

ITG- International Takhi Group

Association for the re-introduction and conservation of
the Przewalski's horse (takhi) in Central Asia

Annual Report 2019



ITG - International Takhi Group
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The President's Preface

Biodiversity is shrinking at an alarming rate worldwide due to the loss of appropriate environment caused by human activity, through destruction and overuse, in many places also through pollution and invasive species, brought in by man. Thus, the creation or expansion of protected areas is always a ray of hope for friends of nature.

What a tremendous joy is was for our whole ITG-team and our partners in the Mongolian Ministry of the Environment that the Great Chural, the Mongolian parliament decided on May 2, 2019 to double the size of the Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area! Huge additional areas to the East and West are now under protection, allowing the park to include for the first time the entire area which the wild horses have used and completing it with valuable habitats: steppes, semi-deserts, forests of Saxaul and mountain pastures. A tremendous win for nature conservation!

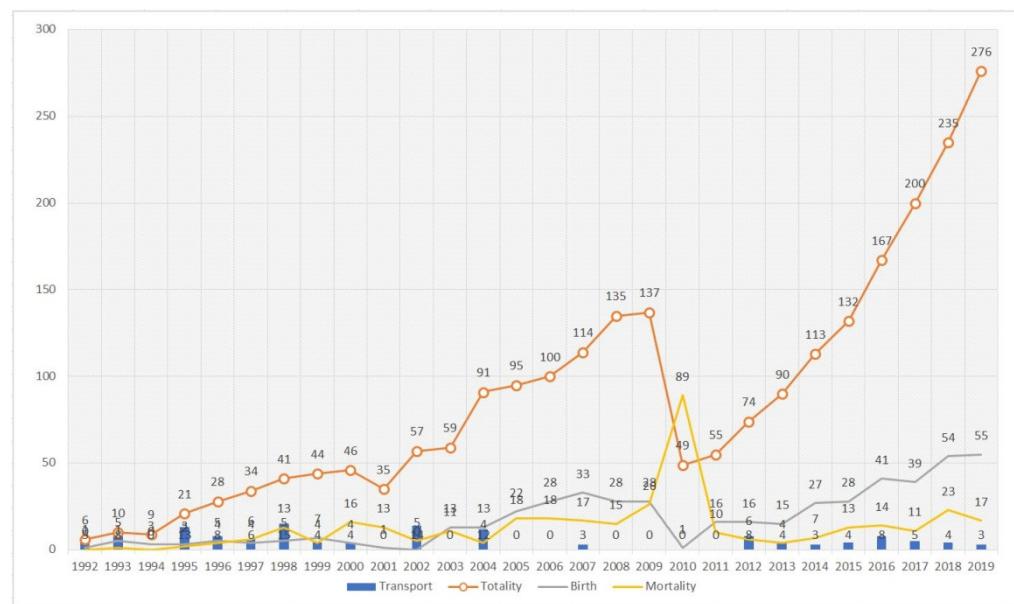
Whoever follows the work of ITG will realize how important this decision was to us. Many years of work, many discussions and a long waiting period of hoping finally paid off. The result is by no means to be taken for granted. Although the huge expanse of Mongolia may allow more generous solutions than the heavily populated countries of Europe, even here the local communities are affected by such plans. Even here the protection of nature is in direct competition with economic interests, from the herding of cashmere goats to mining. Arguably such decisions also open new opportunities for the local inhabitants, for example in the development of ecologically sound tourism. Even untouched nature has a value, both ideal and economic. The act of the Great Chural is significant for other decision-makers in the whole world who must weigh the protection of intact ecosystems of international importance against other possible uses. The fact that the Great Gobi B is conceived as a biosphere reserve, in which both nature and the local population can develop in harmony, side by side, may have made this bold decision easier.

In the name of ITG I want to thank the Great Chural and congratulate its members for their farsightedness. We of ITG will now continue to do our best and to help make use of this excellent opportunity for the effective protection of an still undisturbed ecosystem.



