

WORKSHOP ON THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF SAIGA ANTELOPE
Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China
27-29 September 2010

SUMMARY REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of information presented and discussions undertaken by participants at the Urumqi workshop, the conservation management issues for saiga antelopes may be summarized as follows:

- Saiga antelopes¹ are migratory herbivores closely associated with native vegetation patterns that characterize the steppe region of Eurasia.
- Saiga antelopes exhibit a high reproductive potential with a demonstrated capacity, under favourable conditions, to recover their numbers.
- Five distinct populations are currently recognized; viz. Russian Federation (North West Pre-Caspian and Ural² populations), Kazakhstan (Ural, Betpak-Dala and Ustiurt³ populations), Uzbekistan (Ustiurt population), Turkmenistan (Ustiurt population) and Mongolia.
- Unexplained catastrophic population declines and subsequent recoveries have been observed throughout the species' range in the early to mid 1900s. The present decline may be attributable to the combined effects of changes to the vegetation to less palatable species for saiga antelope, competition with domestic livestock, increased abundance of predators, disruption to migration routes, poaching and illegal trade.
- Continued poaching for meat and illegal trade in horns seriously exacerbate conservation efforts, particularly at the present time, when all populations of the species are depressed.

The following actions (nationally and internationally) have been (are being) taken to address conservation and management of saiga antelope:

- Saiga antelopes are included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).
- Both species are protected under national legislation throughout their range and exports of horns are currently prohibited.
- Under the CMS, a Memorandum-of-Understanding (MOU) concerning Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of the Saiga Antelope (*Saiga* spp.) and an accompanying

¹ The Appendix-II listings of saiga antelope by the CMS and CITES have been updated to include two species, *Saiga tatarica* and *Saiga borealis* in accordance with Wilson and Reeder (2005).
Wilson, D.E. & Reeder, D.M. (2005) - Mammal Species of the World: A Taxonomic and Geographic Reference. Third Edition, John Hopkins University Press.

² The Ural population is shared between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan

³ The Ustiurt population is shared between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Action Plan entered into force in 2006. A second meeting of signatories to the MOU (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 7-10 September 2010) adopted a Medium Term International Work Programme (2011-2015) which specifies a series of actions to be undertaken by range and consumer States to enhance *in situ* conservation of saiga antelopes throughout their range.

- The 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (Doha, 2010) adopted a series of decisions on saiga antelope which, *inter alia*, support effective implementation of the MOU and associated Action Plan.
- In response to the activities identified in the Medium Term International Work Programme that was adopted in 2006 for the period 2007-2011, the five MOU signatories (Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russian Federation, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) have undertaken a range of activities (eg surveys and monitoring, increased anti-poaching patrols, community education and awareness programmes) to achieve greater protection for saiga and facilitate recovery of the populations.
- As a consequence of these actions, although all populations remain seriously depleted, overall numbers of saiga antelopes have increased substantially since 2006, with all, except one population (Ustiurt population), either stable or increasing.
- Notwithstanding the positive results achieved to date under the 2007-2011 Work Programme, access to adequate funding is a problem for all range States and seriously constrains the type and scope of conservation programmes and associated field projects, undertaken.
- As a major consumer country, China has strengthened Customs border checks for detecting illegal shipments of saiga horn. Intensified law enforcement in China is resulting in seizures of illegal horns.
- Stocks of legal saiga horn in China are being quantified, registered and sealed in coded and traceable containers. Companies manufacturing traditional medicines that contain saiga horn must identify the package with a coded, non-reusable label. Only labeled medicines are available to the public according to government-established quotas.
- The China Association of Traditional Chinese Medicines (CATCM) is in the process of reviewing the range of different types of medicines containing saiga horn while at the same time researching the pharmaceutical efficacy of alternatives.
- The CATCM has expressed a desire to ensure the wild saiga resource is conserved and used in a sustainable manner. In order to achieve this objective the CATCM seeks to develop mechanisms for bilateral cooperation through which it would contribute to the conservation efforts of the saiga range States.

Two working groups were established to consider issues surrounding; i) conservation and management, and ii) sustainable use and trade regulation respectively. On the basis of discussions by these two working groups the following recommendations were adopted by the Urumqi Workshop:

1. Conservation and Management⁴

1.1 *Priorities for research:*

- a) Research on mapping distributions (*cf* Section 6.0 of the WP), including:
 - i) To develop models on saiga population dynamics and the collection of appropriate demographic data, aimed at the conservation and management of the species.
 - ii) To determine habitat requirements of the species
 - iii) To assess the dynamics and location of saiga migration and movements (*cf* Section 8.2 of the WP), including the development of recommendations for corridor maintenance and recovery
 - iv) To map distributions in the light of climate change.
 - v) To improve the understanding of the limiting factors to saiga population dynamics, including disease, barriers to migration, habitat degradation and fragmentation.
- b) Research on “best practice” methodology for saiga monitoring (*cf* Section 8.3 of the WP)
- c) To establish a working group to facilitate information and methodology sharing.

