



# Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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## PRESS RELEASE

### Priority Action Kicks Off for the Antelope from the Eurasian Steppes

Astana/Bonn, 21 February – Representatives of wildlife management authorities in Kazakhstan and experts came together 17-18 February in central Kazakhstan to discuss the implementation of the CMS Memoranda of Understanding on the Saiga Antelope (*Saiga* spp.) and the Bukhara Deer (*Cervus elaphus bactrianus*). The objectives of the Astana workshop convened by the Committee of Forestry and Hunting of the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan and the UNEP/CMS Secretariat, was to set up the technical coordination for the Saiga Memorandum (MoU), to agree priority activities for saiga conservation in Kazakhstan and to assess the current status of Bukhara Deer populations.

Leading up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the CMS Conference of the Parties, the meeting explored opportunities for action under the CMS Eurasian Aridlands Mammals initiative, pilot projects for further development of the initiative in the region and potential new species listings under the Convention.

At the meeting the UNEP/CMS Secretariat concluded an agreement with two environmental NGOs, which at the last Meeting of Signatories to the Saiga MoU in Ulaanbaatar offered to jointly provide technical support for the coordination of the Saiga Antelope MoU. Under this arrangement, the Association of the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK) and the Saiga Conservation Alliance (SCA) will provide technical and logistic support to catalyse urgent conservation activities under the international work programme.

In the early 1990s, one million Saiga antelopes used to migrate across the Russian and Central Asian steppes. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Saiga antelopes declined by 95% within a decade, primarily lead by poaching. Saigas are valuable for their horn, which is used in Chinese Traditional Medicine, as well as for their meat. Other factors such as illegal trade of Saiga horn, diseases and competition with domestic livestock further contribute to the species' decline. The majority of Saiga populations are currently stabilizing, with individual ones even increasing. Today approximately 100,000 Saigas roam the steppes and deserts of Eurasia. The transboundary Ustiurt population, however, continues to decline dramatically and currently numbers around 5000 animals. The Astana workshop agreed to make conservation action here a priority.

The CMS Saiga MoU, which has been signed by all Saiga range states, namely Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, aims to restore populations throughout the steppes and deserts of Eurasia. The Medium-Term International Work Programme (2011-2015) under this instrument has identified urgent conservation measures to ensure the restoration of Saiga populations. Disease research and emergency action are fully integrated within this work programme following a mass mortality event which left 12,000 animals dead in Kazakhstan in May 2010. The list of priority actions for Kazakhstan further specifies the task list to prevent future mass mortality events, as well as to coordinate research and concrete emergency measures.

Law enforcement to minimize Saiga poaching is one of the core activities of the work programme. Kazakhstan has long-standing experience in protecting Saigas and has built up a thorough ranger system throughout the country. An agreement between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan was signed in 2010 to facilitate law enforcement in the Ustiurt region across the two countries. Participants stated the need to closely collaborate with China and the Chinese traditional medicine industry, which is the major consumer of Saiga horn. It was acknowledged that the recommendations from the Urumqi meeting in China in November 2010 require urgent attention.

Communication is essential to emphasise the species' cultural and economic value to local people and its fundamental role in the steppe ecosystem. Improving the information flow within the agreement area is a key objective of ACBK and SCA, which will jointly provide technical coordination to the Saiga MoU from now onwards.

As a result of the coordination, the communication of project results and progress on the implementation of the CMS Saiga agreement will be strengthened. The bi-annual newsletter "Saiga News" issued by the Saiga Conservation Alliance is an important tool for all stakeholders to share their work with the general public in national languages, including Chinese. A new webpage, the Saiga Resource Centre, will be developed as a hub for information about Saigas and progress undertaken. An online database of Saiga conservation projects will document the progress towards implementing the international work programme.

At the meeting, delegates also reviewed the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Bukhara Deer and its current conservation status. International experts confirmed that Bukhara Deer populations have increased from only a few hundred animals in 2002, when the MoU was signed by Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to about 1600 animals today. However, the degradation of riparian forest ecosystems continues and constitutes a major threat to the long-term survival of the species. The delegates therefore suggested a roadmap for the conservation of the Bukhara Deer, and discussed next steps leading up the First meeting of Signatories to the MoU, which will take place on 19 November 2011 in Bergen, Norway.

Both Bukhara Deer and Saiga antelopes are vital components of the Convention's Eurasian Aridland Mammal initiative. Mongolia initiated this initiative, which was concluded at the Conventions last Conference of the Parties in 2008, to cover all threatened migratory large mammals of the temperate and cold deserts, semi-deserts, steppes and associated mountains of Central Asia. Further developments depend upon decisions taken by CMS Parties at the forthcoming COP10.

#### **Notes to Editors**

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans. At present, 114 countries are Parties to the Convention. In 2006, CMS concluded the Memorandum of Understanding concerning conservation, restoration and sustainable use of the Saiga Antelope. [www.cms.int](http://www.cms.int)

**Saiga Antelope:** In 2002 the sub-species *Saiga tatarica tatarica*, which includes several transboundary populations was listed on CMS Appendix II. In 2006 a Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of the Saiga Antelope came into force. It is aimed at restoring Saiga populations and has been signed by all countries, where Saiga antelopes live in the wild today. Since 2008 the entire species has been listed on CMS Appendix II.

At a workshop, convened by the CITES Management Authority of China and the Secretariats of CITES and CMS in Urumqi, China in September 2010, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Industry agreed to contribute to the recovery of the Saiga Antelope.

#### [Medium-Term International Work Programme for the Saiga MoU](#)

CMS Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Conservation and Restoration of the **Bukhara Deer** (CMS Appendix I) was concluded in 2002. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are signatories.

#### [Eurasian Aridlands Mammals initiative](#)

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