



# CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

Distr: General

CMS/SA-1/5/Add.1  
7 September 2006

Original: English

FIRST MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO THE  
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING CONCERNING  
CONSERVATION, RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE  
USE OF THE SAIGA ANTELOPE (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*)  
Almaty, Kazakhstan, 25-26 September 2006  
Agenda Item 7.0

## OVERVIEW REPORT

*(Prepared by IUCN/SSC Antelope Specialist Group &  
European Sustainable Use Specialist Group 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 Antelope (*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. As of 31 August 2006, the Signatories from the following Range States had submitted their national reports to the Secretariat: Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. A national report was also received from Kazakhstan. Reports were received from Mongolia, whose Ministry of Nature and Environment has signed the MoU as a collaborating organisation, and the State Forestry Administration of China. Eighteen other 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. The structure of this report follows the draft national report format (CMS/SA-1/6/Add.1). Corresponding action points from the Action Plan are indicated in square brackets where appropriate. 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 Antelope

4. 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.
5. There is evidence that the previous severe decline in the global Saiga Antelope population has stabilised since 2002 with increases reported for some populations. Latest estimates are 15-20,000 in Russia. National reports indicate: c. 40,000 in Kazakhstan and an upward trend; maximum 2000 in Turkmenistan in some winters, and stable; maximum 15,000 in Uzbekistan in winter and declining. The distinctive Mongolian subspecies is estimated at 1050-1500 and declining.

6. 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 in all cases smaller than quoted figures due to skewed sex ratios resulting from 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.

7. Saiga occur in five populations: north-west Precaspian, Ural, Ustiurt, Betpak-dala and Mongolia (*S. t. mongolica*). These are depicted in the attached map. A sixth population *Saiga tatarica tatarica* in NW China became extinct by the 1960s.

#### *North-west Precaspian population*

8. The North-west Precaspian population is centred around the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve and Stepnoi Sanctuary. Its range covers two administrative regions of the Russian Federation; the Autonomous Republic of Kalmykia and Astrakhan province. Russia has been in the vanguard of implementing saiga conservation actions, which have been highly successful in terms of public awareness-raising and apparent stabilisation of the saiga population. They are helped in this by the relatively small range area covered by the saiga, which is centred on an effective protected area. Actions taken include livelihoods interventions, anti-poaching patrols and public awareness campaigns. Poaching is still ongoing, though apparently at a less intense commercial level than previously.

#### *Ural population*

9. The Ural population is in the far west of Kazakhstan, between the Volga and Ural rivers. The Ural population suffers from neglect due to its position, remote from Almaty. Although aerial surveys are carried out there annually, there has been little or no other intervention or research in at least the last 10 years.

#### *Ustiurt population*

10. The Ustiurt population occurs west of the Aral Sea, and is a transboundary population. In general the population is in Kazakhstan in the spring and summer, moving into Uzbekistan in the winter, and in severe winters migrating south through Uzbekistan to Turkmenistan. There are several protected areas within the recent range of this population. Kazakhstan: Buzachinsk Sanctuary, Ustiurt Sanctuary. Turkmenistan: Kaplankyr State reserve (282,000ha); Sarykamysch Sanctuary (551,000ha); Shasenem Sanctuary (169,000ha) and an Ustyurt Sanctuary is planned. Uzbekistan: Saiga State Sanctuary (1,000,000ha). The number of saiga that currently occur in these protected areas, and at what time of year, is unknown.

11. The Ustiurt population is the site of the most intense current poaching pressure and disturbance (although Ural is not included in this comparison due to lack of data). This is due to the population currently being larger and/or denser than in Betpak-dala because it is more remote with a lower human population density, hence heavy poaching started later than in Betpak-dala. Remoteness also means it is hard to police and has particularly severe social problems. It has large-scale transport routes passing through it. Its status as a transboundary population brings associated problems concerning implementation of protection. It is likely to be particularly hard hit by upcoming infrastructural development linked to gas extraction.

12. Interventions have included socio-economic surveys in both the Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan ranges of the population, and a pilot alternative livelihoods project in Kazakhstan. An aerial census is carried out annually in the Kazakhstan part of the range, and Kazakhstan also has anti-poaching patrols, which have recently apprehended poachers in the area.