The takhi in the UNESCO-Biosphere reserve of the Great Gobi in Mongolia

At the end of 2019, 276 takhi lived in the reserve, including 55 foals. Seventeen animals died in that year. In the summer of 2019 Elushka and Alpha, a 2-year-old mare and a one-year-old stallion, wandered off to the east outside of the reserve. The rangers watched this movement and reported regularly on the location of the two "explorers". After a few weeks the two takhi stayed in the region of a group of domesticated horses which belonged to a ranger in the team of GGB. In the late fall the ranger herded the domesticated horses towards takhin tal. The two takhi followed independently. Thus it was possible to lead the two "escapees" back to the fenced in area used to acclimatize the takhi on arrival from Europe, to form a harem with those from Europe, to be let free in the spring of 2020. The story of the two adventurous takhi shows that wild animals will not stay within the park borders and plans must be worked out to trace such movements of the takhi in the future with the use of GPS collars.

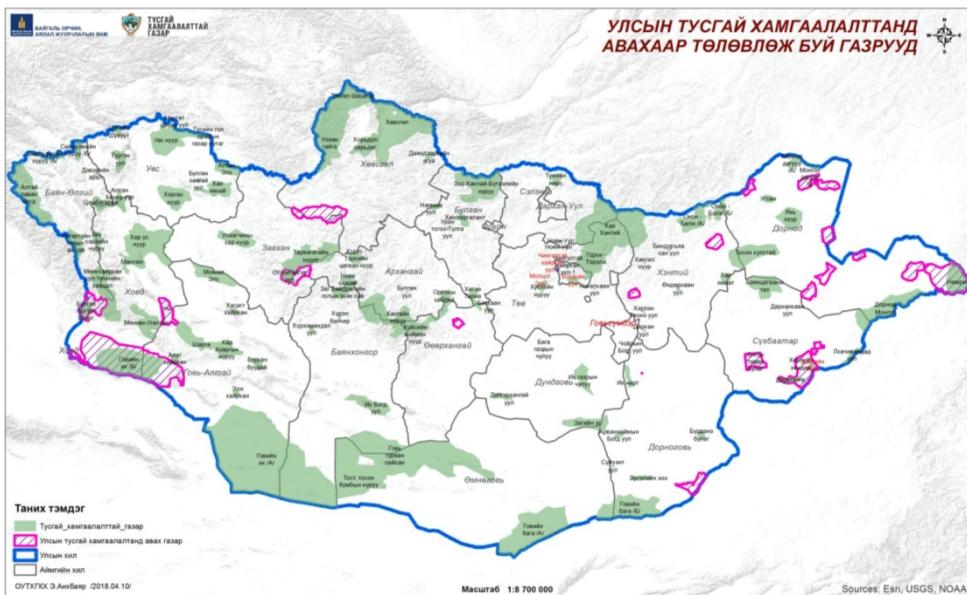


Development of the Number of takhi in the Great Gobi B SPA until the end of 2019

In the spring the group of takhi which stayed in the enclosure in takhin tal during the winter and the four mares which had been transported from Europe in 2018 were set free without any problems. Again in June the Prague Zoo transported three wild horses from European zoos and parks to takhin tal with the help of the air force of the Czech Republic. The newcomers were selected according to the studbook of the European Endangered Species Programme (EEP). The takhi came from the Prague Zoo, from Dobrejow and from the bison enclosure Springe in Germany. This group will be let free in the spring of 2020.

The ITG together with Park Director Ganbaatar Oyunsaikhan has for many years worked actively for the enlargement of the protected area in the Mongolian-Dzungarian Gobi, with the families of nomads in the region, the communities there, the provinces of Khovd and Gobi-Altai and, of course, with the national administration and the national parliament. May 2, 2019, was the great day, the day on which the Great Chural, the national parliament, placed an additional 9'000 km² under strict protection and thus extended the area of the

park to 18'000 km². With this decision huge, valuable steppes and semi-desert habitat used by the wild horses are integrated into the strictly protected area. The decision was possible only thanks to the pragmatic approach in the out-zoning and the tireless persuasive work of Director Ganbaatar in the region.



The Ministry for the Environment and Tourism MET requires of all national reserves in Mongolia the writing and periodic reworking of a management plan. The first management plan for the GGB was made in 2011. Together with the park administration ITG evaluated in 2018 the strengths and weaknesses of this plan and based on that study worked out a new plan for the Ministry. At the ITG-workshop in the Langenberg Park in January 2019 the draft of this plan was discussed, amended and completed by the ITG board, representatives of the ministry and the director of GGB SPA, after which the new management plan was finished and submitted to the ministry. The new management plan is excellent. Until 2023, it is the basis of the activities of those working in the park, but also of the allocation of the funding of the ITG.

