



CENTRAL ASIAN MAMMALS INITIATIVE

Bukhara Deer in Ile Balkhash, Kazakhstan © WWF Russia

Dear friends and colleagues,

With the COVID19 pandemic taking up speed again in many countries, I hope that you, your families and colleagues are safe and healthy and are managing to keep a positive spirit in these difficult times. Like probably most of you, all staff of the CMS Secretariat are continuing to work remotely until further notice. With no in-person meetings possible, we are fully embracing the potential of online communication technologies, not only to navigate through the pandemic but also to establish new modes of working together in times of limited resources and an unfolding climate crisis.

As you will see from this newsletter, the past six months have not been as quite as it might seem: meetings, consultations and discussions were shifted to virtual platforms and although field work had to be cancelled or postponed in many places, we have still received updates from colleagues that were able to take up field work again in summer. This newsletter includes information about the latest meeting under the Bukhara Deer MOU and the GSLEP Steering Committee, both held virtually. It also includes updates on Asiatic Wild Ass in Turkmenistan and Iran, as well as on the development of important new initiatives such as the Global Initiative on Ungulate Migration and of existing funding schemes such as IUCN SOS Central Asia and the Critical Ecosystem Protection Fund (CEPF) in the region.

I would like to sincerely thank all those who contributed to this newsletter and hope you enjoy reading it!

CAMI Coordinator

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Recent Meetings

Technical Workshop under the Bukhara Deer MOU (online, 20-22 October 2020)

Government representatives, NGOs and experts agreed on a new five-year work programme for the conservation of the Bukhara Deer (*Cervus elaphus bactrianus*). The work programme as well as a comprehensive overview report on the conservation status of the species was reviewed during a technical workshop under the CMS Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Restoration and Conservation of Bukhara Deer (*Cervus elaphus bactrianus*), which took place on 20-22 October 2020 using a virtual platform. The MOU was signed on 16 May 2002 by four Range States: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The International Council for Game & Wildlife Conservation (CIC) and WWF Russia have signed the MOU as cooperating organizations. Representatives from Afghanistan also participated in the meeting as the country was recognized as Range State of the species at the First Meeting of the Signatories in 2011.



Bukhara Deer in Ile Balkhash, Kazakhstan © WWF

The report shows that the situation of Bukhara Deer has stabilized with many populations stable or growing. The species has been successfully reintroduced in much of its former range with absolute numbers having increased from 350 animals at the time the MOU was signed to about 3,500 in 2020. But the species still faces a number of important threats, which the work programme attempts to address: the degradation and fragmentation of the riparian forests along major river basins which are critical habitat, the concentration of deer populations in relatively small protected areas with few options to expand their range and settle independently in new areas. Local overpopulation of deer and the threats they face outside of their protected zones such as poaching as well as the restoration and reconnection of habitat including sustainable forest and water management are among the key challenges facing Bukhara Deer today. The programme also includes actions on scientific research, international cooperation, captive breeding and reintroduction as well as country-specific measures. The meeting also reviewed and agreed on a new reporting format.

For further information including all meeting documents, please visit <https://www.cms.int/bukhara-deer/en/meeting/second-meeting-signatories-bukhara-deer-mou-mos2>

The GSLEP Steering Committee Meeting (online, 23 October 2020)

The Steering Committee Meeting of the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP) took place virtually on 23 October 2020, the International Snow Leopard Day. The representative of Nepal as the Steering Committee Chair and the representative of Kyrgyzstan as the co-Chair opened the meeting followed by opening statements from other Snow Leopard Range States.

The GSLEP Secretariat provided an overview of the conservation work done by the countries as well as the Secretariat to implement the programme during the past seven years since the launch of GSLEP in 2013. Achievements included the development of management plans for most of the Snow Leopard landscapes as well as the PAWS initiative (Population Assessment of the World's Snow Leopards) which was endorsed at the International Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Conservation Forum 2017 in Bishkek to produce a robust estimate of the species population status. The meeting also discussed resource mobilizing strategies to ensure the long-term continuation of the work of the GSLEP Secretariat and to support the implementation of the NSLEPs and Global Support Components across the Snow Leopard range. Options discussed included establishing an Asian High Mountains Fund similar to the Global Coral Reef Fund as well as the need to convene a consortium of countries to collectively approach international financial institutions and develop a sound funding strategy.