#### *Betpak-dala population*

13. 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. Currently, socio-economic surveys suggest that there is sporadic opportunistic poaching, but the population is too low to support large-scale commercial hunting. Improved monitoring and law enforcement may also have had a positive effect. It is the population of most interest to the Government of Kazakhstan and international NGOs with relation to protected area networks, in part due to the high bird interest of parts of the region. It has been the subject of more previous research than other populations, and many projects are currently under way by a number of NGOs. These encompass scientific research, social surveys, livelihood enhancement, anti-poaching, education and awareness. Aerial censuses are carried out annually. A network of protected areas within the saiga's range is planned, to complement existing reserves: Kurgaldjinsk Zapovednik, Turgai Zapovednik, Andasai Zapovednik, Zhusandalinskaya Protected Zone. Proposals have been developed for the creation of the Irgyz-Turgai Protected Zone (6,700,000ha) covering the main calving area.

#### *Mongolian sub-species*

14. Distribution of the Mongolian sub-species, *Saiga tatarica mongolica*, is centred on the Shargiin Gobi, Khuisiin Gobi and Dorgon Steppe in western Mongolia. This area represents a significant expansion since the 1970s but is still only about 20% of the historical distribution. The nominate subspecies formerly occurred in southwest Mongolia but is now extinct there. The population was estimated at 1,020 in March 2005, down from 3,000 in the year 2000. Both poaching and adverse weather are involved in this decline - an estimated 80% of the Saiga population died during the harsh winter of 2002. Effects of drought are exacerbated by increasing numbers of domestic livestock occupying available water sources. Sharga-Mankhan Nature Reserve (390,000ha) was established in 1993 to protect two 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. However, patrolling and other conservation activities in reserves are limited by lack of funding. Current conservation actions include anti-poaching patrols and feasibility studies for further intervention.

#### *Saiga in China*

15. 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. A captive breeding herd, currently numbering 51 animals, is kept at the Wuwei Endangered Animal Breeding Center, Gansu Province. Reintroduction remains a future aim but there is no detailed implementation schedule at present.

**Table 1. Populations of the Saiga Antelope based on information collected for the 2006 CMS MoU meeting**

Population	Average numbers 2001-2005/6	Proportion of 1980s population	Latest estimate	Postulated trend
NW Precaspian [RU]	15-20,000	13%	15-20,000	Stable/increasing
Ural [KZ]	8,300	7%	9,800	Stable
Ustiurt [KZ, TM, UZ]	16,600	9%	14,700	Decreasing
Betpak-dala [KZ]	8,500	2%	16,800	Increasing
Mongolia [ <i>S.t. mongolica</i> ]	-	-	1,200	Decreasing
Total			56,300-	
( <i>S. t. tatarica</i> )	48,400-53,400		61,300	

### 3.0 Implementation of the Action Plan

16. **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. Signature by the two remaining Range States, Kazakhstan and Russia, will significantly enhance conservation efforts at the global scale. The Ministry of Nature and Environment of Mongolia has signed the MoU as a collaborating organisation. Consideration should be given to extending the MoU and Action Plan to include China and Mongolia, so that they are applicable to the species as a whole.

17. **International Agreements.** *Saiga tatarica tatarica* was listed in CMS Appendix II in 2002. Saiga was included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1995. At its 13<sup>th</sup> meeting in October 2004, the CITES Conference of the Parties adopted 9 interconnected decisions on Saiga Antelopes *inter alia* urging all concerned Parties, Range States, organisations and stakeholders to work together to halt further population declines, improve trade controls and support the entry into effect of the CMS MoU and the implementation of the Action Plan. The IUCN World Conservation Congress in November 2004 also adopted a comprehensive resolution on Saiga conservation urging increased international action.

18. **Habitat [AP Objective 2].** 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 habitat 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.

19. Protected areas coverage is patchy. A major problem remains chronic lack of funding for many sites which limits or prevents any meaningful management activity. Long distances between summer and winter ranges have further complicated the establishment of a comprehensive protected area network. This issue is currently being addressed in Betpak-dala through proposals for an extensive protected zone. Table 2 lists protected areas containing Saiga.