In the summer of 2019 and after years of planning, the park house of GGB was modernized under the direction of Rebekka Blumer and under the on-site supervision of Batsukh Jamiyandorj, manager of the ITG office in Mongolia. Most importantly, running water was brought from the steppe into the building, for cooking, washing, the toilets and showers. Let us look back: in 2005, thanks to donations from the Austrian Ministry of Food and ITG, the national park house in takhin tal was built. This houses the administration of the park, a laboratory of scientific studies, offices for the rangers, a kitchen and a large dining room. From the beginning dung was used to heat the only two rooms that could be heated. Water had to be delivered with a cistern wagon. Thanks to the drilling of a well in 2016, paid for by the development aid of the Czech Republic and the Prague Zoo, water could be gotten about 570 meters from the house. The water still had to be transported to the house in cannisters.

Finally in 2019, the project for the long-awaited total renewal of the water and energy provision system was completed, thanks to funding of a Swiss foundation. The following major work was also done:

The building of a pumphouse and the installation of a new, solar-powered pump at the well; laying of water pipes from the pumphouse to the park house; reuse of an existing room as bathroom with one toilet, one washbowl and one shower for men, one shower for women; installation of a waste-water system; installation of a new solar power station; replacement of the outhouse; increase in the energy efficiency through new windows, insulation of the walls and ceilings, additional modern heaters.



The renovation and extension of the park house in takhin tal results in major advantages for the care of the protected area and the wild horses as well as life in the camp. Thanks to the new solar system, the supply of energy is more stable and allows several people at once to work on their laptop. The director and the rangers appreciate the exchange with ITG via telephone conferences, now possible on a regular basis. Too, the collaboration between the department in Ulaanbaatar responsible for the protected areas functions smoothly electronically. In addition, the yurts of two ranger families and the three research yurts have electricity. The reconstruction of the energy system means not only the burning of less material; the new heaters produce less CO2. The biological waste treatment and the new outhouses are up to the modern, ecological standards expected today of the infrastructure of a nature protection site. The new sanitary installations, the running water and the larger kitchen all increase tremendously the quality of life and the working situation of the rangers. Researchers and tourists will also appreciate these comforts. Income for the park can now be generated through stays by tourists with a clear conscience. All of the work was done by Mongolian firms, with the strong support of the rangers. The Swiss architect Guido Doppler planned not only the original park house but also helped again without pay with the concept and building plans of the renovation. A Mongolian architect added the local point of view.

ITG is proud of the ecological solution reached in an environment which is climatically demanding, with temperature differences from plus 50° to minus 50° centigrade. And ITG is convinced that with the realization of the house-renovation the living and working conditions of the park administration and the rangers in the Great Gobi B SPA and the attractiveness of the park as place of employment especially for younger people have been greatly improved.

Cooperation with politics and research

In Mongolia ITG works under the roof of a contract with the Ministry of the Environment and Tourism MET and keeps up a regular exchange with the officials there. In the fall of 2019 the president of ITG was able to renew those contacts with friends and collaborators in many groups and committees during a visit to Ulaanbaatar.

The three projects for the reintroduction of the takhi in Mongolia – Hustai Nuuru, Khomyn tal, takhin tal -now meet regularly to exchange information. In 2019 the three projects finished writing a joint program for the conservation of the wild horse in Mongolia and submitted it to the Ministry of the Environment and Tourism MET, after which it must be approved by the parliament.

Ever since the visit of the ITG president to the officials in the neighboring Chinese province Xinjiang in 2015 ITG with Prague Zoo are trying to organize the transport of five takhi stallions to the Chinese stud station Jimsar, north of Urumqi. Unfortunately, administrative hurdles have delayed the realization of this undertaking in 2019. The collaboration of ITG with China is of great strategic importance because four-fifths of the immense Dzungarian Basin is in Xinjiang. In addition, China is very active in the conservation and reintroduction of the wild horse. However, the political debate about the treatment of the Chinese central government of the ethnic Uiguren in Xinjiang makes contact and visits across the border difficult at the moment.

