

Saiga Spotlight

The newsletter of the Saiga Conservation Alliance Fall 2011



Photo © Navinder Singh

Saiga Day goes international!

In April 2011 Saiga Day was celebrated for the first time in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Russia. Hundreds of children took part in events to celebrate and support the saiga antelope.

Kids from Kalmykia, Russia visited saigas at the breeding centre in Yashkul and took part in special sports events and quizzes,

whilst their counterparts in West Kazakhstan got creative with saiga art and poetry competitions, and played games and puzzles. In Uzbekistan, schoolchildren and their parents

sang, danced and watched puppet shows in a big saiga-themed concert.

In all these regions the saiga is a much-loved cultural and historical icon and its demise has caused great sadness.



Photo courtesy of ACBK

With such wonderful enthusiasm flowing from the next generation, we feel hopeful for the saiga's future.

The SCA will expand International Saiga Day to new countries and regions in the years to come – maybe to a school near you!



Photo © Alexander Esipov

Saiga conservation project update

The Saiga Conservation Alliance has worked to save the saiga antelope across its range states for many years, and 2011 is no exception!

Elena Bykova, with support from the Wildlife Conservation Network, Disney

Coins for Change and the Whitley Foundation for Nature, is busy raising awareness and developing alternative sources of income in Uzbekistan.

In Russia, Professor Yuri Arylov of the Centre for Wild Animals and Anatoly

Khludnev of the Stepnoi Reserve are implementing innovative participatory monitoring to conserve the threatened pre-Caspian population, with help from the Rufford Foundation and the Mohammed Bin Zayed fund.

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.



Join us!

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

Photo © Jean-Francois Lagrot

First saiga ecotour visits southern Russia

August 2011 marked the launch of our first international saiga ecotour to the steppes of southern Russia.

In partnership with a local tour company, Saga Voyages, the SCA developed a tour of the wildlife and culture of this little known region. A group of tourists from the US and Canada visited key SCA project sites during a 10-day tour of the steppe grasslands, the Caspian, and the lush Volga Delta. The trip also took in the historic city of Astrakhan

and the Republic of Kalmykia, the only official Tibetan Buddhist state in Europe.

This new initiative supports the saiga projects visited, provides a source of much-needed income for the local economy, and fosters links with the international community. With a little luck, this will become an annual event: Join us in 2012!



Photo © Igor Shpilenok

Spotlight on saigas in Kazakhstan

In May 2010 tragedy struck the Ural saiga population in western Kazakhstan: nearly 12,000 saigas, about one third of the population, were found dead from disease. Heartbreakingly, they were mostly females who had recently given birth, so their calves probably also died.

Out of this sad event some optimism can be found. A new project set up by the SCA and the Association for the Conser-

vation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan is building on community concern at the loss. Public opinion is being mobilised into concerted action, and the future looks hopeful. Sign up for our newsletter to keep informed of their progress.

The project is funded by the People's Trust for Endangered Species, the Save Our Species (SOS) coalition and Fauna and Flora International.



Trying to identify reasons behind saiga fatalities

Photo by Committee of forestry and hunting of Kazakhstan

Get involved!

Visit www.saiga-conservation.com and make a difference. Join us!

Saiga Facts

Latin name *Saiga tatarica*

Appearance In summer, the saiga's coat is a rich chestnut colour and its belly and legs are pale. In winter, it has a thick, pale buff coat and the males' noses swell for the rut

Range *Saiga tatarica tatarica* lives in Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and, in extremely cold winters, Turkmenistan.

Saiga tatarica mongolica lives in Mongolia, and until the 1960s, China

Habitat Arid Eurasian steppe

Height Roughly the size of a goat, measuring about 70cm tall

Weight Males weigh about 41kg and females about 28kg

Top speed 80 km/h

Diet Grasses, herbs and shrubs.

Predators Wolves and foxes.

Eagles sometimes take calves.

Number of Young Young females typically have one calf; older females have twins or, very occasionally, triplets.

Status Critically Endangered

Photo © Igor Shpilenok

Spotlight on SCA Small Grant winner Aizada Nurumbetova

In 2007, the SCA initiated a pioneering Small Grants Programme. This competition aims to build capacity at the grassroots level by providing up to \$2,000 for a one-year project on saiga conservation in the wild. Aizada, winner of a 2010 Small Grant, is director of the “Keuil Nury” Centre for Social Support of Women in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. She has been using her grant to develop alternative sources of income for local

women. They are trained in needlework, embroidery and handicrafts, reducing the need for illegal saiga poaching, and act as advocates for saiga conservation in their families and communities. Innovative projects such as these rely on your support. Visit www.saiga-conservation.com to see how you can get involved.



Learning to embroider

All photos © Alexander Esipov

Why do saigas need your help?

Saigas are one of the fastest declining mammal species on our planet today. As recently as the early 1990s, 1 million migrated across the open steppe in vast herds, but just over a decade later barely 6 percent remained.

Why so few? Extensive and unregulated poaching is the greatest cause. This is due to both the collapse of rural economies following the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the reopening of the border with China in the late 1980s. (Males are targeted for their horns for use in traditional Chinese medicine.)

In addition to poaching, other threats to the saiga include habitat degradation, migration disruption and competition for grazing.

In recent years, the situation has improved thanks to international conservation efforts, and the decline has stopped. Unfortunately, 2010 brought hard winters, disease and renewed heavy poaching.



Patrolling for poachers

Photo © E.J. Milner-Gulland

Saigas are at severe risk of extinction. But we know that conservation works: Join us and help save the saiga for future generations.

Donate!

Your support is crucial for the saiga! Visit www.saiga-conservation.com to see how you can help!



Weighing a baby saiga

Photo © Nils Bunnefeld



Photo © James Finlay

Photo © Igor Shpilenok

SCA's Elena Bykova wins prestigious Whitley Award for saiga conservation

SCA Executive Secretary Elena Bykova was presented her prize by HRH The Princess Royal during a ceremony at the Royal Geographical Society in London, hosted by The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN). The Whitley Award includes development training and a project grant of £30,000 – generously donated by the Scottish Friends of the WFN. The prize recognises Elena's tireless efforts to

engage people of the Ustiurt Plateau in saiga conservation. Congratulations, Lena!

Elena is using the funding to evaluate the amazing conservation work she has been doing over the last 6 years to see which initiatives have worked best in changing people's attitudes. She will also look at new ways of counting this elusive and nomadic species. Since saiga can run up

to 80 km/h and travel thousands of kilometers between their summer and winter grounds – sometimes in different countries – this is a very difficult job!

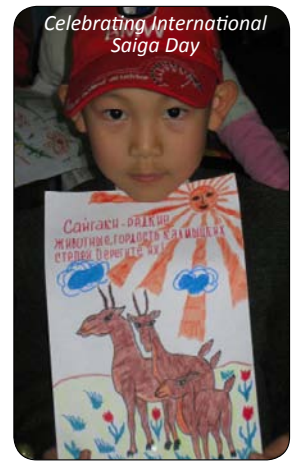


Photo © E.J. Milner-Gulland

The Saiga Conservation Alliance



Saiga Conservation Alliance

We are a network of researchers and conservationists who have worked together for over 15 years to study and conserve the saiga. We are committed to restoring its position as the lynchpin of the steppes, reflecting the species' cultural and

economic value to local people and its fundamental role in the ecosystem. We work collaboratively, and freely share our expertise and love for saigas. We disseminate our work widely throughout the world – to the public, governments, and the conservation community.

Registered charity in England and Wales (1135851)

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