

Nr. 8 | December 2018

Nomads in the National Park: Does that work?



How do you operate a National Park which local nomads have been using as an important winter pasture for centuries? And what if their herds grow ever larger? Such questions we face up to. Jointly they can be solved.

Foto: Rebekka Blumer

Protect the primordial Wild Horse and its habitat.

Dear friends of the Wild Horse,



Since time immemorial the Dzungarian Gobi was herders' country. In summer the nomads of the region let their goats, sheep, horses and camels graze on the alps of the Mongolian Altai. This mighty mountain range extends along the north of the Dzungarian basin, a 9000 km² wide high plateau framed by mountains. Here, at an elevation of 1500 m above sea level, the nomads and their herds find shelter from the harsh Mongolian mountain winter. That's how it always was. That's how it still is. But today this same plain has become a preserve by the somewhat unwieldy name "Great Gobi B SPA (Strictly Protected Area)". It is not only a refuge for herds of livestock, but also for wildlife species that have become rare everywhere else. Species like the Takhi (Przewalski primordial wild horse) whose last free-ranging individuals were sighted precisely here before dying out – and which are trying to regain a foothold in the wild right here. Or thousands of Asiatic Wild Ass for which this very park has become the most important refuge world-wide. On top of that, Goitered Gazelles, wild sheep, ibex, many small mammals, about 100 bird species, not to forget the flora with many representatives occurring only here. Many good reasons for a National Park! And in the thick of it: 100 nomad families with 60'000 head of small livestock. Does that work at all? Are humans and wilderness not uncomfortably thwarting each other? Can they really co-exist peacefully?

Yes, says UNESCO which in 1991, together with the Mongolian government, listed the Gobi Strictly Protected Area as a biosphere reserve – the largest of its kind in Asia and fourth-largest world-wide. As a habitat of equal importance for both wildlife and traditional, extensive human use it perfectly matches their concept of a biosphere reserve.

Is everything good then? It's not that simple. For the nomads of the Dzungarian Gobi, too, carry iPads and smartphones today. And their cashmere goats stand squarely in the global market for finest natural fibers. No wonder the herds grow ever larger. No wonder they need ever more pasture. Can this end well? Some herders are worried that after one winter with too little rain or too much snow the pastures might not suffice.

How do you operate a Protected Area under such circumstances? These are questions we ponder at ITG. For we don't want to preserve the Takhi only, and not only the unique arrangement of species in this region, but also the equally unique, traditional way of life of the nomads. The Protected Area shall keep its value for them, even generate a new one – for instance through a gentle tourism that is compatible with the fragile ecosystem. If this works out, local families can earn a living through the preserve – and don't have to move to Ulaanbaatar. Then conservation will not become ostracism for them, but a joint venture. That isn't easy, as not all interests of humans and rare species harmonize. Clear rules are essential. But jointly – and only jointly – conflicts can be solved. That's what we engage for. Do you join in?

Dr. Reinhard Schnidrig, President of ITG

"We don't want to preserve the Takhi only, but also the traditional way of life of the nomads."



Foto: © N. Altansukh

Faces of conservation:

L. Galbadrakh and N. Ariunjargal, Herders

Beginning in the spring of 2018 Lena Michler has been doing field research in Takhintal and the surrounding regions. For the Takhi Post she interviewed Galbadrakh and his wife, Ariunjargal, giving voice to the herders affected directly by the reintroduction of the Takhi and the measures protecting the biodiversity of the Great Gobi B SPA.

Lena: How long have you been a herder in this region?

Galbadrakh: I have been a herder for almost 44 years. I have lived here since I was born.

Lena: What kind of animals do you herd and how many do you have?

Galbadrakh: Today we have 5 kinds of livestock, including 700 goats, 400 sheep, 25 horses, 2 or 3 camels and only 2 or 3 cows.

Lena: Do you have children who help you herding?

Galbadrakh: We have 4 children. Two of them are married and no longer live with us. One is a university student and one, our second son, lives with us now. He helps us with the livestock.

Lena: Do you think that this nomadic lifestyle will continue in the younger generation?

Galbadrakh: I think that our second son will continue living this way. I certainly hope so.

Ariunjargal: Yes, we will leave this all to our second son who is working with us already.

Lena: How often do you change your location and at which time of year are you inside the Great Gobi B strictly protected area?

