

# **INTERNATIONAL TAKHI GROUP**

## **Takhi Reintroduction Project Great Gobi B SPA**

### **Annual Report 2017**



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## Foreword of the President

The reintroduction of the Mongolian wild horse into the Great Gobi B SPA, one of the most difficult living environments on earth, was and is a tremendous challenge. Fifty years ago the takhi - worshipped by our ancestors - was on the edge of extinction. A handful of people took it upon themselves to prevent its disappearance. They considered it a shame for mankind that a so emblematic species should die out.

In 2017 ITG celebrated 25 years of the return of the takhi to its last retreat in southwestern Mongolia. The return was made possible solely thanks to the great efforts of the pioneers of this unique project: Christian Oswald (1930-2011), Dorothee Stamm, Jean-Pierre Siegfried (1930-2013), Ochir Dorjraa, Ravchig Samia, Christian Stauffer, Chris Walzer, Ruth Baumgartner and Tsedensodnom Sukhbaatar (1962-2007). We hereby thank them all sincerely in the name of the holy horse. These people brought the takhi back to their home, the steppes of Central Asia, with their knowledge, their heart and their hands. It was courageous to transport wild horses which over generations had been raised in captivity thousands of kilometers in order to set them free in the huge expanse of the Great Gobi B SPA – in a part of the world that had just escaped from the grip of a dictatorial super power.

However, the judgment of history is the victory of the bold: 200 takhi now living completely free graze on the grass of the Dzungarian Gobi. And their number increases each year.

The wild horses and the protected area are cared for today by descendants of the pioneers, a new generation of rangers, biologists, veterinarians, administrators and philanthropists, no less competent and devoted. To these people, too, I give my thanks for their support, for the place in their hearts which they give to the horses and for their helping hand today and tomorrow. Even after 25 years our work is far from done. We continue to need people who take care of the wild horses and the people who live with them in the steppes of Central Asia, so that this exemplary story of nature protection can continue.

