



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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SECOND MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO THE
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING CONCERNING
CONSERVATION, RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE
USE OF THE SAIGA ANTELOPE (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*)
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 7-10 September 2010
Agenda Item 9.0

OVERVIEW REPORT

*(Prepared by IUCN/SSC Antelope Specialist Group & the Saiga Conservation Alliance
on behalf of the CMS Secretariat)*

1.0 Introduction

1. Pursuant to paragraph 6 of the MoU, the Secretariat shall prepare an overview report compiled on the basis of information at its disposal pertaining to the Saiga (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*).
2. National reports by the Signatories are a primary source of information for the overview report. The Secretariat provided reporting templates to all MoU signatories, non-signatory Range States, collaborating organisations having signed the MoU and other organisations concerned with Saiga conservation. All MoU Signatories, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, have submitted their national reports to the Secretariat. Fourteen organisations returned project report forms. Other information available to IUCN/SSC was also used in the form of data and project reports, conference proceedings and published materials.
3. Additional information is expected to be provided by the participants of the Saiga Technical Workshop (7-8 September 2010) that will precede the MoU Meeting. It will be incorporated as appropriate in a revised version of this report to be produced after the meeting.
4. The structure of this report follows the national report format (CMS/SA-1/Report/Annex 7) endorsed by the First Meeting of the Signatories to the MoU. This report does not repeat the information provided in the national reports. It only summarizes the main issues.

2.0 Conservation Status of the Saiga

5. The status of the species is assessed here on the basis of the information available to IUCN/SSC, the national reports and project reports submitted, and other sources.
6. There is evidence that the previous severe decline in the global Saiga population has stabilised further since 2006 with increases reported for some populations. National reports

indicate: at least 10,000 in Russia and stable; c. 85,500 in Kazakhstan and an upward trend;; several thousand in Uzbekistan migrating from Kazakhstan in the winter, as well as a few hundred year-round. No saigas have been observed in Turkmenistan for the last 10 years. The distinctive Mongolian subspecies was estimated to number 3169 in 2009 according to a ground survey. An aerial count of Mongolian saiga conducted in 2010 resulted in an estimate of 8016 ± 1656 .

7. The extensive area of distribution, large differences between seasonal ranges, the Saiga's nomadic way of life, and natural population fluctuations make accurate population estimates difficult to obtain and obscure population trends. The effective population size is likely to be smaller than quoted figures as sex ratios may be by overhunting of males for their horns. Some recent estimates indicate encouraging increases but the extent to which these reflect real population growth, or sampling bias caused by changes in census methodology or in underlying Saiga distribution and behaviour is currently not clear.

8. Saiga occur in five populations: north-west Pre-Caspian, Ural, Ustiurt, Betpak-dala and Mongolia (*S. t. mongolica*/*S. borealis*). These are depicted in the attached map. A sixth population of *Saiga tatarica tatarica* in northwest China and adjacent areas of SW Mongolia became extinct by the 1960s.

North-west Pre-Caspian population

9. The North-west Pre-Caspian population is centred around the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve and Stepnoi/Tinguta Wildlife Reserve. Its range covers two administrative regions of the Russian Federation: the Republic of Kalmykia and Astrakhan province with sporadic occurrences in neighbouring regions. The population's status is currently rather unclear due to the lack of a systematic range-wide monitoring programme. Monitoring is carried out by rangers of the Department of Animal Conservation of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy Development of the Republic of Kalmykia, with participation of experts from the governmental agency "Centerokhotkontrol", as well as additional information from rangers in the two protected areas collected in the course of their duties. There have also been pilot participatory monitoring programmes in 2008 and 2009, extending the range of saiga observations and engaging local people. The population appears to have stabilised since 2006 at around 20,000 individuals, based on this monitoring, though the government provides a more cautious estimate for 2010 of 'not less than 10,000'. There has been substantial public awareness and engagement activity and the protected areas are effectively patrolled. However a combination of administrative difficulties (including the decentralisation of responsibilities for wildlife management and budgetary limitations since January 2008), continued poaching and a harsh winter have combined to cast doubt on the stability of this population, which is once again of concern.

