transports – was heading for Takhin Tal in the eastern parts of the Gobi B, the mares were taken to Takhin Us in the west where the number of horses is still quite low.

The mares left the crates on July 22nd at 0.45 LT and the stallion ran out at 1.45. All the horses were fine. Finished. Finished for the day.

At long last there was time to celebrate.

Twenty-seven

The number of takhis we have jointly transported in good health in coordination with ITG and other partners by CASA military planes since 2011 has reached 27 this year. This is an excellent outcome of the work of a great many people, ranging from zoo keepers and breeders, military pilots to our Mongolian colleagues. Without them and their hard work the success of the project the Return of the Wild Horses could not be considered a matter of routine, on the contrary it would be impossible.

Takhi record numbers in the Gobi

Though the population of wild takhi living in the 'Great Gobi B' National Park is still minute and accordingly vulnerable, it reached a new record number of 173 animals this year. They live in 15 harem groups which each comprise 3 to 20 animals. Strong stallions are able to gather a number of mares and juveniles, weaker ones only 2-3 mares. This spring, 50 mares were pregnant, and the total headcount rose from 126 horses to the new record high, as we had hoped.

We are very pleased that the takhi have started to show behaviour known from the time before extermination, developing strong group dynamics and expanding their home range. Only this will enable them to re-develop knowledge essential for survival, which experienced individuals can pass on to their family groups. Of course, this also increases the risk of getting in touch with domestic horses – in other words: with their diseases and genes. Our rangers thus won't run out of work.

Networking on all levels – much work for the future

The president of ITG, Reinhard Schnidrig, and its actuary Mirjam Wuersch travelled to Mongolia in October, their calendar packed. After the landslide victory of the Mongolian People's Party, they wanted to meet newly elected Soum and Aimag¹ authorities as well as the new Minister of the Environment, Green Development and Tourism, in order to present to them ITG's goals and concerns. In parallel, they renewed existing contacts to the President of Mongolia, the Faculty of Biology of the University of Ulaan Baatar, the Mongolian Tourism Association, GOs and NGOs to discuss current goals.

¹Soum=District, Aimag=Province

The ITG delegation were met with interest both at local and regional parliaments and at the Ministry of the Environment by Dalamsuren Oyunkhorol. Across party boundaries, ITG enjoys a good reputation and so much support in Mongolia that we were able to meet with the nation's President, Tsakhia Elbegdorj. At all levels, ITG was assured further support in the future, and Minister Oyunkhorol promised to submit the expansion of the National Park area to Parliament as soon as possible. Even the idea to consider the restitution of migration corridors for species moving between Mongolia and China met predominantly with agreement.

Talks with the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency (DEZA), the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the German Credit Institution for Reconstruction (Deutsche Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau, KfW) yielded valuable information on how to enable and finance the planned linking and establishment of migration corridors between conservation areas. Moreover, a reconnaissance trip through the south of Mongolia allowed getting a first impression of potential migration corridors and the identification of respective obstacles. The delegation got in touch with the Great Gobi A SPA, which is ecologically linked to Gobi B. A common strategy is important to realize the vision of a networked system of conservation areas in the southwest of Mongolia.

Step for Step towards great visions

In 2017, ITG will celebrate „25 years of takhi reintroduction in Gobi B“. Many people have contributed to this with vision and lifeblood. In Mongolia, various activities are planned:

- The famous Mongolian Pop band „Hurd“ has recorded a Takhi/Takhin Tal song and will first release it in Ulaan Baatar.
- The most beautiful and informative pictures from 25 years of reintroduction will be presented to the public in a photo exhibition in Ulaan Baatar.
- A dinner with potential sponsors in Ulaan Baatar aims to expand the support for the takhi within Mongolia.
- A workshop and a celebration in Takhin Tal joined by Chinese takhi rangers shall improve cross-border cooperation.



The Minister of the Environment, Green Development and Tourism, Dalamsuren Oyunkhorol (center) welcomed the delegation of ITG (from left to right, Enkhsaikhan Namtar, Mirjam Wuersch, Reinhard Schnidrig and Ochir Dorjraa) to promising talks about cooperation.

Basic research and the monitoring of Gobi species remain a key topic in 2017; at the same time, options for ecological networking and the protection of migration corridors are being evaluated by means of detailed geographic maps and various supportive information. This goal also forms part of the new Great Gobi B SPA Management Plan to the attention of the Mongolian Government. During his visit in Takhin Tal, Reinhard Schnidrig conducted detailed talks about this subject with the Director of Gobi B, his Deputy and the rangers.

Water in Takhin Tal!