Reinhard Schnidrig, president of the International Takhi Group

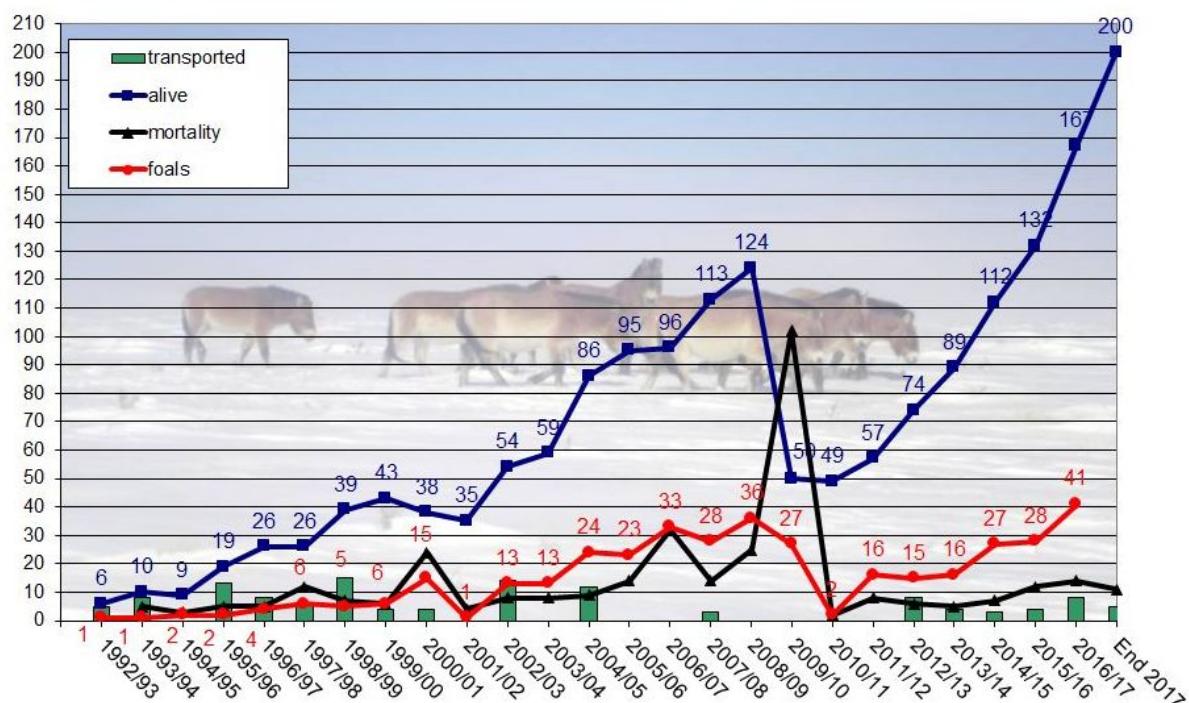


## Statement of Accounts

### Development in the Number of Takhi

ITG is pleased that at the end of 2017 the intermediate goal had been reached: 200 takhi in the Great Gobi B SPA! Between April and November 39 foals were born, of which 34 survived. In addition, four mares were transported from Europe to Takhin tal under the leadership of Prague Zoo and with the support of the air force of the Czech Republic. Thanks to the excellent organization and the mastering of a logistic challenge, the horses were released in the acclimatization enclosure in Takhin tal only 32 hours after leaving the Czech Republic.

In comparison to the number in December 2016, the number of harems increased by two; the size of the harems varies between 5 and 24 individuals. Between January and December there were more than 80 moves between the groups. Sometimes the moves were caused by single young stallions which took over a harem temporarily but lost it again later to an older stallion. Additionally, in October separate harems joined to larger loosely combined groups which grazed together and then separated again.



### Development of the numbers of Takhi in Great Gobi B SPA up until the end of 2017

The numbers are recorded within a "horse year" which begins on May 1 and ends on April 30 of the following year.

The extremely dry summer caused grave concern about the winter 2017-2018 among those responsible. Due to an analysis of the risk to the horses, ITG bought a large amount of hay in the summer. Luckily the winter months turned out to be moderate so that the supply of hay was not needed in the amount feared.

## Infrastructure

Thanks to the drilling of a well, Takhin tal has had access to fresh water since 2016. The next challenge is the laying of a water pipe to cover the distance between the pump at the well and the park building and possibly continuing to the ranger camp. In addition, sanitary facilities should be built. The architect who designed the park building earlier has supported ITG this year in the planning of this project for which possible financing is now being sought.



## 25 Years of Reintroduction of the Przewalski's horse in Mongolia

The takhi population in the Great Gobi B SPA reached the 200 mark exactly at the time of the 25th anniversary of its reintroduction. To celebrate this anniversary ITG organized a photography exhibit in the capital and in the provincial centers of Altai and Khovd. The shows were accompanied by well-attended, informative events and lectures about the reintroduction project. The income from the sale of the photographs will be used for laying the water pipes to connect the park center and the ranger camp in Takhin tal to the well.



In the fall ITG celebrated the achievements of the past 25 years with a benefit dinner in Ulaanbaatar with which it also raised awareness of the project, of its goals and of the challenges involved. Both the photography exhibit and the dinner as well as the production of a takhi-song by the well-known Mongolian band “HURD” were supported generously with a grant from the **Swiss Development Cooperation Agency, Mongolia**. A member of the Friends of the Takhi, Peter Kistler, compiled and edited especially for this occasion an anniversary edition of the Takhi Post which includes the history of the project and the voices of the important people involved, both Mongolian and European. This brochure is an important and much appreciated review of the work done and results achieved.

On the same fall weekend an anniversary conference was held jointly with the reintroduction projects of Hustai Nuuru and Homin Tal, during which the scientific findings of the past quarter century of the reintroduction of the Przewalski's horse were exchanged and strategies for the future were discussed. The reports were generally positive while the unique potential of ITG's project in the Great Gobi B SPA was also emphasized.