Ural population

10. The Ural population is in the far west of Kazakhstan, between the Volga and Ural rivers. It is a transboundary population, overlapping to some extent with Russia. Aerial surveys are carried out there annually, and *Okhotzoooprom* have an on-the-ground presence. Saigas use a protected area in Russia. A disease outbreak occurred in west Kazakhstan in May 2010, resulting in the death of 11,920 saiga over the course of four days. Laboratory examination identified the cause as infection by *Pasteurella multocida*.

Ustiurt population

11. The Ustiurt population occurs west of the Aral Sea, and is a transboundary population. In general the population is in Kazakhstan most of the year, moving into Uzbekistan in the winter, and in the past, a proportion of the population has migrated south through Uzbekistan to Turkmenistan. There is a small resident population year-round in Uzbekistan, including at least 150 on Vozhrozhdeniye peninsula. There are several protected areas within the recent range of this population. [Kazakhstan: Buzachinskiy Wildlife Reserve] . Turkmenistan: Kaplankyr State Reserve (275,000ha); Sarykamysh Sanctuary (541,000ha); Shasenem Sanctuary (109,000ha) and an Ustyurt Sanctuary is planned; Uzbekistan: Saigachiy State Sanctuary (1,000,000ha).

12. The Ustiurt population is the only one that is currently reported as declining. Estimated numbers have declined by 62% since 2006, and fell sharply from 9,200 in 2009 to 4,900 in 2010. It is likely to be the site of the most intense current poaching pressure. It has large-scale transport routes passing through it. It is also a transboundary population, with associated problems concerning implementation of protection, and one which is likely to be particularly hard hit by upcoming infrastructural development linked to oil and gas extraction.

13. Recent interventions have included social engagement projects in Uzbekistan, including, education, an alternative livelihoods programme aimed at women and a participatory monitoring programme. Aerial and ground monitoring is carried out annually in the Kazakhstan part of the range, and anti-poaching patrols operate in both countries, and have recently apprehended poachers in the area. Several large scale projects supported by international funding were initiated in 2010.

Betpak-dala population

14. The Betpak-dala population's historical range covers a large area of Central Kazakhstan, approximately from the Moinkum Sands/Chu River in the south, to Lake Tengiz and the Karaganda region in the north. The Betpak-dala population suffered particularly badly from poaching in the late 1990s, due to its location in a relatively populated area closest to Almaty, however the population is now increasing. Improved monitoring, social engagement, public awareness and law enforcement seem to have had a positive effect on reducing poaching, although poachers are still being apprehended. This population has had substantial investment in development of protected area networks by the Government of Kazakhstan, international NGOs and intergovernmental organisations. Many projects are currently under way by a number of NGOs, encompassing scientific research, social surveys, anti-poaching, education and awareness. Aerial and ground monitoring is carried out annually, and there is a programme of satellite tracking of individual animals. There are proposals to enhance the protected area network within Saiga range by creating new reserves and extending some existing protected areas. These protected areas cover a substantial area: for example Andasai Reserve, currently 1,000,000 ha with proposed extension to 3,000,000 ha.

Mongolian subspecies

15. Distribution of the Mongolian sub-species, *Saiga tatarica mongolica/Saiga borealis*, is centred on the Shargiin Gobi, Khuisiin Gobi and Dorgon Steppe in western Mongolia. The nominate subspecies (*S.t.tatarica*) formerly occurred in southwest Mongolia but is now extinct there. The population of Mongolian Saiga was estimated at about 1369 in 2009. An aerial count in 2010 resulted in an estimate of 8016 \pm 1656. A ground surveys indicated that population size increased by [9.7% annually compared to 2007] The current range is also reported to have increased since 2007, but only an estimated 31.4% of the range is within

protected area network. Sharga-Mankhan Nature Reserve (390,000ha) was established in 1993 and Chandmanii Khuren Tal local protected area (133,317ha) was established in 2007 to protect populations of Mongolian Saiga. A small part of the range also lies within Khar Us Nuur National Park. A reserve has been proposed in Khuisiin Gobi. The subspecies' long term survival is still threatened by a habitat degradation caused by livestock (overgrazing/unsustainable pasture use, competition for water), climate change (increased frequency of cold winters and droughts) and poaching and illegal trade of horn. Anti-poaching patrols have increased and Saiga ranger network have been set up. Substantial investment in public awareness includes educational programmes in the schools in the saiga range. A project exists to assist herders to improve rangeland management by linking saiga conservation to alternative income activities. A taxonomic revision (Wilson & Reeder 2005) classified Mongolian Saiga as *S. borealis mongolica*. Based on latest genetic evidence IUCN/SSC Antelope Specialist Group continues to regard it as *S. t. mongolica*.