Galbadrakh: We come to stay inside the protected area in September, and stay here until May, when we move to our higher summer location.

Lena: How do you feel about herding in the protected area?

Galbadrakh: Herding livestock in the protected area is not that simple. Somehow we try to keep the animals pasturing at a distance from the wildlife, using the borders of the park. We do that because we worry about rousing the wild animals from their spots and location.

Lena: Was it different before the Great Gobi B SPA was established in 1975?

Galbadrakh: Oh, I remember that there was a very harsh winter, a dzud, in 1975 and 1976, when the protected area was established. Today things have become much better. The situation is good since the rehabilitation of the region and reintroduction of the Takhi took place.

Ariunjargal: The situation has changed completely.

Lena: What is a typical year as a herder in this area like? When do you comb cashmere and shear the sheep? Do your children come and help you comb the cashmere? When do you cut the camel wool?

Galbadrakh: We usually comb the cashmere goats in April, starting on April 10th. We shear the sheep in late June and July and cut the camel wool in May. Our children come and help us during these busy periods.

Lena: When do you have the most work to do?

Galbadrakh: Spring is the busiest period, the time when the work is hardest, with newly born animals and the cashmere combing. Usually the combing of the goats for cashmere takes one month.

Ariunjargal: Animals are born beginning around March 15th. After that the combing of the goats begins.



Foto: Lena Michler

Lena: Which of your animals is the most important source of income?

Galbadrakh: It is the goat! Definitely the goat!

Ariunjargal: We have heard that the price of a kilo of cashmere will reach 120'000 to 130'000 tugrugs (SFr 48.00-52.00).

Lena: Do you see a lot of wildlife? Do you see takhi and khulans (wild ass)?

Galbadrakh: Yes, many! We see almost all of the wildlife in this area. We are proud to see these animals. We can see them because all of them drink here. Early in the morning, at dawn, they come to the water to drink. In the evening, at sunset, when it is so quiet, we see gazelles and khulans on the hill. If the dogs don't see them and chase them, the animals gather close together and drink. Then they just gallop and run down beyond our sheep pen, their hooves making an amazing sound. Around 1000 Khulans graze in this area.

Lena: What do you think about the reintroduction of the takhi?

Galbadrakh: I think that bringing them back was the right thing to do. Before, in earlier years, they used to live here. Now it is wonderful to see them back in their original home, safe and free.

Ariunjargal: This is such a good thing.

Lena: Do you often interact with the rangers of the protected area?

Galbadrakh: Oh, we see them quite often and talk about the takhi and the khulan drinking here. And we discuss other things.

Lena: How do you feel about more takhi living in this area?

Galbadrakh: It is very good and the right thing. We hope that this kind of work, reintroducing rare species to the wild nature, will continue in the future.

Ariunjargal: Yes, it is excellent work. We hope that they will keep doing it.

Lena: Is the grazing quality good enough for both herders and wildlife, considering the variability of precipitation in this region?

Galbadrakh: We feel that the quality of the grazing is getting lower and lower, year by year. Maybe this is because nature is itself slowly becoming endangered. It seems that things are now in their average condition, not good but not bad. If we have a lot of snow it is a challenge and a risk for both the animals and the herders. We have observed this situation over the last 2-3 years.



Foto: Lena Michler

Mr. L. Galbadrakh proudly takes part in Lena Michler's research. She develops co-management strategies for sustainable grazing and protected area management. Therefore, twenty goats are equipped with GPS collars to track their movement patterns over one year.

Targets for 2019: Questions to ITG¹

Rebekka Blumer, you are ITG's treasurer. Each year before Christmas I get piles of mail from all kinds of organizations. Why should I donate to ITG, of all those?



There are a few good reasons for that. First of all, conservation receives a surprisingly small proportion of charity – in Switzerland around 10%. Since we live on nature, why not set personal priorities differently? Secondly, donations to ITG benefit its programme without loss, as the entire Board works free of charge. Thirdly, by protecting the Dzungarian Gobi, we safeguard a UNESCO biosphere reserve and a unique habitat among the globally last largely intact steppe ecosystems. It's the refuge of various species occurring only here, yet known so little that we are only thinly financed. Fourthly, our work

can prove a spectacular success: the reintroduction of the Przewalski primordial wild horse (Takhi), a megafauna species formerly extinct in the wild. In its course we also provide local families with a living and support their traditional nomadic lifestyle, even within the national park. Do you need any more reasons, or can I now pass you a pay-in slip (laughing)?