### **Expansion of the Great Gobi B SPA**

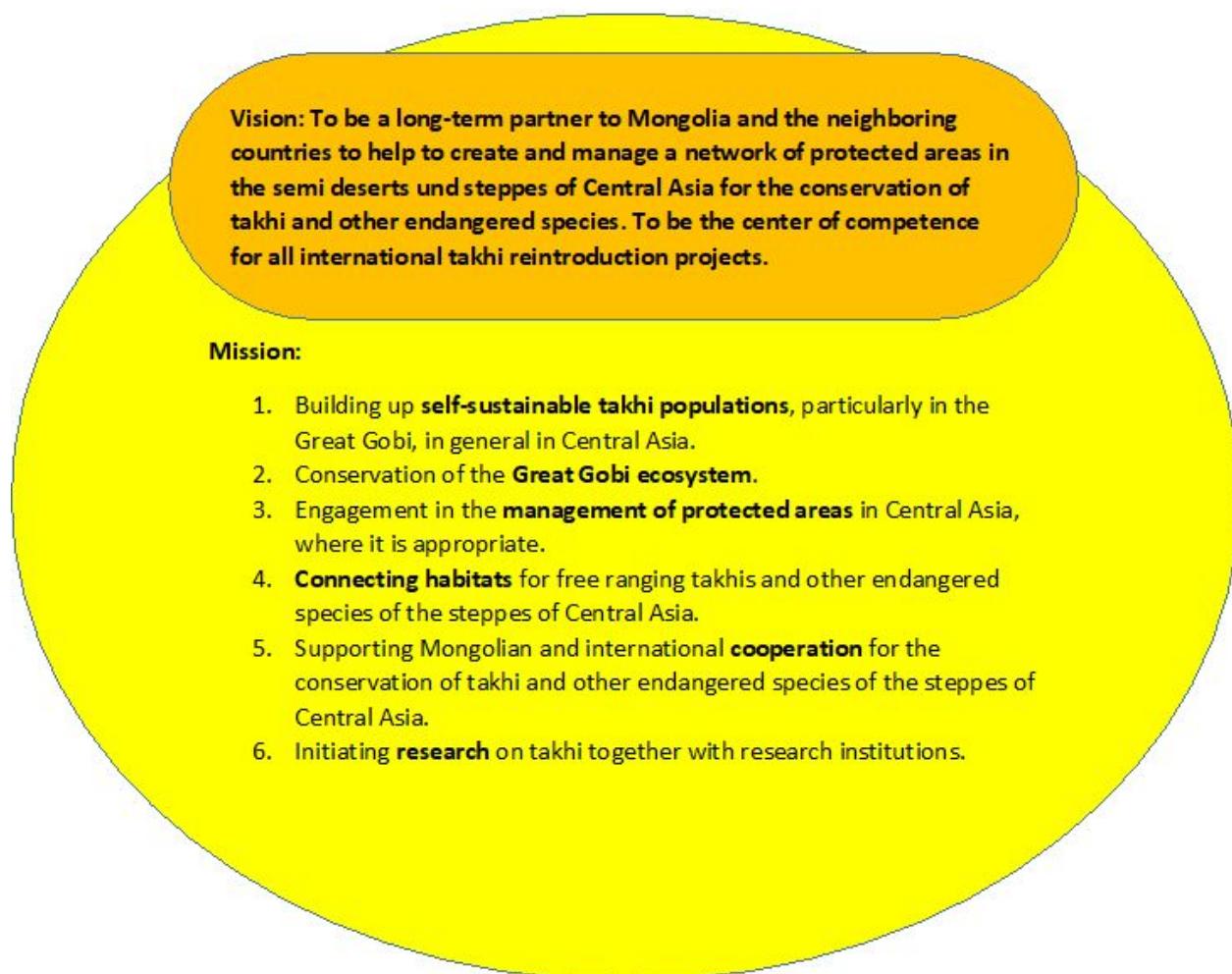
Unfortunately, the measures for the expansion of the Great Gobi B SPA did not develop in 2017 as desired or with the speed hoped for. The frequent changes in the Mongolian politics and administration proved to be an impediment. The increasing development in the mining sector is a further obstacle to these plans on the national level. However, the nomads are mobilizing locally in favor of the expansion of the Great Gobi B SPA because they see in it increased chances for the continuation of their traditional nomadic life style.

## Strategy

At the end of 2017, Ganbaatar O., the park director of the Great Gobi B SPA, formulated a new **management plan** for the period until 2020 and sent it to the board for its comments. The board made additions and corrections to the document which will be presented to the Ministry of Nature, the Environment and Tourism in the first quarter of 2018 for approval.

During this past year the ITG board developed and approved the strategy for 2018-2022.

### ITG Strategy 2018 – 2022



In addition, a **Memorandum of Collaboration** for the time until 2020 was agreed upon with one of ITG's most important partners, the **Prague Zoo**. This agreement governs the cooperation, the activities in connection with the reintroduction of the Przewalski's horse in the Great Gobi B SPA, the transportation of the Przewalski's horses to Takhin tal as well as the strategy for the protection of the Great Gobi B SPA until December 31, 2020.

## Research

In order to give more weight to the research in the Great Gobi B SPA in connection with the reintroduction of the Przewalski's horse but also in connection with the protection of the ecological system and the creation of a network of protected areas, ITG held a two-day workshop in February 2017 in Ittingen (Switzerland). Representatives of ITG and the Great Gobi B SPA met there with scientists from the **Research Institute for Wildlife and Ecology of the School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Vienna (FIWI)**, the **Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA)**, the **National University of Mongolia** and the **Mongolian National Academy of Science** to discuss the present state of the research and the scientific data gathered. As a result, the nine most important and urgent topics were selected from a large number of potential subjects for study.