1.2 *Priorities for captive breeding and reintroduction:*

Range States should undertake research on best practice of captive breeding (WP 9.2)

China should:

- i) assess the possibilities for the enlargement of the current captive population, including analysis of the genetic status;
- ii) Assess the introduction of new stock, and establishment of further captive breeding centers, as appropriate;
- iii) Conduct pilot studies and assess the potential to reintroduce saiga into the wild, within its former range where appropriate habitat conditions exist (e.g. Lake Ebinur, Xiaerxili and Kalamaili Mountain Reserves, Wuwei Desert Nature Reserve, and other appropriate locations);
- iv) Minimize the mortality and risk when transporting saiga;

A working group, or similar body should be established, under the chairmanship of China to focus on activity 9.5 of the WP, including captive breeding and reintroduction to facilitate information exchange and implementation of the foregoing recommendations.

1.3 *Priorities for applied conservation and management action for all populations:*

- i) Assess the influence of existing man-made barriers to saiga population movements, and, based on the best available science, make recommendations on modifications required in order to facilitate Saiga movement.
- ii) Improve pasture management to relieve the pressure on wild populations of Saiga, in light of contemporary climate change.
- iii) Determine the characteristics that differentiate saiga horn derived from natural mortality from those horns obtained from poached animals and produce identification guidelines;
- iv) Strengthen the involvement of local people in participatory management, with the aim to create incentives for the conservation of saiga antelope; and
- v) Improve public awareness.

1.4 *Priorities for enforcement:*

⁴ In formulating recommendations on the conservation and management of saiga antelope, the working group was guided by the long-term vision of the CMS Medium Term International Work Programme (2011-2015). Recommendations on priority activities on wild and captive populations, including former range States, have been cross-referenced, where appropriate, to the relevant measure to be taken in the 2011-2015 Work Programme (WP)

Range States, former range States and consumer States should fully implement all measures to be taken that are identified in Sections 2.0 and 3.0 of the 2011-2015 International Work Programme.

1.5 *Priorities for information exchange:*

In addition to other measures, use the “Saiga News” newsletter to share information (cf Section 5.4 of the WP).

1.6 *Priorities for individual wild populations:*

- North-West Pre-Caspian population: conduct aerial surveys (cf Sections 10.2 and 10.3 of the WP); and establish and support mobile anti-poaching units.
- Ural population: Conduct epidemiological research (cf Sections 1.8 and 8.8 of the WP)
- Ustiurt population: Strengthen anti-poaching activities (cf Section 12.1 of the WP)
- Betpak-Dala population: Develop and implement programmes for local community involvement (cf Section 13.3 of the WP)
- Mongolia population: Research on saiga-livestock interactions (cf Section 14.6 of the WP)

2. Sustainable Use & Trade Regulation

2.1 Formalize the communication lines begun in the workshop (e.g. through the CITES authorities in the range and consumer States) and use these communication lines to:

- i) Explore possible bilateral collaboration between the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) industry and range States;
- ii) Develop options for the establishment of a fund or other enabling mechanism through which the TCM industry could provide financial, technical and human resources to range States for addressing identified and mutually agreed priorities for *in situ* restoration of the saiga.
- iii) Identify and establish incentive schemes which benefit local communities within the range of saiga and obtain their support for conservation efforts.
- iv) Explore the feasibility of and means for using horns which result from natural mortality and government or judicial confiscations.
- v) Continue efforts in China to verify and control reported stockpiles of saiga parts. Share the lessons learned with other consumer States and range States.
- vi) Continue research to; a) reduce the use of saiga in TCM and b) identify alternatives to saiga horn.
- vii) Consider elements of a possible long-term business relationship between the TCM industry and range States which could serve as a means of preventing poaching of and illegal trade in saiga antelope.
- viii) Strengthen law enforcement cooperation (e.g. information or intelligence, experience, equipment, capacity building etc.) among range and consumer States.
- ix) Review and revise, if appropriate, national policies to ensure they are consistent with the goals of conservation and sustainable use.

The Workshop recommends that the CITES Management Authority of China formally transmit the Summary Report and Recommendations of the Urumqi Workshop on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Saiga Antelope to the Secretariats of CITES and CMS for the information of and action by, as may be appropriate, the Standing Committees and respective relevant subsidiary scientific bodies.