

Saiga Spotlight

The newsletter of the Saiga Conservation Alliance Fall 2014

Photo by Navinder Singh



Children create a conservation masterpiece

This spring British wildlife artist Rory McCann travelled to Uzbekistan to engage with local children and paint a mural depicting Steppe wildlife—and so launched a completely new approach to saiga conservation.

Our aim was to spark the children's interest

in local wildlife and conservation efforts—and it was a complete success. As they joined in the painting, they showed an insatiable curiosity about both the wider world and their own wildlife treasures.

After eight days of painting we stepped back and admired this wonderful piece of

art created by the local community. Donations from supporters like you helped to inspire children through this unique experience.

See a short clip of how the mural was made at www.youtube.com/SaigaConservation



Saiga “maternity ward” opened!

Saigas live in the Stepnoi Reserve in Russia all year, but only recently started giving birth there. Unfortunately, this makes them an easy target for poachers. The reserve managers and regional police decided to provide round-the-clock protection to the calving herds. “Maternity Ward” signs were put up declaring the area off-limits, providing the herd of 3,500 with a safe and peaceful place to bring their young into the world.

Many saigas give birth to twins which lie motionless, hidden in the undergrowth for the first few days of their lives while their mothers look for food and water, in turn feeding them in the morning and late afternoons.



Thanks to generous donations from our supporters at WCN, notably the family of Joy Covey, the SCA was able to support the rangers of the Stepnoi Reserve this year in their efforts to protect these defenseless animals from poachers.



JOIN US!

Visit www.saiga-conservation.com and become a member



Exciting new saiga cartoon

We have once again teamed up with local Uzbek children for a gripping new saiga cartoon, "A Steppe Tale II." They painted all the images and provided Uzbek, Russian and English voice-overs.

The sequel reflects the challenges facing the Ustyurt Plateau. Tough economic conditions are forcing the sacrifice of wildlife and the environment. Construction of infrastructure, roads and pipelines for natural gas impacts the saiga's migration route.

In the cartoon, Nosey the saiga is faced with a new hazard: Altyn Khan, an evil wizard, is building an iron city to produce oil and gas, which will destroy the

environment, saigas, and the steppe. A girl tries to help Nosey, while her brother (and his robot) help build the city. While exhaust fumes from the city cause air pollution, its location blocks saiga migration. Is there a way to balance the needs of humans vs the environment's?

We're grateful to our donors at Disney Canada's Coins for Change program who have made this project a reality.



See the cartoon at the WCN Expo or visit www.youtube.com/SaigaConservation

Beautiful gifts available online

Our alternative livelihood project in Uzbekistan has grown immensely, thanks to support from our WCN friends. Money raised at Expo last year allowed us to train Uzbek women to turn their beautiful and unique traditional embroidery into bags.

Now, a variety of colourful designs and styles of bags can be ordered at www.saigacraft.org so you can receive them in time for the holidays.

Visit our new online shop and learn about the meanings behind the designs and how sales are helping women in deprived rural areas of Uzbekistan—as well as

saving the critically endangered saiga antelope.

You can also order a saiga plush toy and own your very own saiga! Just visit www.saigacraft.org



One of the embroidery groups in Jaslyk with their make-up bags

Saiga "fun run" a success

This year we launched a 'mini-marathon' (3 km) for children during the Saiga Day festivities in Uzbekistan. This was followed by a discussion about the challenges the saiga face as they migrate and how they have adapted to cope with the tough terrain.

The run gave children insight into how saigas feel on their marathon journey across the Steppe. The children all finished the tough course and have a new-found respect for saigas!



The winner of the Saiga Day mini-marathon shows off his medal

All photos this page by Alexander Espivov

Camera traps are "catching" endangered species

Thanks to WCN supporters we're using a new technology in Uzbekistan—camera trapping. This provides us yet another way to study saiga behavior.

In the past, zoologists had to keep a silent vigil over animals for days so not to scare them away. Now it's much simpler – set up camera traps in the animal's territory and download the photos and videos!

We focused on places on the Ustyurt Plateau where wild animals congregate in extremely hot temperatures – lakes, wells and caves, etc. Our covert camera traps "captured" saiga, hares, red foxes, jerboas, lizards, desert birds like eagle-owls and endangered goitered gazelle. Most exciting for us was the first ever recording of the rarest of Uzbekistan's desert cats – the caracal (or desert lynx).

Check our website to see the latest images. www.saiga-conservation.com



GET INVOLVED!

Visit www.saiga-conservation.com to see how you can help!

Recognizing excellence in saiga protection

An award in memory of Joy Covey, a long time SCA supporter, was presented to three groups of people who have dedicated themselves to protecting the saiga antelope. Since they're out on the steppe every day, it's easy to overlook the contribution of the rangers who are at the front line of conservation. They protect saigas in tough environments and face potentially dangerous confrontations with poachers—often for low pay and with poor equipment.



Members of the anti-poaching team of the Irgiz-Turgay reserve, Kazakhstan with a new-born saiga calf.

This award recognizes their amazing efforts.