For further information about GSLEP, please visit <https://globalsnowleopard.org>

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Projects and Cooperation

Cooperation of Turkmenistan with CMS



2020 is marked in Turkmenistan as the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the country's Permanent Neutrality status. This year, work has intensified in the field of joining international environmental conventions, agreements and protocols. This is confirmed by the Resolutions, adopted by the Mejlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan, dated August 22, 2020 on the country's accession to/joining a number of international agreements. Among them are the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS, or Bonn Convention) and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Waterbirds (AEWA). This testifies to the active position of Turkmenistan in solving environmental problems and in promoting environmental diplomacy.

Until that time, Turkmenistan was a signatory to three MOUs signed under CMS, namely: the MOU on Conservation Measures for the Siberian Crane (White Crane), the MOU and Action Plan for the Conservation and Restoration of the Bukhara Deer and the MOU on Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of Saiga.

Turkmenistan is also a Range State of CAMI. The following species covered by CAMI occur in Turkmenistan: Mountain Sheep, or Turkmen Arkhar (*Ovis vignei cycloceros*), Urial (*Ovis vignei arcal* and *O.v.bocharensis*), Goitered Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*), Asiatic Wild Ass, or Kulan (*Equus hemionus*), Bukhara Deer (*Cervus elaphus bactrianus*), Saiga (*Saiga tatarica*) as well as the Persian Leopard (*Panthera pardus*).

With its decision to become a Party to CMS, Turkmenistan reaffirmed its commitment at the international level to the conservation of globally significant migratory animals, including migratory birds, as a country occupying a central place in the Eurasian continent. (*Karryyeva Shirin, SBSTTA/CBD Focal Point, Turkmenistan*)



Camera trap picture of Urial in Kopetdag Reserve, Turkmenistan © Kopetdag Reserve

Transboundary Collaboration on Environmental Protection Moves Forward in Central Asia

In an unparalleled effort to protect their unique, shared mountain ecosystem of the Panj Amu Darya River basin, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Republic of Tajikistan signed a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Dushanbe on 17 September 2020. This initiative will support the transboundary management of unique biodiversity, that includes four CAMI priority species and transboundary movers; the Goitered Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*), the Bukhara Deer (*Cervus elaphus yarkandensis*), the Argali (the Marco Polo (*Ovis ammon polii*) subspecies) and the Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*).

This unique agreement is a step forward for a century-old regional ambition. In 1914 the Russian, Simon Tienshasky, first proposed the development of a possible protected area in the Pamirs, the upper reaches of the Panj Amu Darya River, that would serve as an area for transboundary collaboration between what were then the Russian and British Empires. George Schaller of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Yuri Badenkov of the Russian Academy of Sciences put the proposition forward again in 1987 and 1992, respectively.

More recently, development agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and NGOs have all raised the idea and have been working on a regional basis in the hope of taking advantage of a window of opportunity. A conference entitled "Pamirs, source of fresh water for Central Asia" was held in Tajikistan in 2003, in which a presentation promoted the idea of a Pamirs International Conservancy.

In 2004, the Kabul office of the Aga Khan Foundation proposed a comprehensive four-country programme based on community participation and trans-boundary policy dialogue, which it termed "Pamir Conservation: Pamir Integrated Development". In 2005, the Asian Development Bank also proposed a transboundary protected area within this region,

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which was central to the international workshop on ‘Wildlife and Habitat Conservation in Pamirs’ organized by WCS and hosted by the Chinese State Forestry Administration in Urumqi in 2006. Finally, for the past decade the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has been promoting the flow of scientific knowledge between countries sharing the Hindu Kush Karakoram Pamir Landscape.

The new MoU that proposes to develop Afghan-Tajik collaboration on environmental protection along their 1,357 km of common border, and the adjacent river basin is aligned with this historical process and constitutes significant policy advancement in continuing dialogue for enhancing conservation of CAMI species in the region. (*Stéphane Ostrowski and Richard Paley, Wildlife Conservation Society, Inner Asia region*)

More information about the bilateral MoU between Afghanistan and Tajikistan can be found here: <https://untj.org/?p=15028>



In winter the upper course of the Panj-Amu Darya River in Wakhan separates Tajikistan (left) from Afghanistan (right) just a stone's throw apart and so no significant obstacle to large free-ranging mammals. © WCS/Stephane Ostrowski.