1. Understanding the reasons for takhi deaths based on post-mortem analysis
2. Monitoring the biodiversity using camera traps, with special focus on the mountainous regions and the water holes
3. Managing the already gathered data about the takhi in the Great Gobi B SPA
4. Studying the land use by the nomads in and around the Great Gobi B SPA with consideration of the options of co-management
5. Monitoring the populations of khulan and gazelles
6. Studying the goitered gazelle
7. Genetic screening of the takhi population using non-invasive techniques
8. Studying the movement of takhi between harems based on observation
9. Studying the carrying capacity of the Great Gobi B SPA for takhi, to find the maximum number sustainable

In October-November 2017 Lena Michler began the preparations for work on topic number 4. As part of her PhD thesis: *"Adapting to Change—co-management scenarios of local pastoralists and protected area management to maintain biological and cultural diversity in the Dzungarian Gobi in Mongolia"*, she interviewed 38 nomadic families along the eastern border of the protected area and on the border to China, asking them about their situation. She will continue the study in 2018.



An important basis to the study of topic number 1 was laid in 2017: the necessary training and materials brought ability of the ranger team up to the newest standard in procedures of post-mortem analysis, making it possible again to report the death of takhi - and other wildlife if necessary - according to the reliable protocol and thus to record accurately and permanently knowledge about the causes of death.

On behalf of ITG, Petra Kaczensky of the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research will coordinate all of the research activities in the Great Gobi B SPA. In addition, Dalaitseren S., a young biologist, was hired to ensure that the scientific reporting from Takhin tal reaches Europe. Dalaitseren is the son of the former park director Tsedensodnom Sukhbaatar and grew up at Takhin tal.

## Partnerships

The work of ITG is based on a contract with the **government of Mongolia**. Therefore, it is important that contact with the ministry in Ulaanbaatar and with the local governments on the aimag and soum level be maintained continually and that information about new developments be shared. In the fall Reinhard Schnidrig, ITG president, and Rebekka Blumer, ITG treasurer, were able to meet with Mr. Batsansar of the Ministry of Nature, the Environment and Tourism (MNET) and with other members of parliament to discuss and strengthen the collaboration between the Mongolian government and ITG. Mr. Batsansar expressed at that time the wish to become a member of the ITG board.



**Prague Zoo** is a member of ITG and the most active partner among the participating zoos and parks. Central to the relationship in 2017 was the transportation of takhi to Takhin tal and the strategy for continuing collaboration. That strategy was set in a Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC) and signed by both parties. Together with the **air force of the Czech Republic** Prague Zoo was again able to transport four selected takhi from various European zoos to the Great Gobi B SPA. At the same time Prague Zoo conducted discussions with Chinese officials about a planned transport of Przewalski's horses from Europe to China, which should be followed by a transfer of horses from the breeding station in Jimsar, close to the Mongolian border, to Takhin tal.

A very important aim of ITG is the long-term protection of migrating species such as the khulan, the goitered gazelle and the takhi as well as the opening and securing of corridors for that migration. Thanks to intensive preparation and to the commitment of ITG president Reinhard Schnidrig and his work in the **Convention of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)** and in the **Central Asian Mammals Initiative (CAMI)**, the takhi was included in the Appendix 1 of the CMS in October 2017. This new inclusion means that on the international level the Przewalski's horse now has a higher status of protection as a migrating species. This status will be helpful in the future in the reintroduction of the takhi across national borders.

The three Mongolian regions in which takhi are reintroduced, **Takhin tal, Hustai Nuuru** and **Homin Tal**, organize regular meetings at which they exchange information about their experience and work out a common strategy and a common data bank.

For the second time a **Great-Gobi-6 meeting** took place at Bayantooroi, organized by **WWF Mongolia**. The aim of the participants is to protect the ecological system of the Gobi and the elements needed by the 6 large, charismatic species which live there: the bactrian wild camel, the khulan, the saiga antelope, the goitered gazelle, the Gobi bear and the Przewalski's horse. The ITG president Reinhard Schnidrig attended the meeting with Ganbaatar, director of the Great Gobi B SPA, and could thus maintain and enlarge the network with the nearly 300 participating Mongolian park directors, government representatives and nature conservation organizations. Various goals for the protection of the ecology and nature were formulated in the "Bayantooroi Declaration", which should determine the activities to be undertaken until the next meeting. Ecotourism and the raising of public awareness were also themes of this conference.