In September 2019, at the invitation of the Mongolian government, the third CAMI workshop (Central Asian Mammal Initiative, part of the Convention for the Protection of Migrating Species CMS) took place in Ulaanbaatar. There representatives of the fourteen CAMI states and the secretariat of the convention developed a continuing perennial work program, which will be presented to the conference of the contract states of the CMS for approval. The ITG president, in his role as focal point for the wild horse, took part in the workshop, along with the young takhi-researcher Dalaitseren of the Mongolian ITG-team. Together with representatives of the reintroduction projects of Khomyn Tal and Hustai Nuruu, they set up an ambitious activity program for the preservation and promotion of the takhi in all of Central Asia.

The priorities in the research program which were set during the ITG workshop in 2017 were followed in 2019. For 2019 the focal point was without doubt the field work of Lena Michler in connection with her PhD thesis. The goal of Lena's work is the development of an appropriate management strategy for the collaboration of the local herders and the management of the protected area, so that the ecological system there including the habitat of the wild animals as well as the nomadic way of life in and around the protected area can be maintained. Lena lived from the spring of 2019 until almost the end of the year in Takhintal. A high point of her work was a workshop with rangers, herders and researchers from Europe and Mongolia over several days about sustainable pasture use.



The publics' information

Information about the activities of the Association ITG can be found on our website www.savethewildhorse.org, our information brochures and the Takhi-Post in German, English and Mongolian. The Takhi-Post of May 2019 appeared under the motto "Thank you, Great Chural". The issue in November was dedicated to the topic of wilderness. In addition, members of the board of ITG speak regularly with journalists of newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

The association ITG

At the end of 2019 the Association ITG is comprised of four organizations (Stiftung Wildnispark Zurich Langenberg, Wildpark Bruderhaus Winterthur, Prague Zoo, Zoo Nurnberg) and ten people, who also form the board of ITG (Reinhard, Schnidrig, president; Christian Stauffer, vice president; Rebekka Blumer, treasurer; Ruth Baumgartner, secretary; Sven Hoffmann, legal advisor; Anita Fahrni, member; Miroslav Bobek, representative of Prague Zoo; Jaroslav Šimek, representative of Prague Zoo; Purevsuren Lundeg, representative of the Mongolian government as Ambassador of Mongolia in Switzerland). Thomas Pfisterer, the ITG honorary president, is invited as a guest to all board meetings.

In 2019, during one workshop, three meetings and several informal meetings the board discussed the following topics:

- Collaboration with the national and provincial political offices and responsible institutions in Mongolia.
- Renewal of the management plan for the protected areas in the Gobi
- Monitoring of the takhi population living free in the Gobi
- Transport of takhi from Europe to the protected area to be released.
- Research priorities and support of research
- Collaboration with the other two reintroduction projects in Mongolia
- Maintenance and continued development of the infrastructure in the protected area in the Gobi
- Development of the ITG office and its activities in Ulaanbaatar.

In May 2018 the general assembly elected Mr. Batsansar Chilkhaajav as a member of the board representing the government of Mongolia. He is director of the Department of Protected Areas in Mongolia, in the Ministry of the Environment and Tourism MET. At the beginning of 2019 Mr. Chilkhaajav changed his position, so that the general assembly in 2019 could not reelect him to the board. Herr Purevsuren Lundeg, Ambassador of Mongolia to Switzerland, has taken his place as representative of the Mongolian government.

The ITG board decided to increase the staff of the office in Ulaanbaatar. In October 2019 Ms. Khandam Tserenjav began her work for us as assistant in marketing.

ITG is supported financially by the Association “Friends of the Takhi”. The loyal group of about 250 members has made the continual work of ITG possible with their donations for the past 20 years. All of the board members of ITG and the Association “Friends of the Takhi” work without pay.

Finances

ITG received contributions from members, donations, and the support of foundations for a total of CHF. 79'145. We are grateful for the major contributions from the Jean-Pierre and Sonja Siegfried Foundation, the Temperatio Foundation and the Benevolent Foundation Jeanne Lovioz. Too, the “Friends of the Wild Horse” provided a major contribution. Prague Zoo provides with generous direct investments in the protected area an important contribution to the realization of mutually planned activities.

Money was invested in the management of the protected area, the monitoring of the takhi and in research. Due to the very high investments to the improvement of the infrastructure of the park house, the association ITG ends the year with an expenditure surplus of CHF 83'981. At the end of the fiscal year, the available funds are CHF 28'925.

Reinhard Schnidrig, President

