



Report on the implementation of the project under the SCA's Small Grants Programme, with support from USFWS.

Project: Organization and carrying out of Buddhist prayers and lectures for the population living in the saiga range



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The project "Organization and holding of Buddhist prayers and lectures for people living the saiga range" was launched in February 2014. The purpose of the project was to generate environmentally oriented thinking and respect for nature of their native land among the local population.

In February 2014, a meeting was held in the main temple of Kalmykia "Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni" with the monks of the temple. During these meetings, they discussed a number of issues and reached an agreement to hold special prayers, ceremonies and lectures on the conservation of biological diversity of the Republic of Kalmykia, including the saiga, among people living in the habitat of this species. The discussions resulted in a schedule of visits by monks, as well as employees of the Centre for Wild Animals of Kalmykia to remote farmsteads and villages.



As a result, the team made 55 visits to the Centre for Wild Animals, Yashkul, Chernozemelskiy, Yustinsky, Iki-Burulsky villages in the Republic of Kalmykia in which the monks held Buddhist ceremonies.

The essence of this ritual is that the monks read a series of prayers dedicated to all living things and make offerings of food in the area in which people reside. The offering consists of sugary foods, fruits, as well as optional ingredients such as milk, sour cream and honey. Some of the products are placed in a large bowl and set on fire. Fire is considered to be among the Kalmyk's great god, and is why fire is involved in a lot of traditions, customs and beliefs. It is believed that the fire sacrifice will help to create a favourable environment for all living things. The remainder of the products were blessed using prayers and distributed to the homeowners.

In April 2014 a rite was held at The Centre for Wild Animals of Kalmykia, where there is a saiga breeding centre and many captive saigas. It is important to note that this rite was performed at one of the most important periods of life for saigas - the birth of their young.



Lama prepares offering prayers



Reading



Ceremony at the saiga breeding centre

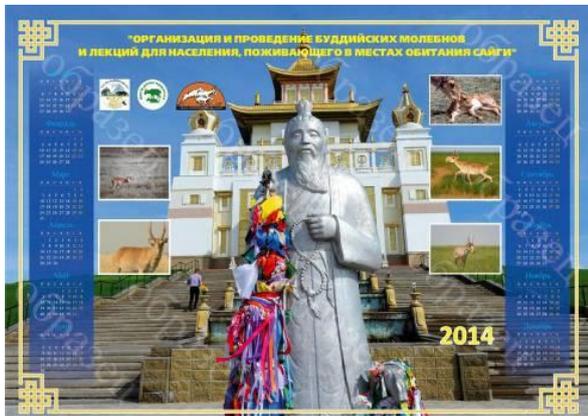
Work under this project was carried out in close cooperation with the "Centre of Wild Animals of Kalmykia", which has many years of experience in carrying out such activities. The centre's staff carried out meetings with local people and compiled and distributed illustrative material about saigas and biological diversity. Thus, we believe that through such conversations, by the end of the project we were in a strong position, having spoken to many local residents and the wider public, and had raised the awareness of the necessity and challenges of conserving the flora and fauna of the Kalmyk steppe.





Also, with assistance from the staff of the Centre we conducted a questionnaire among local residents living in the area saiga. This was a before and after questionnaire and we are happy to report that having analysed the results of 100 local people the majority now fully understand the challenges that face the saiga and why these occur, whereas before the project the majority were unaware of any issues with the saiga population , there was a drop from 30% to 15% in the amount of people sympathetic to the poachers activities and a rise in the numbers of people who think it critical to help conserve the saiga and defend it against poachers, and many offered their services to help in this activity.

During the project, the Centre for Wild Animals prepared and distributed leaflets and illustrated calendars devoted to saiga conservation.





За убийство сайгака теперь могут посадить

Федеральным законом от 2 июля 2013 года № 150-ФЗ «О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации» введена новая статья 258¹, предусматривающая уголовную ответственность (лишение свободы сроком до 7 лет и штраф до 2 млн. рублей) за незаконную добычу, содержание, приобретение, хранение, перевозку, пересылку (контрабанду) и продажу особо ценных диких животных и водных биологических ресурсов, принадлежащих к видам, занесённым в Красную книгу Российской Федерации и (или) охраняемым международными договорами Российской Федерации, их частей и производных.

В перечень объектов животного мира, утверждённый Постановлением Правительства РФ № 978 от 3 ноября 2013 года, включены млекопитающие (алтайский горный баран, амурский тигр, белый медведь, леопард, зубр, за исключением гибридов зубра с бизоном или домашним скотом, **САЙГАК** и снежный барс), птицы (балобан, беркут, кречет, сапсан) и рыбы (амурский, атлантический, персидский, русский, сибирский и сахалинский осетры, белуга, калуга, северюга, сахалинский таймень, шип), занесённые в Красную книгу Российской Федерации или подпадающие под действие Конвенции о международной торговле видами дикой фауны и флоры, находящимися под угрозой исчезновения (СИТЕС), стороной которой является Российская Федерация.

Фот: В.Маслов

This project was very successful and productive. On completion of this project, we have achieved the following results:

- With the help of religion focused on the issue of public disappearance saiga; attracted the attention of the general public (including clergy and people practicing Buddhism) to the problems of conservation of natural ecosystems on the Kalmyk steppe, and endangered species of plants and animals.
- Due to the conversations the staff at The Centre for Wild Animals carried out with local people we have increased public awareness of the saiga.
- Published and distributed together with the monks, a series of illustrative materials on Saiga (flyers, calendars).
- Conducted a survey of 100 people on the impact of the project: The organization and holding Buddhist prayers and lectures for the population living the saiga range.