**Tama Zoo** in Japan is a reliable partner which supports ITG financially and organizes events regularly which spread the knowledge about the takhi and its history in Japan.



ITG maintains regular contact with the **Jimsar breeding station** in China. Because of quarantine regulations, the planned transport of Przewalski's horses from Europe to China could not take place in 2017. The negotiations are continuing; the transport is planned for 2018.

In 2017 the office of the **Swiss Development Cooperation Agency (SDC)** in Mongolia supported substantially the activities celebrating the 25th anniversary of the reintroduction, thus making it possible for information about the project and the goals of the International Takhi Group to reach a wider public. In the framework of the discussions which ITG held in Mongolia, the educational program for sustainable development which was initiated by SDC - the Eco-Club - was brought up and then discussed with the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), which now implements the program.

ITG is in regular contact with the **Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)** and cooperates with it in the scientific field.

**Swiss foundations**, such as the Jean-Pierre and Sonja Siegfried Foundation, the Temperatio Foundation, the Fondation de Bienfaisance Jeanne Lovioz and the Vontobel Foundation have become reliable and faithful partners over the years. They support the aims and visions of ITG financially and ideally.

## Finances

ITG seeks to improve its financial basis by obtaining long term grants from foundations and organizations which support international conservation efforts. To this goal promising discussions were held in 2017 and a plan of action was formulated. Again, ITG was able to count on the support of many years from the **Jean-Pierre and Sonja Siegfried Foundation**, the **Temperatio Foundation**, the **Fondation de Bienfaisance Jeanne Lovioz** as well as the **Vontobel Foundation**.

Private donors and organizations have also supported ITG, for which we are very grateful. The International Takhi Group received additional donations raised in various ways including lectures and collections during events and birthdays.

The issues of the "**Takhi Post**" always produce a major echo and increase the donations noticeably. The special issue for the 25th anniversary met with strong approval. The printing and mailing costs of the "**Takhi Post**" were generously sponsored by members of the ITG board. In the future a sustainable means of financing the newsletter must be found.

In 2017 ITG received contributions in the amount of CHF 67'130.70. Of that CHF 39'630.70 was donated by individuals through membership in the "**Friends of the Wild Horse**".

Thanks to the benefit dinner held in Ulaanbaatar in September, ITG was able to increase awareness of its project among Mongolian companies and private persons. However, this did not result in increased contributions in Mongolia. Therefore, ITG decided to hire a staff member for the "*Friends of the Wild Horse, Mongolia*", in order to strengthen the local presence and to increase the local contributions.

The extension of the Great Gobi B SPA and the renewal of the car fleet and of the infrastructure of the ranger camp - especially making water and electricity accessible - as well as various research projects make up the greatest financial challenges of the next 2-3 years. This is in addition to the basic annual costs of monitoring, protection, hay, the rangers' salaries and the spread of information among the local population.



## Those active in the International Takhi Group

### The Board\*

Reinhard Schnidrig, president	Christian Stauffer, vice-president
Rebekka Blumer, treasurer	Mirjam Würsch, recording secretary
Ruth Baumgartner	Miroslav Bobek
Jaroslav Simek	Sven Hoffmann
Karin Hindenlang Clerc	Anita Fahrni

*\*The entire board works without remuneration. ITG maintains an office in Ulaanbaatar and together with the Mongolian government maintains the Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area*

### Employees of ITG in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia\*\*

Enkhsaikhan N., manager ITG Mongolia

*\*\*In December 2017 Batsukh J. was hired as program manager of "Friends of the Takhi, Mongolia". She begins her job in January, 2018.*

### Employees in the Great Gobi B SPA (as of December 2017)

Ganbaatar O., director	Altansukh N., deputy director
Altantsetseg E., field specialist	Dalaitseren S., research coordinator***
Baast Z., ranger	Nisekhkhuu G., ranger
Amgalan Ya., ranger	Batsuuri B., ranger
Myagmarjav B., ranger	Oinbayar L., ranger
Ganbataa Kh., ranger	Bunchindagva A., accountant***
Tunga S. cook., camp maintenance	Lkhagva B., camp maintenance

*\*\*\* since April 2017*

*\*\*\*\* since July 2017, employed by ITG*

Ranger Batsuuri B. was awarded the order of the **"Polar Star Medal"** by the president of Mongolia, honoring his long service.

During the anniversary conference held in Ulaanbaatar the Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism honored the **Prague Zoo** for its active support of the reintroduction of the Przewalski's horse.

