

Saiga Spotlight



The newsletter of the Saiga Conservation Alliance Fall 2012

Photo © Navinder Singh



A new educational course for the schoolchildren of Karakalpakstan

While law enforcement is incredibly important in the fight against illegal poaching of endangered species, it is by no means the only way to tackle it. In the longer run, another effective approach is to educate local children,



who might one day be tempted to poach, about the threats the saiga faces. With this in mind, SCA representatives, equipped with teacher-training guides and teaching materials for students, met with teachers from villages in Uzbekistan to train them in saiga biology and conser-

vation during a four-day workshop. (See lower right) The training was well-received and we look forward to seeing the results. The teaching pack was prepared by the

State Committee for Nature Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan, with the generous assistance of the Penguin Club of the Disney-Canada Foundation.



Photo by Alexander Espipov



Photo by Natalia Shivaldova

Yet another difficult year for saigas in Kazakhstan

The year 2012 saw yet another mass die-off of saigas in the critically endangered Kazakhstan populations; the third in as many years. Almost 1,000 saigas were found dead in late May just after their calving season. The die-offs appear to be the result of natural causes, such as disease, but it's difficult to establish the main driver of these events or even if they are related. Historical

records tell us that saiga numbers have often fluctuated. The difference now is that human involvement has driven saiga numbers so low that these fluctuations pose a very real threat. Veterinarians and scientists are working to understand and reduce these die-offs, but the most effective way to safeguard the saiga from extinction is to increase their

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Three saiga females; photo by Igor Shpilnenok

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

Saiga Day 2012



For the second year Saiga Day went international, with events in Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan.

Villages and schools from across the saiga range states held festivals celebrating the important role this enigmatic species plays in local culture. Concerts, quizzes, sports events and art competitions were the order of the day for children of all ages.

The festivities expanded into new regions and new events were created, including more involving teenagers. In Jaslyk, Uzbekistan, for example, youngsters painted an old oil pipe which runs through the centre of the village with colourful images of saigas and Disney-inspired animals, in celebration of the funding the event received from Disney's Penguin Club. (See photo below)



For centuries the saiga has been an icon for the people of the steppe and events like these will strengthen that connection.



Clockwise from above: participants in the painting competition; youth dances in saiga costume; young participants in the concert program; saiga toys made by children. Photos by Alexander Esipov.

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 during mating season.

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 70 cm tall

Weight Males weigh about 41 kg and females about 28 kg

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.

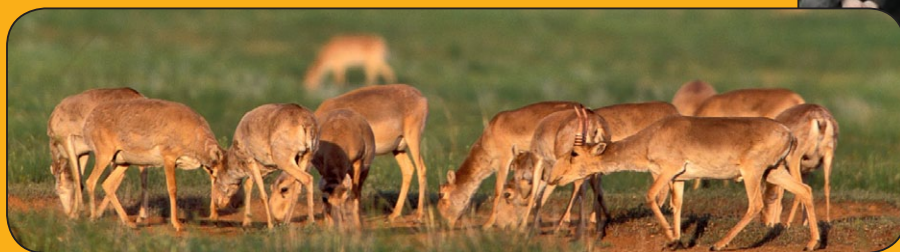
Status Critically Endangered

Spotlight on SCA Small Grant winner WCS-China

In 2007 the SCA initiated a pioneering Small Grants Programme. This competition builds capacity at the grassroots level by offering grants of up to \$2,000 for a one-year project on saiga conservation in the wild.

Since 2009, three grants have supported the work of the Wildlife Conservation Society's South China Project. WCS-China

is working to reduce the illegal trade of saiga products in Guangzhou by gathering trade information and directing the efforts of government agencies. They're also developing education programmes to try and stem demand.



Innovative projects such as these rely on your support. Visit www.saiga-conservation.com to see how you can take action.

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, one 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, as well as 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.



Saiga male; photo by Navinder Singh

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.

Saigas are at severe risk of extinction. But we know

that conservation works: Join us and help save the saiga for future generations.

Did you know...

Stone Age paintings of saigas have been found in numerous caves alongside paintings of species such as mammoths and woolly rhinos. Sadly, those two species are both extinct, but the saiga is still very much alive, and, with your help, we can keep it that way. Visit www.saiga-conservation.com to see how.



Young girl feeds a young saiga, during Saiga Day 2012. Photo by Tatyana Karimova

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



An SCA-commissioned documentary exploring the plight of the saiga has been awarded the grand prize, the Golden Loon, at the International Environmental TV Festival "Save and

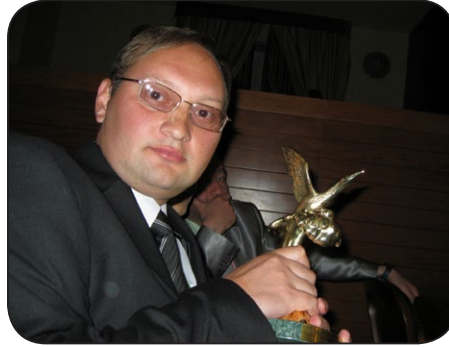
SCA documentary wins Golden Loon award at international film festival

Conserve" in Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia. The film "At the End of the Line," which was created by Tashkent GALA-Film Studio with financial assistance from Disney Canada, the Marsh Christian Trust and DVV International, attracted special attention of jury members. It is narrated from the perspective of

an old man who explains how the catastrophic decline of saigas in Uzbekistan has affected his life, and how important saigas are for the steppe.

You can watch "At the End of the Line" by visiting our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/SaigaConservation.

Member of the Selection Board Maria Vorontsova, Director of IFAW-Russia, presents the prestigious "Golden Loon" statuette to the film cameraman, Aleksandr Klepalov.



Saiga calves, photo by Nils Bunnefeld

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)

Acknowledgements

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Kazakhstan

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numbers to a level that can withstand these shocks. With your help, we're stopping the decline in this wonderful species but it will take even more to reverse this process. Go online and see how you can get involved at www.saiga-conservation.com.

Sponsors IFAW