The first prize of \$1,000 was awarded to the anti-poaching team of the Irgiz-Turgay reserve in Kazakhstan. They've been instrumental in the recovery of the Betspak-dala saiga, which was nearly extinct 10 years ago. The runners-up were the Ranger team of the Stepnoi Reserve, Russia and Batsaikhan Baljinnyam, State Environmental Inspector in Mongolia.

Thanks go to Joy's family for supporting this award, and congratulations to the winners on their well-deserved prizes.



Conservation leaders of the future



Olga acting as interpreter on a recent SCA Mural project in Uzbekistan

We're pleased to introduce the conservation leaders of the future!

An exciting SCA initiative recognizes and supports the next generation of conservationists through grants and mentoring. So let's welcome three young conservationists into the growing SCA family:

Olga Espipova (pictured above) is an SCA volunteer and full-time university student in Uzbekistan. At the WCN Expo this year she'll talk about some of the child-

focused saiga projects she has worked on.

Aigul' Aitbaeva is a saiga conservation project manager with the Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia, Russia, with a special interest in working with children.

Sergelen Erdenebaatar is a biologist working with the NGO "Altain Nuudelchid" in Mongolia who is using his grant to research the biology of the Mongolian saiga subspecies.

Each aspiring conservationist received \$1,000 to support a 12-month project which links to the ongoing work of the SCA in their country, in addition to mentoring from SCA guardians.

A saiga pop song and video

We're branching out into the music world with the release of a pop song and music video about saigas! Originally written and performed by Koblan Ezenbaev, a famous Uzbek musician and singer, he kindly let us rerecord his song in English.



Photo by Alexander Espipov

The song urges people to help save the saiga antelope and its steppe habitat. Two young actors bring to life the struggle between competing views of the world. In the end they unite to fight for nature.

Joe Bull, saiga friend and Ph.D. student at Imperial College London, recorded the English version of the song.

Watch the video at www.youtube.com/SaigaConservation



Thanks to the Houston Zoo for its support of this project.

What are saigas?



The saiga antelope is a unique inhabitant of the vast plains of Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It is a relic of the ice age fauna that included mammoths and sabre tooth cats, and is evolutionarily distinct from other antelopes. It is a symbol of the steppe for the nomadic people it shares its habitat with, and has been an important source of food and inspiration for centuries.

DONATE! Your support is crucial for the saiga!



Photo by Jean-Francois Lagrot

YOU can make a difference!

Support Wildlife Clubs – Environmental education for children

Establishing Wildlife Clubs in villages associated with saiga poaching allows children to have fun while learning to value their own natural heritage.

- a. **\$70** provides a child with everything they need to take part in club activities for a year, including notebooks, pens and a uniform.
- b. **\$170** buys a refurbished laptop so children can take part in international environmental competitions and on-line training.
- c. **\$1500** buys essential field equipment (tents, binoculars, cameras, transportation), so children can take part in eco-camps and engage with their natural environment.

Support Traditional Embroidery and women's enterprise

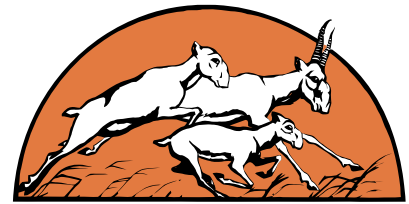
This project gives women the opportunity to learn sewing and business skills. The potential to earn a wage and provide a consistent income for their family enables women to afford alternative meat such as mutton, helping to reduce the hunting of saigas.

- a. **\$100** helps a woman in rural Uzbekistan to buy materials and equipment to join an embroidery enterprise.
- b. **\$250** buys a sewing machine. Allowing women to incorporate their beautiful hand-embroidered designs into purses, bags and other desirable items.
- c. **\$2800** to create marketing and publicity materials to maintain an internet presence and help the women publicize and sell their products overseas.

Support Saiga monitoring and protection

This project engages local communities in saiga conservation through their participation in assessing the status and trends of their saiga population, while also receiving an income from their involvement.

- a. **\$60** buys enough gasoline for rangers to run motorbike patrols for a season.
- b. **\$200** buys a pair of binoculars to help monitors and rangers spot saiga from a distance.
- c. **\$250** buys an infra-red camera, to help combat illegal saiga poaching activity by hunters.
- d. **\$700** to train and equip ex-hunters and unemployed men in rural villages with technical equipment to monitor and protect saiga.



Saiga Conservation Alliance

The Saiga Conservation Alliance is a collaborative network of scientists and conservationists who work within saiga range states and internationally. Committed to restoring saiga antelope populations to levels which enable it to play its full role in the ecological and human landscape, we promote and support the species' intrinsic, cultural and economic value by carrying out research, conservation actions and capacity building. We are a registered charity in England and Wales (1135851)

To make a donation to support Saiga Conservation:

- Visit www.wildnet.org [select "Saigas" in the "Where needed most" pull-down]
- Make check payable to 'Wildlife Conservation Network' and send to:
WCN. 25745 Bassett Lane. Los Altos CA, 94022
(Be sure to write on the check that the donation is for Saigas.)
- Visit us at www.saiga-conservation.com

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