20. **Populations shared between Range States [AP Objective 3].** The only transboundary population is in Ustiurt. A bilateral agreement has been signed between **Turkmenistan** and **Kazakhstan** and a state landscape transboundary reserve is planned in **Uzbekistan**.

21. *Laws, Institutions and Trade [AP 1.6.3, 1.6.4., 1.6.5].* The Saiga Antelope is legally protected in all countries of its breeding range: **Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan**, and in former Range State, **China**. Legal frameworks are generally adequate but increased patrolling and much more stringent enforcement are needed for these to be fully effective.
22. International trade in Saiga Antelopes and products, parts and derivatives thereof is authorized but strictly regulated under the terms of CITES. Since 2001, recommendations have been in place to suspend imports of Saiga from **Kazakhstan** and the **Russian Federation**. The Government of **China** is registering saiga stocks. TRAFFIC and World Conservation Society are currently undertaking a large-scale survey of trade issues under the auspices of the CITES Secretariat.
23. Preliminary results of the CITES trade and market studies confirm the importance of Saiga horn as an essential and virtually irreplaceable ingredient in Traditional Asian Medicine, and show the availability of both fresh and old horns on Asian retail markets, the relative scarcity of the product in the face of continued demand, and significant price increases in recent years.
24. The nine decisions adopted by CITES in 2004 were developed mainly to address concerns related to non-sustainable or illegal trade in, and use of, saiga. Their implementation and overall impact will be discussed in October 2006 and June 2007, when Parties and Range States should report on actions taken to comply with these decisions.
25. *Captive Breeding [AP 1.7].* In **Russia**, the Centre for the Conservation of Wild Animals of Kalmykia has led the way in successfully breeding Saigas, though additional funding is needed for expansion and consolidation of facilities. A small centre in Rostov *oblast* has received training and Saigas from staff of the CWA.
26. Wuwei Endangered Animal Breeding Centre in Gansu province, **China**, established a breeding herd in the 1980s with a view to future reintroduction. It now has 51 animals. A small group was sent there from the Kalmykia Breeding Centre in 2004.
27. Attempts in **Mongolia** to establish a captive breeding herd in the 1970s were unsuccessful. WWF-Mongolia are currently conducting a feasibility study on establishing a captive breeding herd and possible reintroduction.
28. At the international level a number of zoos and collections have kept saiga, mostly with limited breeding success. The Zoological Society of San Diego conducted captive breeding over a 35 year period, 1962-1996, with cooperation from facilities in Europe and the United States, and produced 118 offspring. The Centres for Conservation and Species Survival, a consortium of US zoos, is currently planning cooperative captive breeding programmes.
29. There is a stated intention by the Government of Kazakhstan to establish a saiga breeding facility in **Kazakhstan** in the near future.
30. There is a proposal from **China** for a workshop to bring together saiga captive breeding experts. There is a need for training and exchange of expertise.
31. Representatives of the Traditional Asian Medicine industry in **China** have expressed to the CITES Secretariat their interest in establishing commercial breeding operations for saiga, with the intention to produce horns.