16. Conservation measures required are: fund anti-poaching measures to make them fully effective; institute public engagement activities, including awareness and livelihood enhancement; establish a captive breeding facility to preserve the distinctive gene pool; estimate population size using a reliable method and map Saiga movements.

Saiga in China

17. In China, *Saiga tatarica tatarica* formerly occurred in the Dzungarian Gobi of Xinjiang, northwest China, but they became extinct by the 1960s. There have been a few subsequent reports of Saiga from this area that probably relate to wandering individuals from Kazakhstan. Reintroduction remains a future aim but there is no detailed implementation schedule at present.

Table 1. Populations of Saiga based on information collected for the 2010 CMS MoU meeting

| Population | Estimated numbers in 2006 | Latest estimate | Postulated trend |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| NW Pre-Caspian [RU] | 15-20,000 | 10-20,000 | Stable |
| Ural [KZ, RU] | 12,900 | 27,140 ¹ | Stable/Increasing |
| Ustiurt [KZ, TM, UZ] | 17,800 | 4,900 | Decreasing |
| Betpak-dala [KZ] | 18,300 | 53,440 | Increasing |
| Mongolia [<i>S.t. mongolica</i>] | 3,169 | 8016±1656 | Increasing |
| Total | 67,169-72,169 | 103,496-113,496 | |

¹ 39,060 estimated in April 2010, 11,920 died in disease outbreak May 2010

These figures are supplied without confidence intervals as they are based on censuses that are subject to error and bias that is difficult to quantify with current monitoring methods. Given the biology of the saiga, the biases are most likely to act such that trends in either direction are exaggerated, and such that actual numbers are higher than the estimates. The figures for 2006 and 2010 are not directly comparable because of variations in survey effort and methodology.

3.0 Implementation of the Action Plan

18. This section provides a brief summary of information on progress towards the implementation of the MoU and Action Plan, according to the format of the National Reports. A report on progress towards implementation of the Medium Term International Work Programme (doc. UNEP/CMS/SA-2/Doc/5/Rev.2) provides detailed information on activities carried out against specific action points.

19. **MoU.** The CMS MoU was first signed by Turkmenistan at the Eighth Meeting of the CMS Conference of the Parties in November 2005. It was signed in Bonn by Uzbekistan in May 2006. Kazakhstan signed the MoU during the MoU Meeting on 25 September 2006 and the MoU subsequently entered into effect. The Russian Federation signed the MoU on 25/06/2009. This means that all *Saiga tatarica tatarica* Range States have formally associated themselves with the MoU and the new international forum it creates. This significantly enhances conservation efforts regionally and globally. The Ministry of Nature and Environment of Mongolia has signed the MoU as a collaborating organisation in light of CITES decision 13.30 relating to its subspecies. A proposal to amend the MoU and Action Plan to include all Saigas has been submitted for approval by the Signatories at the 2010 meeting.

20. **International Agreements.** *Saiga tatarica tatarica* was listed in CMS Appendix II in 2002. The Ninth Meeting of the conference of the Parties to CMS (Rome, 2008) extended the listing to the species as a whole (*Saiga tatarica* as recognized by Wilson and Reeder (1993)¹. Following a change in the CMS taxonomic reference for terrestrial mammals (Wilson and Reeder (2005)²), the listing on Appendix II was updated to include the species *Saiga tatarica* and *Saiga borealis*. Saiga was included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1995.

21. **Habitat.** The Action Plan calls for habitats to be restored to optimal levels. Range State reports indicate low levels of habitat loss or degradation. Habitats are intact or moderately fragmented across the global range, and pasture quality is likely to have been improving over the last decade in all locations except Mongolia, due to a sharp reduction in livestock grazing pressure.

22. Protected areas coverage has improved, especially for the Betpak-dala population in Kazakhstan. Table 2 lists protected areas containing Saiga.