Which targets have you set for 2019?

The fundamental tasks of ITG stay the same from year to year: park monitoring, data collection on the Takhi wild horses and project information. This requires, in addition to salaries for ITG staff in Ulaan Baatar and the rangers, various costs (see table) totaling around CHF/USD 90'000.- annually. For this we use the donations of our loyal donors of large and small sums for whom the conservation of the wild horses and their ecosystem matters, too. On this occasion I would like to thank them cordially once more for enabling us to continue this important conservation program.

You have been listing routine tasks. What other tasks do you envisage?

Routine tasks are the alpha and omega of any conservation project. They may not be spectacular, but they form the foundation without which nothing unfolds. Yet indeed there are additional jobs. This year we tackle the following six projects or plannings: the **3rd management workshop**, the **large mammal census 2020**, **research projects**, **water management** in the preserve, the **park extension** and the long-term goal of forming a **trans-frontier park network**.

In a workshop in Zürich Wilderness Park we will align research projects and ITG activities with the National Takhi Program of Mongolia and professionalize our field work and operational lead.

How should I imagine a large mammal census, and why is it needed?

The regular, systematic census of several species from defined observation points is an essential basis for wildlife management. It is masterminded by specialists of NINA (Norwegian Institute for Nature, Trondheim) and FIWI (Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology, Vienna). Preparations for 2020 must start next year to execute timely the laborious survey and cartography and recruit,

instruct and equip around 50 persons, among whom many volunteers. For these tasks we expect costs of CHF/USD 25'000.-

What kind of research do you do? Basic research or rather practice-driven?

Both. Meaningful wildlife management must be evidence-based, but many questions on Dzungarian Gobi ecosystem are unanswered. That's why last year we created a **research council** that shall be coordinated by the reputed wildlife biologist Dr. Petra Kaczensky. It shall supervise the implementation of 9 research projects agreed upon in 2017. As an example, a socio-economic study by Lena Michler shall provide fundamentals for the reconciliation of traditional land use and conservation of wilderness. Other examples include the monitoring of biodiversity, a study on infectious microbes at waterholes used by both wildlife and livestock, and genetic investigations of the Takhi. In 2019 we expect costs of at least CHF/USD 20'000.- for this.

And what is the purpose of water management?

The Great Gobi B preserve is desertlike. Water use thus requires care. We would like to supply the ranger camp in Takhin tal with potable water from the well drilled in 2016, and the sanitary installations with running water. Because of the enormous temperature variability in the Gobi (+50° C to –50° C) this is very challenging. At present the Swiss architect Guido Doppler is in the (free-of-charge) planning process. Moreover, we need a concept for using Bij river, natural springs and (where it makes sense) artificial waterholes for wildlife along migration routes. This will require costs of at least CHF/USD 65'000.-

You were mentioning a trans-frontier park network. What is it about?

Large steppe mammals need a lot of space to follow variable resources. That's why ITG would like to first expand the protected area in the Dzungarian Gobi and, as a long-term goal, connect through migration corridors the Great Gobi B and Great Gobi A preserves in Mongolia and the Kalamaili nature preserve in China. This would create one of the largest protected area networks globally. For the political and logistical evaluations in Mongolia and China we need stamina, for there are substantial competing interests, most notably the exploration for mineral resources. Since a first consultation on a 9'000 km² extension of the preserve was supported by local province councils and approved by the Mongolian government on 6 September, we expect it to be debated in the national Parliament this winter. Keep your fingers crossed for us!



Through the park extension the Great Gobi B preserve (lowermost pale green area) would be enlarged by the zone dashed in yellow. The black line is a provincial border, the red line is the border with China.

Interview: Ki

"Conservation receives a surprisingly small proportion of charity – in Switzerland around 10%. Since we live on nature, why not set personal priorities differently?"

New solar well in Takhin Us

At the key waterhole Takhin Us there is a borehole. In 2016 we erected a new accommodation enclosure here to strengthen the western takhi population. This year the firm Solar Tech LLC, Ulaanbaatar, built in a new solar pump. In addition, the borehole water is now being collected in a newly erected well house. From there it flows into a well in the new enclosure and also into a pond outside, allowing wildlife and in winter livestock herds of the nomads to quench their thirst.