The Marco Polo Sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*), a flagship species of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and a priority species for CAMI/CMS should benefit from the agreement on environmental protection signed in 2020 between both countries. © WCS/Ali Madad Rajabi

Assessing the Status of the World's Migratory Ungulates: A Global Initiative

Most of the world's large terrestrial mammals are ungulates and many of them migrate seasonally. The ability to move freely across large landscapes to find the best forage and minimize risks such as harsh weather events, is essential for the long-term survival of those species. But many migrations are being lost as landscapes are increasingly fragmented and degraded by roads, fences, agriculture, energy development, and human settlements. With global projections estimating a staggering 22 million kilometres of new roads by 2050, terrestrial migrations are under serious threat.

New advances in migration science now make it possible to map migration corridors, pinpoint threats, target fences for modification or removal, site road-crossing structures, adjust energy development footprints, and focus conservation efforts. With the new Global Initiative on Ungulate Migration (GIUM), we aim to work collaboratively to: 1) create a Global Atlas of Ungulate Migration (an inventory) using tracking data and expert knowledge; and 2) stimulate research on drivers, mechanisms, threats and conservation solutions common to ungulate migration worldwide.

To launch this new effort, we are engaging the world's leading biologists and conservationists to participate in this initiative and share information regarding the world's remaining migratory ungulates. GIUM participants include



Mongolian Gazelles © Thomas Mueller

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global experts representing the world's major terrestrial regions and most if not all of its longest migrations (e.g., Serengeti Wildebeest, Arctic Caribou, Mongolian Gazelle, White-eared Kob, African Elephants, among many others). We seek to spark conservation efforts worldwide by sharing and discussing new, ongoing, and proven approaches to maintain migration corridors across large landscapes.

The GIUM was founded by the following wildlife researchers, in partnership with CMS:

Francesca Cagnacci - Fondazione Edmund Mach, Italy

Simon Chammille-Jammes - Centre d'Ecologie Fonctionnelle et Evolutive, CNRS, France

Mark Hebblewhite - University of Montana, USA

Grant Hopcraft - University of Glasgow, UK

Matthew Kauffman - US Geological Survey, University of Wyoming, USA

Jerod Merkle - University of Wyoming, USA

Thomas Mueller - Senckenberg Nature Research Society, Germany

Atle Mysterud - University of Oslo, Norway

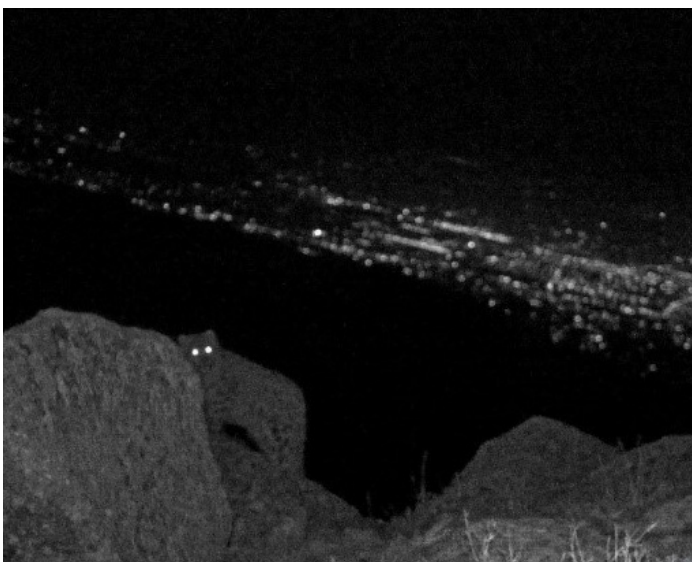
Wibke Peters - Bavarian State Institute of Forestry, Germany

IUCN Save Our Species supports actions for the threatened Snow Leopard and Goitered Gazelle in Central Asia

[IUCN Save Our Species](#) supports science-based conservation action that ensures long-term survival of threatened species and their habitats across the world, guided by the [IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™](#) and [IUCN Species Survival Commission \(SSC\)](#). In 2019, the IUCN Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECARO) joined the programme to launch [SOS Central Asia](#).

This new project supports the CMS Central Asian Mammals Initiative, and in the first phase of implementation, it has mobilized funding to support conservation of 2 out of 15 migratory mammal species in 4 out of 14 Central Asian countries covered by CAMI. In 2019, the open call for proposals offered grants to CSOs working on conservation of the Goitered Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*), and the Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*) in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Both species have decreasing population trends and the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ lists them as Vulnerable to extinction. Considering the ranges of both species in eligible countries, the programme is able to cover important habitats of both lowland landscapes of vast grasslands and semi-deserts, as well as impressive high mountain ranges.