32. **Education and Awareness [AP 3.2].** Education and awareness programmes have been carried out in most Range States; further activities and publications are planned. An excellent visitor centre has just been unveiled at the Kalmykian captive breeding centre. There are at least two websites that contain saiga conservation information, and *Saiga News* has been operational for 18 months. This is a biannual newsletter available electronically and in paper versions, in English and the Range State languages. There has been a lot of publicity in the mass media at all scales, and using all formats – film, TV, newspapers and magazines.
33. **Human Dimension.** Social attitude surveys have been conducted in **Kalmykia**, Betpakdala and Ustiurt (**Kazakhstan** and **Uzbekistan**), using standardised questionnaire surveys. The results are now being analysed. This has not been done for the Ural population; an update in Mongolia forms part of current proposals.
34. There has been some direct but small-scale intervention to improve local people's livelihoods in **Kalmykia** and **Kazakhstan**. Linking improved local livelihoods with saiga conservation is critical to conservation success and expanded programmes throughout saiga range are a priority.
35. **Ecological Studies [AP 1.2, 1.3, 1.4].** The Action Plan calls for adoption of standardised monitoring programmes and field investigations of breeding biology and ecology.
36. Aerial and ground counts are conducted in most parts of saiga range. Different census techniques have been reviewed and 'best practice' methodologies adopted for birth area censuses. Some standardisation and collation of data has also been undertaken for herd counts in **Kazakhstan**, **Kalmykia** and **Uzbekistan**. There is a need to develop best practice for population size estimation, whether by aerial survey or other means. A proposal to do this in **Kazakhstan** is under development.
37. Regular monitoring of sex/age ratio in Saiga Antelope populations is ongoing in **Kalmykia** and Ustiurt, though funding for these activities will cease in 2007. This is planned for **Mongolia** under a current proposal.
38. An international research project on the reproductive ecology of the saiga is being carried out. Other proposed projects include satellite tracking and other aspects of Saiga Antelope ecology.
39. **Threats.** National reports listed the following main threats. **Kazakhstan:** hunting for meat and hunting for horns - medium level threats. Other factors are of low importance. **Turkmenistan:** predation - high level threat; other factors are regarded as low. **Uzbekistan:** hunting for horns or trade - very high; demographic factors - high level. **Mongolia:** Hunting for horns/trade and competition with livestock - very high; habitat loss, drought and severe winters – high.
40. **Priority Actions.** Priority actions listed in the Range State reports are: **Kazakhstan:** create new specially protected areas; captive breeding. **Uzbekistan:** Establish efficient mobile inspection teams; establish a landscape *zakaznik*/sanctuary; carry out regular monitoring of saiga populations; captive breeding. **Mongolia:** reintroduction to former distribution.

#### 4.0 Evaluation

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

- Awareness of 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.
- The severe global population decline has apparently been halted and some populations may have begun to increase.
- Improved techniques have led to regular breeding of captive animals.
- Integration of saiga conservation into wider biodiversity conservation has been initiated.
- Widespread public awareness campaigns have been effective.

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

- Anti-poaching efforts have intensified but should be extended to all parts of the range and given sufficient funding to make them fully effective.
- Existing laws prohibiting saiga hunting and trade need stringent enforcement to ensure arrest and successful prosecution of offenders.
- Some socio-economic surveys have been carried out and pilot projects on livelihoods conducted, but the human dimension has so far been relatively neglected. Integration of local communities into saiga conservation programmes, especially alternative livelihood provision will be critical for long-term success.

# RANGE OF SAIGA ANTELOPE



Milner-Gulland et al. (2001), Oryx

**Table 2. Saiga Antelope Occurrence in Protected Areas**

Name	Area (ha)	IUCN Category	Months saiga present	Rut <sup>1</sup>	Calving <sup>1</sup>
<b>Russia</b>					
Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve	121,900		1-12	Yes	Yes
Stepnoi Sanctuary			1-12	Yes	Yes
<b>Kazakhstan</b>					
Kurgaldjinsk Zapovednik	258,963		5-10	-	Some years
Turgai Zakaznik	348,000		5-10	-	Some years
Andasai Zakaznik	1,000,000		10-4	Yes	No
Zhusandalinskaya Protected Zone	2,757,500		10-4	Yes	No
South-Kazakhstan Protected Zone	6,258,000		10-4	Yes	No
Ustiurt Zapovednik	223,342		1-12	Some years	Some years
<i>Proposed</i>					
Irgiz-Turgai Protected Zone	6,700,000		1-12	Yes	Yes
Zhaltyrkol Protected Zone	1,400,000		1-12 (some years)	Some years	Yes
<b>Turkmenistan</b>					
Kaplankyr State Reserve	282,000	I	11-3		
Sarykamysh Sanctuary	551,000		11-3		
Shasenem Sanctuary	169,000		11-3		
<i>Proposed</i>					
Ustyurt Sanctuary	150		11-3		
<b>Uzbekistan</b>					
Saigak State Zakaznik	1,000,000	III	10-5	Yes	Possibly
<b>Mongolia</b>					
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
<sup>1</sup> 'Yes' and 'Some years' refer to the situation c. 20 years ago. With the severe recent population declines, rut and calving may not currently occur in a particular locality every year.					

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