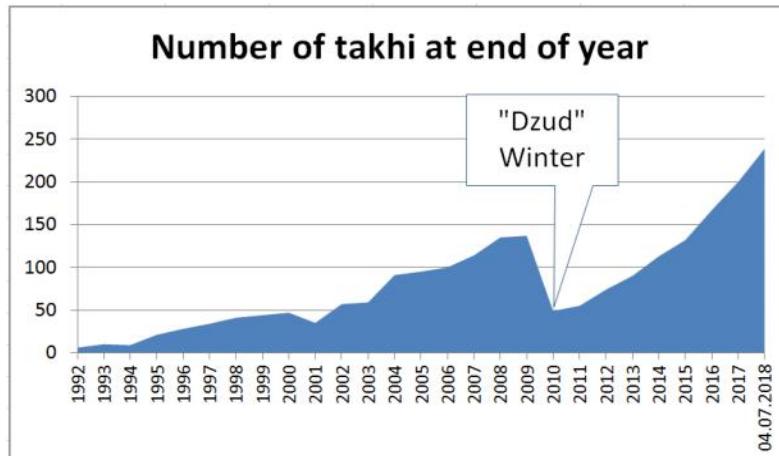
Cool water splashes into the well in the new accommodation enclosure. Mind you, the beer cans are not meant for the wild horses...



Park director O. Ganbaatar (second from left) with the happy team of solar technicians and rangers standing by the well house in which the borehole water is stored. On the far right is Stefan Schomann, who writes a takhi report for Terra Mater magazine.

What ITG will be working on in 2019

Activity	Financial needs
Baseline work (park and wild horses monitoring; operation of ranger camp and ITG Mongolia office; information/ communication; operation of patrol vehicles; emergency hay; maintenance of solar wells, equipment, and accommodation enclosures).	CHF/USD 90'000.-
Preparation of large mammal census 2020	CHF/USD 25'000.-
Research projects	min. CHF/USD 20'000.-
Water management in the preserve	min. CHF/USD 65'000.-
Park extension and trans-frontier park network	To be determined



In 2018 the headcount of takhi in the preserve has reached a new peak of 235 individuals.

Join hands with us!

Should you, dear reader, feel inspired to also support our program with deeds (web design, communication, developmental aid, construction work, project management,...), please just reach out to ITG (info@savethewildhorse.ch). Our somewhat older team volunteering their time to wild horses and their

ecosystems would be grateful for energetic support. Bring in your ideas and energy. There is always something to do for the conservation of the Gobi – be it as Board Member or from outside the Board. Plus... see Takhin Tal with your own eyes and stay there for free. It's part of the package!

Mongolian support for the takhi

So far the majority of donors who help to finance the reintroduction of takhi in Mongolia live in Europe. To also establish understanding for our concern in Mongolia, an ITG delegation this summer visited numerous authorities, firms, tourism companies and foundations. Through the “Friends of the Takhi” in Mongolia we are now also gaining valuable local help. Supporters include reputed personalities such as B. Davaa, best herder of Gobi-Altai province, N. Burged, Chairman of Altai Soum’s Citizens’ Representatives Khural, B. Altangerel, Deputy Governor of Altai Soum, D. Baatarsuren, Head of the Altai Soum Governor’s office, M. Erdenesuren, Governor of Barlag Bag, Dr. J. Sergelenhuu, Ecologist of the Mongolian Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Alfred Naef, co-owner of Chinggis Beer Brewery, and Ch. Gantulga, Director of Khors Autoservice LLC.

New supporters also include the firms Nomadic Journeys and Nomin Holding LLC. Nomadic Journeys is one of the oldest tourism providers of Mongolia. Led by Mrs. S. Manduhai and in collaboration with international and local travel vendors, communities and conservation groups, the company has been offering environment-friendly adventure trips since 1993, attracting more than 1000 tourists to Mongolia each year.

Nomin Holding LLC is one of the largest companies of Mongolia and active in trade, production, services and in the finance sector. Board Member, Company Council and horse enthusiast Prof. Dr. A. Shagdarsuren named this year’s first foal of the Ajna harem „Nomin“.