Populations shared between Range States. The largest transboundary population is in Ustyurt. A bilateral agreement on saiga conservation between **Turkmenistan** and **Kazakhstan** was signed in 2007. A joint action plan on conservation of Ustyurt saiga population for 2008-2010 was signed on 23/02/2008 between the Committee of Forestry and Hunting of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of **Kazakhstan** and State Committee of Nature Conservation of the Republic of **Uzbekistan**. An agreement on conservation, restoration and sustainable development of saiga was signed by the Government of **Kazakhstan** and the Government of **Uzbekistan** on 17/03/2010 and ratified by Uzbekistan on 20/08/10. An agreement on the conservation, restoration and use of the Ural population is under discussion by the governments of **Kazakhstan** and the **Russian Federation**.

23. **Laws, Institutions and Trade.** *Saiga* is legally protected in all countries of its breeding range: **Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russian Federation, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan,**

¹ Wilson, D.E. and Reeder, D.M. (1993). Mammal species of the world. A taxonomic and geographic reference. 2nd ed. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.

² Wilson, D. E. & Reeder, D. M. (ed.) (2005): Mammal Species of the World. A Taxonomic and Geographic Reference. Third edition, John Hopkins University Press.

and in former Range State, **China**. Legal frameworks are generally adequate but increased patrolling and more stringent enforcement are needed for these to be fully effective.

24. **International trade in Saiga and products, parts and derivatives thereof** is authorized but strictly regulated under the **terms of CITES**. Six decisions relating to saiga were adopted at CITES CoP15 in March 2010. The first of these directed all **range states** to fully implement the **measures** contained in the MTIWP 2007-2011. In view of the fact that Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation have signed the CMS MoU and the lack of trade in recent years, the CITES **Standing Committee** agreed **in March 2010** to lift its export moratorium. If either State wishes to resume export of saiga specimens, it should advise the CITES Secretariat of the measures it has taken to comply with the recommendations of the CITES Animals Committee, and the Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair of the Animals Committee, should determine whether the recommendations have been implemented and report to the Standing Committee accordingly. A meeting to discuss trade, saiga horn and TAM is scheduled to take place in Urumqi, China, in September 2010.

25. **Captive Breeding**. Captive breeding is being carried out in three centres in Russia, with a captive population currently numberin 200. Establishment of a captive breeding herd and possible reintroduction have been considered in **Mongolia**, but this option has now been downgraded in favour of *in situ* conservation. A captive breeding herd, currently numbering 80 animals, is kept at the Wuwei Endangered Animal Breeding Center, Gansu Province, **China**.

26. **Threats**. National reports listed the following main threats. **Kazakhstan**: hunting for horns/trade - very high level threat; hunting for meat - high; disease - high. -. **Russian Federation**: hunting for meat - high; hunting for horns trade - high; predation - high. **Turkmenistan**: predation - high level threat. **Uzbekistan**: hunting for meat - high; hunting for horns/ trade - high. Information provided at the technical workshop indicated that the main current and potential threats in **Mongolia** are habitat degradation caused by livestock (overgrazing/unsustainable pasture use, competition for water)- high; climate change (increased frequency of cold winters anddroughts) – high; poaching and illegal trade of horn – medium; no data on or records of disease.

27. **Priority Actions**. Priority actions listed in the Range State reports are: **Kazakhstan**: establish and expand existing protected areas; increase state funding for conservation activities and saiga census; obtain additional finance for satellite tracking studies of migratory routes of Ural and Ustyurt saiga populations; engage international agencies and experts in saiga disease studies and development of preventative measures; obtain funding for printed materials and videos aimed at saiga conservation and their habitats; maintain the ban on saiga hunting in Kazakhstan until 2020; enhance state funding for saiga conservation to match the increase in numbers and habitat expansion; involve the game service of hunting farms in saiga conservation in wildlife management areas. **Russian Federation**: expand monitoring to include aerial surveys; develop up-to-date methods for monitoring and conserving saiga including radio collaring; establish a special mobile section for saiga protection; continue development of techniques for captive breeding; develop strain-specific vaccines against pasteurellosis. **Uzbekistan** indicated in the technical workshop that priority actions include: reorganise of the “Saigachy” sanctuary, including clarifying its legal status; strengthen anti-poaching activities; improve the accuracy of monitoring; involve industry in saiga conservation; continue and expand work with local people. **Mongolia**: continue aerial monitoring; conduct ecological studies, fundraising to initiate captive breeding, continue current conservation efforts.