Starting in the spring of 2020, under unprecedented conditions of the global COVID 19 pandemic, SOS Central Asia grantees are working hard to adapt and deliver on their goals. On the other hand, there are new observations and experiences about how these altered ways of human life are affecting wildlife and the state of habitats, and about new ways to interact and work in the virtual environment. Projects are taking on ambitious tasks in research and conservation action to identify and apply the best solutions in mitigating threats and contributing to improved population status. The variety of projects cover many needed actions: employing traditional knowledge, collecting crucial data, prioritizing sites for implementing measures, supporting protected areas as well as ensuring good conditions for animals in corridors beyond protected zones, creating co-managed conservancies, involving local communities, raising awareness, and reaching out to youth,



Almaty camera trap. © Wildlife without Borders



Snow Leopard Sarychat 2019 © SLFK

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but also working on plans for long-term approaches.

Financial support was mobilized through IUCN Save our Species with the kind donation of “Private Foundation from the Netherlands”, with over 460,000 Euro awarded for projects conducted over 18 months in 2020 and 2021. Project beneficiaries are the public fund “Ecobioproject”, Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan, Regional Association of Environmental NGOs of Western Kazakhstan “Tabigi Orta”, Marwell Wildlife, Snow Leopard Trust, Wildlife without Borders and Snow Leopard Conservancy. SOS Central Asia does more than mobilize funds for conservation. Thousands of experts are within reach for consultation, and cooperation, exchange of experiences and project results will help identify best practices and shape recommendations, and capacity-building programmes will help strengthen the position of civil society organizations in conservation work, and improve needed knowledge and skills. (*Milica Miskovic, IUCN Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia*)



Goitered Gazelle in Kazakhstan © Tabigi Orta

More information and profiles of current projects can be found [here](#).

Funding Opportunities for the Mountains of Central Asia

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) has allocated funding in support of biodiversity conservation projects in the Mountains of Central Asia biodiversity hotspot. A “hotspot”, as defined by Conservation International and CEPF is a region of the world with significant levels of biodiversity which requires conservation. A map of the Mountains of Central Asia Hotspot can be found on the CEPF website, here <https://www.cepf.net/our-work/biodiversity-hotspots/mountains-central-asia>

Civil Society Organizations are encouraged to read the Ecosystem Profile, to determine whether their projects are eligible for funding, and apply when Requests for Proposals are open. The funding will be active through 2024 and will be allocated in small grants (up to \$20,000) and large grants (up to \$150,000) in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Some projects in Afghanistan might also be funded. We will announce calls for large and small grants in each country, with the next series of calls coming up in the first quarter of 2021. (*Yelizaveta Protas, Regional Implementation Team, WWF Russia*)

You can check our portal www.mca.earth for announcements, as well as contact info and other details.

Species Updates

News on Asiatic Wild Ass in Turkmenistan

Some encouraging news here is a recent video from a camera trap from our colleagues Hojamyrat Hojamyradov and Shirin Karryeva in Turkmenistan: a small herd of Asiatic Wild Ass (*Turkmen Kulan*) in the Western Kopet Dag. The group consisting of at least eight individuals, including two females with foals was filmed in August: <https://www.facebook.com/naryn.tr.71/videos/348435933042904/>

Additional video footage from September confirms the presence of the group and shows 11 animals with 3 foals. (*Petra Kaczensky, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research & University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna*)



Screen shot of camera trap video from Western Kopetdag. Source: Hojamyrat Hojamyradov

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If you want to learn more about this endangered population of Kulan reintroduced in 1976, please take a look at the 2018 Rapid Assessments of wildlife in Turkmenistan <https://brage.nina.no/nina-xmlui/handle/11250/2639265>

Update on Asiatic Wild Ass or Onager in Iran

Wild populations: The most recent autumn population estimates by the Department of Environment (DoE) from 2019 were: 993 Onager in Bahram-e Goor protected area suggesting an increasing population and 119 Onager in Touran protected area, suggesting a stagnating or possibly declining population. In an attempt to reduce competition between traditional local herders and Onager, DoE recently bought some privately owned rangeland from traditional owners who had livestock pens and grazing plots within Touran National Park. The population census planned for the autumn of 2020 has been postponed due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

Captive breeding: Quite some attention has been given to improving captive breeding of Onager in Iran, focussing on Kavir National Park. In October 2018, 10 Onagers from a fenced area in Touran were transported to an enclosure in Kavir NP. However, half of these animals died due to the unstandardized transport boxes or anaesthesia. Later, four animals from Gourab CBC were successfully transported to this fenced population. However, the enclosure was not ideal for breeding and in 2020, a new captive breeding centre (CBC) was opened for Onagers in Kavir National Park (NP).

