



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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Wildlife conference makes enhanced commitment to the conservation of Central Asian Saiga Antelope

Convention on Migratory Species meets in Nairobi 20-25 November

Nairobi, 25 November - A Memorandum of Understanding for the conservation and management of the Saiga Antelope (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*) was concluded today at the 8th meeting of the conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi.

The Saiga antelope is found in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and the Russian Federation. The new Memorandum of Understanding, and associated action plan for the subspecies, covers the Central Asian populations in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia.

Saiga populations numbered over 1 million as recently as the early 1990s, but have now been reduced to no more than 40,000; they are now recognized as endangered by the IUCN (World Conservation Union). Their drastic decline is due to poaching for illegal trade in horns (for Asian medicine markets), uncontrolled hunting for meat, habitat destruction, and obstacles to migration. The primary threat is over hunting.

Today, the agreement and action plan were agreed to by Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and formally signed by Turkmenistan's Minister of Nature Protection, other ministers will sign in the coming days. The agreement was signed as well by the Mongolian Minister of Environment, IUCN, WWF International and the CMS Secretariat.

The action plan now commits the governments and cooperating organizations to the recovery of the species' populations through Central Asia. An alliance of signatory states, CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), CMS, and non-governmental organizations including WWF, and local communities will work together on a number of conservation efforts, including setting up a monitoring programme. These animals undertake seasonal migrations from summer pastures in steppe grassland to winter pastures in desert areas. A regional conservation plan and strategy to be implemented at an international level will now enhance transboundary cooperation and exchange of information.

The action plan commits governments and partners to enhance enforcement and anti-poaching efforts, along with public education and work with local communities, to reduce poaching and illegal trade. Restoring the Saiga's habitat throughout its entire range is also a priority of the Action Plan agreed by the governments—including establishment of new protected areas. During their seasonal migrations they face serious obstacles such as irrigation channels and roads.

CMS Executive Secretary Robert Hepworth said: "This agreement and action plan will effectively help to protect the Saiga. Restoring its habitats is a first step to increase its scattered populations. The collaboration between regional and international organisations, government authorities, local communities and our partners who implement the ambitious project is a promising approach as it comes to implementing a comprehensive conservation strategy."

"Urgent transboundary cooperation is needed to ensure the conservation of this species. We applaud the action of governments today—to work together to benefit both the Saiga antelope and local communities who share its habitat", said Dr Susan Lieberman, Director of the WWF International Global Species Programme.

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