4.0 Evaluation

28. Based **on the synthesis** of the national reports and other available information the **following achievements** can be recognized:

- The critical plight of the Saiga has been recognized at international and other forums.
- Conservation interventions by governmental and non-governmental organisations have increased, and there is improved collaboration between them.
- There has been an increase in the arrest and successful prosecution of saiga poachers and traders range-wide.
- The severe global population decline has apparently been halted and four out of five populations are reported to have be stable or increasing.
- Improved techniques have led to regular breeding of captive animals.
- There has been investment in improving monitoring techniques for saigas, particularly in Kazakhstan and Mongolia.
- Protected area coverage has improved and expanded.
- Integration of Saiga conservation into wider biodiversity conservation has been initiated.
- Widespread public awareness campaigns have been effective.
- The Government of China has expressed its commitment to control trade in Saiga products and has expressed interest in contributing to international conservation efforts within the Range States.

29. Less progress has been achieved in the following fields:

- Anti-poaching efforts have intensified but poaching is still ongoing throughout the range, suggesting a need for further investment in improving effectiveness.
- Monitoring of trends in abundance is still subject to unquantifiable bias and error, and needs to be improved if trends are to be robustly detected.
- Relatively small-scale projects on alternative livelihoods have been conducted, but the human dimension remains relatively neglected. Integration of local communities into Saiga conservation programmes will be critical for long-term success.
- Evaluation of the success of conservation interventions and sharing of best practice is also crucial now that programmes have been running for several years.
- There has been insufficient attention to the issues of saiga disease.

RANGE OF SAIGA ANTELOPE



Source: Milner-Gulland et al. (2001), Oryx

| Table 2. Saiga Occurrence in Protected Areas | | | | | |
|---|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Name | Area (ha) | IUCN Category | Months Saiga present | Rut | Calving |
| Russia | | | | | |
| Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve | 121,115,900 | | 1-12 | Yes | Yes |
| Stepnoi/Tinguta Sanctuary | 197,800 | | 1-12 | Yes | Yes |
| Mekletinskiy Sanctuary | 102,500 | | Varies | Insignificant | Rarely |
| Bodinskaya-XXX Reserve | | | | | |
| Sarpinskiy Sanctuary | 163,900 | | 6 (rare) | | |
| Kharbinskiy Sanctuary | 195,500 | | Very rare | | |
| Kazakhstan | | | | | |
| Irgiz-Turgai Reserve | 763 549 | Ib | 3-12 | Yes | Yes |
| Korgalzhyn Reserve | 543 171 | Ia and Ib | 1-12 | Yes | Yes |
| Andasai Reserve | 1,000,000 | IV, V or VI | 12-3 | Yes | No |
| Sarykopa Reserve | 51 200 | IV, V or VI | 12-3 | No | No |
| Ulytau Reserve | 19 300 | IV, V or VI | 12-3 | No | No |
| Naurzum Reserve | 191,381 | Ia | 5-9 | No | No |
| Butretau Reserve | | | | | |
| Buzachinsky sanctuary | | | | | |
| <i>Proposed</i> | | | | | |
| Altyn Dala reserve | 489,774 | Ib | 3-12 | Yes | Yes |
| Bokeiorda-Zhayik | ≈ 500,000 | Ib | 1-12 | Yes | Yes |
| Irgiz-Turgai reserve (expansion) | 241,500 | Ib | 3-12 | Yes | Yes |
| Andasai sanctuary (expansion) | 3,000,000 | IV, V or VI | 12-3 | Yes | |
| Ulytau sanctuary (expansion) | 50,000 | IV, V or VI | 12-3 | Yes | |
| Turkmenistan | | | | | |
| Kaplankyr State Reserve | 275,735 | I | 11-3 | | |
| Sarykamysh Sanctuary | 541,100 | | 11-3 | | |
| Shasenem Sanctuary | 109,002 | | 11-3 | | |
| <i>Proposed</i> | | | | | |
| Ustyurt Sanctuary | 150,000 | | 11-3 | | |
| Uzbekistan | | | | | |
| Saigachiy Reserve | 1,000,000 | III | 10-5 | Yes | Possibly |
| Mongolia | | | | | |
| Sharga-Mankhan | 390,000 | | 1-12 | Yes | Yes |
| Khar Us Nuur NP [part of] | | | 1-12 | | |
| <i>Proposed</i> | | | | | |
| Khuisiin Gobi | | | 1-12 | Yes | Yes |