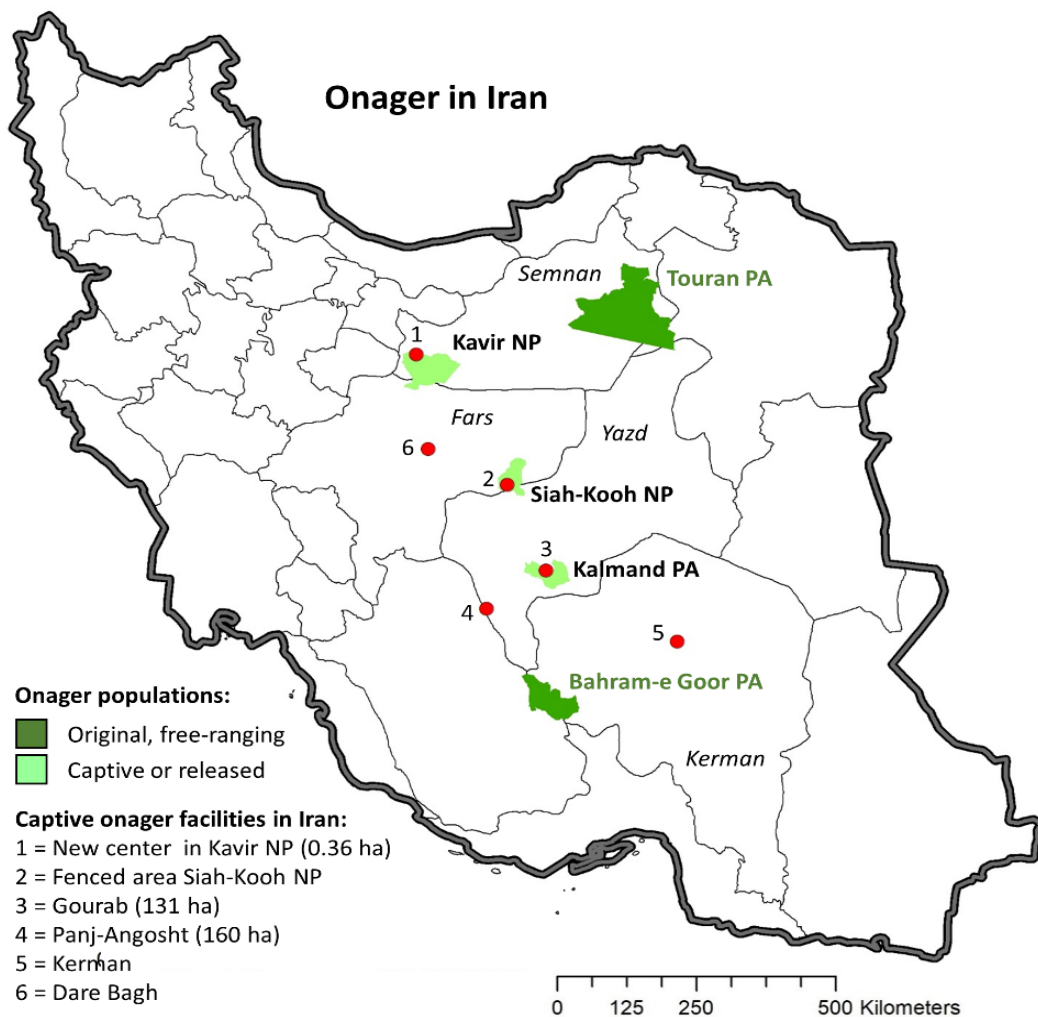


Fig. 1: Original free-ranging Onager populations and captive or released Onager in Iran in 2019/2020.

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The new facility was carefully designed to allow the separation of individuals (particularly prior to giving birth) to reduce the injury risk to young foals. Using a new transport protocol, Onager were transferred from the older enclosure to the new CBC in Kavir NP in a padded trailer with video surveillance and without the need for prior handling and anaesthesia. The 12 animals were transported in three trips covering the ca. 15km, each lasting ca. 30min (for video footage see Instagram links below). All animals arrived uninjured and remained calm during transportation, which was a huge relief given the unfortunate losses in 2018.