Foal sponsorships were entered into by Dugar Ganbold, Director of Deepsurvey, Stefan Duppel and family, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Mongolia, and Elisabeth Hurlen and Fredrik Strøm from Norway.

ITG is thrilled about the assistance from individuals, companies and foundations, and extends its sincere thanks to them all.



Chultem Gantulga (middle right) loaned a truck to ITG during the Dzud Winter 2009/2010 for our emergency hay transport. He also annually donates to ITG 500'000 Tugrik (CHF 200.-) in the form of gasoline! Far left and right: Batsukh Jamyandorj and Enkhsaikhan Namtar (ITG Mongolia). Middle left: Rebekka Blumer (ITG Board).



“Nomin”, the first 2018 foal of Ajna Harem, was named by Prof. Dr. Ambayar Shagdarsuren (left), Board Member of Nomin Holding LLC, pictured here with Enkhsaikhan Namtar.



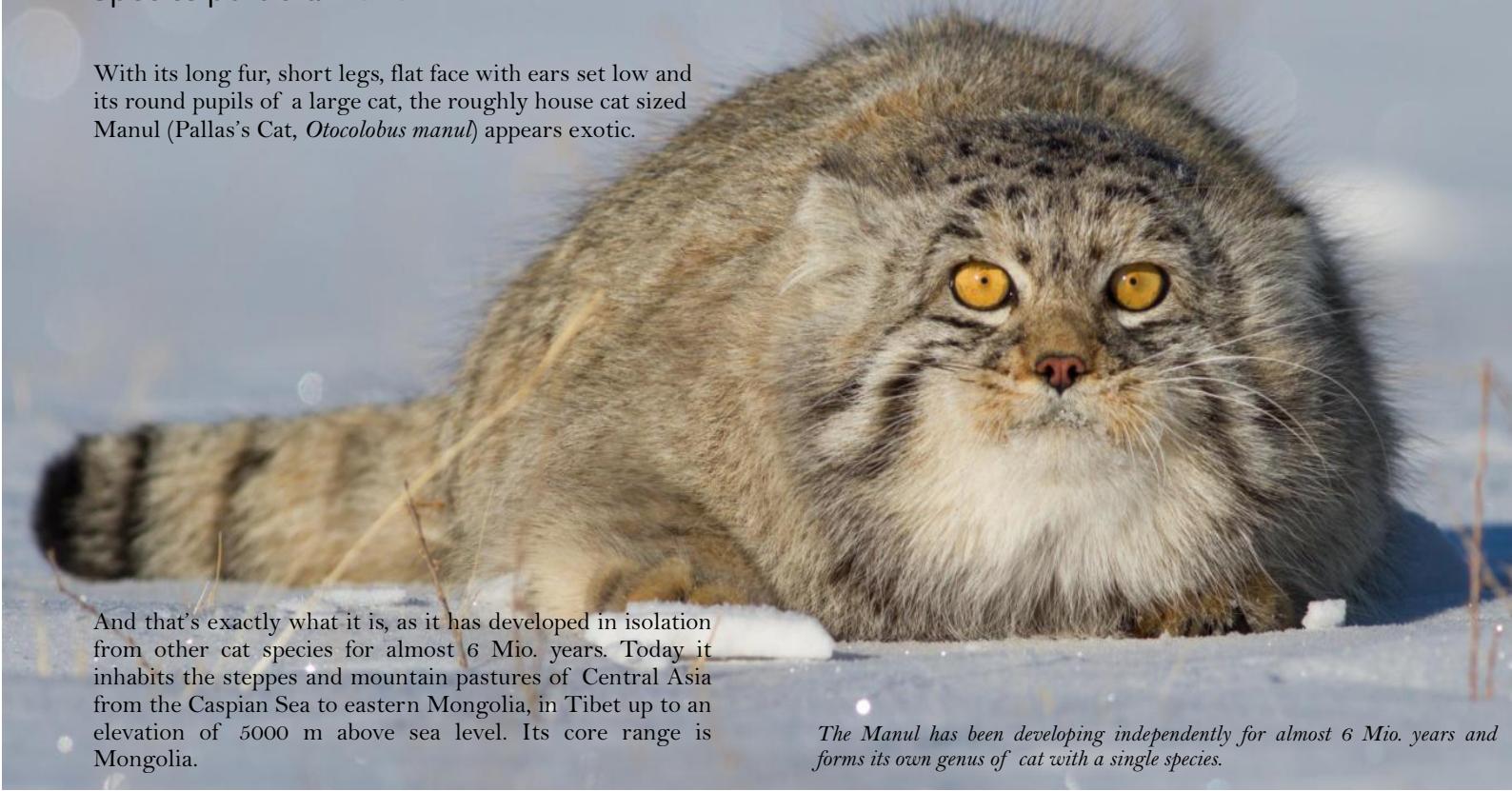
Through the “Friends of the Takhi” in Mongolia we are now also gaining valuable local support.