Takhin Tal, the Headquarters of Great Gobi B National Park, consists of a few yurts for rangers and guests, several shacks, the park centre's slightly brick building and the Wild Horse acclimatization enclosures. Until recently, there was no running water; one managed with a cistern trailer. This problem – well outside the financial capacity of ITG – was just solved. Made aware of the situation by Prague Zoo, the Czech Developmental Aid financed the drilling of a bore hole this summer, which hit on water at a depth of 140 meters.

This will significantly facilitate ranger life in Takhin Tal – and meets a key requirement for tourism in the



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region. Luckily, the ground water is safe in this place, whereas elsewhere in the conservation area it is heavily loaded with salt and naturally occurring toxic substances.



Water is spouting in Takhin Tal! Happy Park Director O. Ganbaatar (2nd from left, front row) with the proud drilling team and his rangers.

Species portrait: Yarkand gazelle – the species which is another one

The continental dry habitat of the Dzungarian Gobi with its extreme temperature variations is tolerated by only few species of large herbivores. Besides takhi and khulan, the goitered gazelle can cope. Until recently, this roe-deer-sized gazelle weighing 20-30 kg, with a sandy colour, a white belly and a dark facial stripe was thought to be a subspecies of the Persian Goitered Gazelle, *Gazella subgutturosa*, which, however, lives at least 2000 km away. Now it has become clear that the Mongolian „sub-species“ in reality forms its own, monotypic species called Yarkand Goitered Gazelle (*Gazella yarkandensis*)¹. It roams the steppes, semi-deserts and alpine pastures of northwestern and northern China and Mongolia and survives on desert forage such as Saxaul bushes (*Haloxylon ammodendron*), composites such as bismuth (*Artemisia*), feather grasses like *Stipa gobica*, garlic (*Allium*) and salt herbs (*Salsola*). The gazelles live in small flocks (up to 12 animals) and in winter congregate in groups of 20-30 individuals. There are no data on the activity patterns and the breeding behaviour of this species classified as „vulnerable“ by IUCN.

¹Lynx Edicions, Handbook of the Mammals of the World, 2011, Volume 2, p. 639



ITG helps communities

Whilst the focus of our work lies on the conservation of the Gobi ecosystem, ITG also supports activities benefiting the locals. In the summer semester, our Board Member Anita Fahrni-Minear participated in the 70-year anniversary of Bugat district, celebrated with a Naadam festivity. Naadam is characterized by competitions in wrestling, archery and horse racing. Anita Fahrni, a seasoned Mongolia expert after more than 20 work trips to the country, took the opportunity to make a gift of IT and school items to the district council of Bugat, which she had organized for this purpose specifically. For the first time she also visited Takhin Tal, the Headquarters of Great Gobi B National Park, and was thrilled:

„This summer, the heavy rain brought out an astonishingly diverse plant flowerage. One would have to be a botanist or geologist to fully appreciate the rich colouring of plants and minerals. Observing several Takhi harems in the freedom of the unbelievable vastness of the Gobi strengthened my respect of nature and my engagement for its protection. I can warmly recommend a visit of several days duration to this remote and unhurried region. The Main Camp with its courteous team offers an ideal hostel for nature aficionados and a basis for seminars or research expeditions.“

Even before her visit Anita, a tireless networker, had recruited in Switzerland a retired teacher, Uli Rutz, to give English lessons to the pupils of Bugat and the rangers in Takhin Tal. Mr. Rutz stayed in Great Gobi B National Park from mid-May to mid-June and assisted in observing takhi harems as well as the building of an acclimatization enclosure in Takhi Us. Read more about this in the next Takhi Post.



Anita Fahrni hands the prestigious first prize to the owner of the winning horse in the Naadam horse race.

What we need your help for

Conservation work is not always spectacular. However, routine jobs in the background make a project successful. Our examples show how much you can achieve with your contribution. Each donation is valuable and most welcome.



CHF 20.-

You pay a ranger his daily salary and for the use of his material.

CHF 60.-

You fill the gasoline tank of a patrol vehicle.

CHF 100.-

You contribute to the maintenance and repair of heavily strained patrol vehicles.



CHF 150.-

You contribute to the first Chinese-Mongolian ranger workshop.

CHF 250.-

You enable the ranger patrols of one month.

CHF 500.-

You pay for the hay purchase and transport for one winter.

ITG works in an honorary capacity. Each donation is used directly for protecting the primordial Wild Horse.

Join the 'Friends of the Wild Horse'!

- Membership for private persons **CHF 50.-**

- Foal membership for teens, students and apprentices **CHF 20.-**

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