The long-term plan is to breed Onagers (of Touran origin) in this new facility for future releases into suitable areas in northern Iran. Only a small number of Onager remain as a back-up population in the CBCs in Gourab (N=19), Panj-Angosht (N=5), Kerman (N=11), and Dare Bagh (N=1). All captive animals have now been separated based on either originating from Touran or Bahram-e Goor, as genetic analysis showed that the animals for Bahram-e Goor are most distinct from Turkmen kulan, whereas those from Touran are somewhat in-between animals from Bahram-e Goor and Badhyz in southern Turkmenistan (Kaczensky et al. 2018; <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10592-018-1086-3>).

Released captive-bred Onagers: In 2019, 11 Onagers from Panj-Angosht CBC were brought to Siah-Kooh NP. These Onagers were initially kept in a fenced area, but later were released into the national park which they seem to have left. Additionally, 33 Onager were released from Gourab in and near Tang-e Hanne in Kalmand protected area. An estimated 11 Onager, released from Gourab breeding centre in 2010, which were living in Kalmand PA, had not been seen any more in 2019. (Petra Kaczensky, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research & University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, with information provided by: Bahareh Shabirari of the Department of Environment (DoE), Mohammad Ali Adibi, DoE Semnan office, and Hemami Mahmoud-Reza, Department of Natural Resources, Isfahan University of Technology)

Instagram link Onager transport 2020:

<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CFclWsgAxY4/?igshid=5vcdvzycm8yf>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CFdy6TkAeCV/?gshid=1mp0q07dom2rv>

Snow Leopard Conservation in India

In India, Snow Leopards inhabit the high-altitude region of the Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, and the States of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Current estimates of its population in the country range between 500 and 700 individuals. The Government of India launched the Project Snow Leopard (PSL) in 2009 to safeguard the species as well as associated high-altitude wildlife populations and their habitats. Through the project, the unique conservation challenges of high-altitude regions are being addressed using a landscape-based approach to conservation that goes beyond protected areas (PAs). The key initiatives undertaken under PSL include recovery programmes for endangered species, restoration of degraded landscapes, improved PA management, stronger law enforcement and protection of important traditional pastoral economies and lifestyles, while reducing anthropogenic pressures.



Snow Leopard © Klein & Hubert/WWF

India plays an active role in global Snow Leopard conservation and was the host of the last GSLEP meeting. Through the PSL, India is addressing all the issues connected with the conservation of the species in a holistic manner. It has also launched the country-wide Snow Leopard Enumeration system (SPAI). The UN-Development Programme (UNDP) with financial support from the Global Environment Facility also supports conservation efforts and initiatives for Snow Leopards in 9 of the 12 range countries. Through the SECURE Himalaya project launched in 2017, UNDP is complementing the Government of India's efforts to implement a landscape-based approach for sustainable management of Snow Leopard habitats. The project is establishing participatory models of conservation that involve key stakeholders, including local communities in ensuring conservation beyond protected areas, promoting nature-based livelihoods, and addressing issues pertaining to human wildlife conflict and illegal trade in wildlife. (Soumitra Dasgupta, India).

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Saiga Antelope calf © Daniel Rosengren

Upcoming Events

4th Meeting of the Signatories to the Saiga Antelope MOU (Russian Federation, September 2021)

The 4th Meeting of the Signatories to the Saiga MOU is currently scheduled to take place in September 2021, at the generous invitation of the Russian Federation. The exact dates and modalities of the meeting will be made available soon.

Developing a Regional Strategy for the Conservation of the Persian Leopard (Germany, October 2021)

The CMS and the BfN signed joint work programme 2020-2026 covering the organization of a number of workshops, including a Range States Meeting to develop a Regional Strategy for the Conservation of the Persian Leopard, to implement activity 19.1 of the CAMI Programme of Work. The meeting is scheduled to take place in October 2021 on the Isle of Vilm.

The Central Asian Mammals Initiative

The Central Asian Mammals Initiative (CAMI) and its associated Programme of Work were adopted by CMS Parties at the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP11) in Quito, Ecuador in 2014 and a revised version adopted in 2020 at COP13 in Gandhinagar, India with [Resolution 11.24 \(Rev.COP13\)](#). With an initiative to strengthen the conservation of Central Asian migratory mammals, CMS aims to provide a framework to coordinate conservation activities in the region and to coherently address major threats to migratory species.

CMS at a Glance

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, is a treaty dedicated to the conservation of wildlife beyond national borders worldwide. It has 130 Member States plus the EU.

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