The first Mongolian firm to join the „Friends of the Takhi“ was Nomadic Journeys. Led by Mrs. Manduhai Sukhbaatar it offers environment-friendly tourism.

Species portrait: Manul

With its long fur, short legs, flat face with ears set low and its round pupils of a large cat, the roughly house cat sized Manul (Pallas's Cat, *Otocolobus manul*) appears exotic.



And that's exactly what it is, as it has developed in isolation from other cat species for almost 6 Mio. years. Today it inhabits the steppes and mountain pastures of Central Asia from the Caspian Sea to eastern Mongolia, in Tibet up to an elevation of 5000 m above sea level. Its core range is Mongolia.

As a small carnivore it is itself prey of larger carnivores and birds of prey, and thus needs good cover. That's rare in the steppe. Therefore, the Manul depends on marmot burrows, rocky outcrops and other hideaways. Its population density is very low everywhere. Even optimal habitat in Mongolia only supports 2-6 individuals per 100 km². Correspondingly much space is required for protecting this unique, secretive species, about which very little is known with certainty.

In contrast, with certainty the Manul needs protection; for the increase in the grazing of ever larger areas by ever larger herds of livestock as well as the exploration for mineral resources are displacing this shy cat from its core habitat¹.

Foto: © Otgonbayar Baatargal 2018



The Manul has been developing independently for almost 6 Mio. years and forms its own genus of cat with a single species.

Today, persecution, herding dogs and other carnivores are the main cause of its mortality².

In Mongolia alone about 2000 Manuls annually are shot for their fur, not counting those trapped. An additional problem for the species is that its main prey species – pikas, gerbils, voles and other rodents – are being persecuted through pest control programs and poisoned baits, depriving it of its key food resource.

Based on sparse data IUCN estimates its remaining population size at 15'000 individuals³, spread over 2.3 Mio. km² (an area half the size of the EU). It categorizes the Manul as near-threatened, with decreasing trend, possibly as vulnerable, and lists it in CITES Appendix II, demanding trading controls. Nevertheless, it is not protected in Mongolia – in contrast to all other nations of its range, in none of which it can be hunted legally.

There are only very few Manuls in zoos, and these steppe and high-altitude cats are not easy to keep healthy. Although they do mate in captivity, almost half the offspring die within the first 30 days, often due to infections. Thus, we are very far from offering this species a safe haven in a zoo ark. The biologist couple Baatargal, founders of the "Steppe Wildlife Conservation and Research Center", documents and protects this unique cat species in south-eastern Mongolia (Sukhbaatar province) – a hopeful starting point.

¹ Selles, H. 2013. The relative impact of countries on global natural resource consumption and ecological degradation. International Journal of Sustainable Development World Ecology 20: 97-108.

² Ross, S. 2009. Providing an ecological basis for the conservation of the Pallas's cat (*Otocolobus manul*). University of Bristol.

³ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/>, Zugriff 16.10.2018

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/USD 20.-

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



CHF/USD 60.-

You fill the gasoline tank of a patrol vehicle.



CHF/USD 100.-

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



CHF/USD 150.-

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CHF/USD 250.-

You contribute to supplying our Takhi tal ranger camp with running water.



CHF/USD 500.-

You enable the ranger patrols of one month.

You help to finance the ranger training for the large mammals census in 2020.

Join the 'Friends of the Wild Horse'!

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

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

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

Donation account

Aargauische Kantonalbank
CH-5001 Aarau

Account number (IBAN): CH07 0076 1016 0117 6052 3

Account 50-6-9

Beneficiary: Friends of the Wild Horse

Impressum

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