

Nr. 12 | August 2020

## At the pace of the steppe.



*The reintroduction of the takhi is a huge success in conservation – yet this precious species continues to depend on our support. With it, we help preserve the entire Gobi ecosystem, represented here by Asiatic Wild Asses.*

Let's protect the primordial Wild Horse and its habitat.

## Dear Friends of the Wild Horse



For the first time we circulate a summer edition of the Takhi Post – albeit a short version for cost reasons. As you can see, our commitment doesn't abate even in extraordinary times. Our vision takes endurance. If the Primordial Wild Horse – saved from extinction by a hairbreadth only – shall survive as a truly wild species, it will need our care today and for many years to come. And that means support precisely in difficult times: when a blizzard – or dzud – freezes over the Gobi, when drought threatens to dry up the waterholes or when a sandstorm rips through the steppe. And also when a corona virus paralyzes and frightens mankind's world.

In the steppe only those survive who are prepared against all odds and know how to blend into its rhythm. Wild asses and gazelles can do that; they have millennia of experience living in the wild. The takhi no longer do. Their traditional knowledge must be rebuilt over generations. Not even 30 years have elapsed since ITG released the first naive zoo-born takhi into the Great Gobi B preserve.

This spring their number has cracked the mark of 300 individuals. That's a huge success, and yet the future of this precious species of wildlife remains precarious for as long as it hasn't built sufficient resilience towards the greatest risks. Those risks include shortness of water and blizzards, but also overgrazing and the transmission of pathogens from livestock.

Still, the rare Primordial Wild Horse needs us conservationists to recognize such dangers in time and develop counter-strategies. To implement these we need financial resources. Especially in difficult times. To cope with our budget tasks in this extraordinary corona year, we still need about 30'000 Dollars. May I count on your help?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Schnidrig".

Dr. Reinhard Schnidrig, President, ITG

**Caution, you are entering a newly protected area...**

In May 2019 the Mongolian Parliament doubled the size of the protected area B in the Great Gobi biosphere reserve to a total of 18'000 km<sup>2</sup>. With this far-sighted decision it didn't only put key wintering grounds for Khulan (Asiatic wild asses), takhi and gazelles under protection; it also added

*Photo: © Uli Rutz*



*The 14 new jobs for additional rangers needed to protect the extended preserve will provide the local population with much needed income.*

mountain habitat of Argali wild sheep, Siberian capricorn and snow leopards, among others. Yet for ages these regions have also been used by humans who are substantially affected by the strict rules of the preserve. Luckily, the majority of local herders support the park extension because it protects them from activities threatening their traditional way of life – such as prospecting for mineral resources. Nevertheless, they of course need to know what changes will result for them from the park extension – and where the park boundaries are now. Following a survey of the new line of the border, we must mark it in the field with 100 demarcation posts and 20 information boards. Moreover, an information campaign for the population affected is indispensable. Half of the cost of these actions (USD 10'000.-) will be borne by the **Jean-Pierre and Sonja Siegfried Foundation** (Basel, Switzerland), which will also finance half the cost of USD 10'000.- required for training the 14 additional rangers. These are being trained by ITG in cooperation with the Park Administration and its office in Ulaanbaatar. For their equipment the rangers also need field glasses, cameras, compasses, GPS devices, tents, sleeping bags, notepads, writing materials, and even motorbikes and cars. For all these activities and materials we depend on donations. Any donation of money or equipment is welcome!

**"Wild asses and gazelles have millennia of experience living in the wild.  
The takhi no longer do."**



Photo: Dalaitsuren Sukhbaatar

## Shortage of pasture in the oasis?

According to both the local herdsmen and rangers, the winter 2019/2020 was good: there was sufficient precipitation and there were no extreme weather events. The intense monitoring of the numbers of Wild Horses in the preserve documented that between December 2019 and early March 2020 the area around the Khonin us oasis in the East of the park was being grazed by 188 takhi (68% of the population at the time) as well as around 40 camels. Sporadically, some Primordial Wild Horses in the surroundings of the oasis were in poor condition at the time, which might be a warning sign for an overuse of the respective pasture.

Whether this hypothesis is correct or other causes (notably disease) are responsible – and why only singular, mostly young or old individuals were affected – could only be verified through a medical investigation of the respective takhi. In any case, however, this observation underscores the need to better understand the water balance and the vegetation cycles of the park, including the newly protected areas. Only such an investigation will allow defining a carrying limit for grazing and developing a strategy for sustainable use.

Since both the number of takhi and that of livestock of nomadic herdsmen are on the increase (the latter traditionally using the biosphere reserve as wintering grounds), it is important to pay attention to this aspect early on. ITG has initiated respective research projects. They include a study on optimizing the water management, which will create, among other data, a hydrological inventory of the water bodies of both the Great Gobi B and the Alagkhairkhan mountain reserve, including a comprehensive chemical and microbiological analysis (mainly financed by the **Federal Office of the Swiss Development Cooperation in Mongolia**). Moreover, the grazing strategies in the park are being scientifically analyzed (an activity financed by **Temperatio Foundation** since 2018). ITG contributes additional weather stations, for which we are trying to raise USD 15'000.

## Steppe ungulate count postponed

For this fall, a count of steppe ungulates was planned to take place in the Great Gobi B preserve (as we reported in the penultimate newsletter). In view of the high risk to get stranded in a corona quarantine, the ITG Board unanimously decided to postpone both this project and a conservation workshop in Takhin tal, also planned for this year, by one year.

## Mining concessions stopped

Since mid-December 2019 the Mongolian state has put a 12-month hold on further concessions for mineral exploration. As per the government's press office, this ban shall support the government's efforts to create responsible mining. At present there are 2'889 active licenses for mining. A 40-member working group led by Mongolian Deputy Prime Minister Ulziisaikhan Enkhtuvshin is examining these. More than 700 mining licenses have been revoked over the past three years due to the violation of laws and rules.



Photo: Dalaitsuren Sukhbaatar

*Illegal mine in the Great Gobi B preserve. Such exploration activities lead to destruction of habitat and disturbance of the fauna; moreover, they are often associated with poaching. Effective surveillance is indispensable in the vast preserve – as is suitable equipment.*



*Weather station provided by ITG for measuring precipitation and other parameters. Its data shall both contribute to optimizing water management in the preserve and secure a sustainable grazing management of the biosphere reserve in the longer term.*

For establishing a sustainable grazing regime, it is essential to better understand the hydrology and vegetation cycles.

Together, let's secure the future of the primordial Wild Horse.



„Thanks to your support we can not only secure the future of the Primordial Wild Horse as a unique species of wildlife – we can also protect its habitat and provide new perspectives to the local people.“

Altansuh Nanjid, economist and wildlife ranger, Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area

That's how your donation helps us – many thanks!

### CHF/USD 50.-

You help to mark the border of the new park extension.

### CHF/USD 75.-

You contribute to purchasing weather stations for optimizing pasture management.

### CHF/USD 100.-

You take part in sharing the cost of the newly hired rangers' personal equipment.

### CHF/USD 200.-

You help to educate and train the newly hired rangers.



Any other amount also contributes to conserve this unique species of wildlife, as well as the flora and fauna of the Central Asian steppe in general.

*Photo: © Cyril Ruoso*

### 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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