

Saiga Conservation Alliance: Impact Report 2025

Executive Summary: 2025 a year of Resilience and Recovery Saiga Conservation Alliance

Saiga conservation rarely follows a straight road. Like many keystone species around the world, the Saiga antelope has experienced dramatic highs and lows over the past two decades. Yet in recent years, the overall story has become one of recovery. Saiga numbers have grown steadily, especially in Kazakhstan, and global populations now exceed three million. Poaching has dropped significantly, supported by stronger laws, brave rangers, and growing political and economic stability in Central Asia. Alongside this progress, conservation partners have helped establish protected areas, buffer zones, and migration corridors, creating safer landscapes for Saiga to mate, calve, migrate, and thrive.

This recovery has not come easily. Saiga range states and conservation organisations have remained committed through years of population crashes, disease outbreaks, pandemics, political upheaval, and global recessions. In 2024, this long-term effort reached a milestone, with the Saiga's IUCN Red List status changing to Near Threatened, a major achievement for a species once on the brink.

At the same time, late 2024 also brought renewed debate and controversy, with unpopular population control measures, including culling, carried out in West Kazakhstan. Authorities resumed these measures again between August and November 2025.

These developments served as a reminder that conservation success creates new challenges, and that long-term recovery depends not only on population growth, but on responsible management, evidence-based decision-making, and international cooperation.

Saiga now also stands as a global conservation case study. It has been recognised as part of the IUCN Green List framework, showing an estimated 30% recovery score. This signals both success and unfinished work. Recovery has advanced rapidly in Kazakhstan, but threats remain for smaller populations elsewhere, and the future will depend on careful governance across both range and consumer states.

In early 2025, the Saiga Conservation Alliance faced its own major challenge. Global political shifts triggered sudden funding cuts following the creation of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) in the United States, which resulted in the closure of USAID, USFWS, and INL funding streams. This decision abruptly ended SCA's flagship USFWS Conservation Catalyst Fund supported programme, which had operated across Saiga range and consumer states, as well as our Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan transboundary work delivered in partnership with Fauna and Flora.

Despite this setback, SCA did not stop. With the rapid support of the Wildlife Conservation Network and their wider community of nature investors, we stabilised our work and continued delivering impact. In 2025, we successfully completed six major programme activities, ensuring that momentum for Saiga conservation continued during a period of uncertainty.

These included:

- Saiga Memorandum of Understanding and Medium-Term International Work Programme workshop support
- Supporting rangers in Saigachiy, Uzbekistan, through the provision of winter uniforms and a 4x4 vehicle
- Publishing Saiga News Issue 30, maintaining vital communication across the conservation community

- Installing a prototype solar-powered watering hole on the Ustyurt Plateau, reviving abandoned wells to support wildlife in extreme arid landscapes
- Delivering Saiga Day and the Day of Migratory Species celebrations in Karakalpakstan, engaging schools and communities in conservation and environmental education
- Supporting workshops, side events, and advisory delegation work at CITES CoP20, ensuring that Saiga conservation remained part of high-level international discussions

2025 also marked a period of transition within SCA. After many years of dedicated service, Carlyn Samuel moved on from the organisation. At the same time, long-standing project manager Peter Damerell stepped into the role of Interim Director, helping guide SCA through a changing conservation landscape and shaping the future direction of the organisation as Saiga recovery enters a new phase.

One of the most significant international developments of the year came in December. On Thursday 4 December, Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) voted in favour of a proposal from Kazakhstan to cautiously reopen the export of Saiga horn and meat from Kazakhstan's recovered populations. This decision was achieved through a change to the annotation attached to the CITES Appendix II listing for Saiga, which since 2019 had banned all commercial exports of Saiga specimens from the wild. The amendment effectively returned trade rules to the situation prior to that ban.

This decision reflected the extraordinary recovery of Kazakhstan's Saiga populations, from fewer than 40,000 individuals in 2005, to an estimated 3.9 million individuals as of April 2025. In some areas, population levels now exceed those recorded historically, making it difficult to justify an ongoing blanket export ban. The proposal passed with an overwhelming majority; 111 Parties voted in favour, 7 opposed, and 14 abstained. This vote demonstrated international recognition of Kazakhstan's conservation success, while also highlighting the need for precautionary safeguards to protect smaller Saiga populations in neighbouring range states.

As we navigate 2026 and look ahead, we do so with pride, realism, and determination. Saiga conservation has reached a historic turning point. The species has recovered in remarkable ways, yet it now faces new pressures linked to land use, infrastructure expansion, climate change, disease, and the politics of sustainable use. This is precisely why SCA's work must continue. The next chapter of Saiga conservation will require strong science, stronger partnerships, and steady support, ensuring that recovery becomes permanent across the full Saiga range.

This impact report captures what we achieved in 2025, and it reflects what remains possible when committed partners stand together, even in challenging times.

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Saiga and Conservation Alliance

Saiga Antelope - A Symbol of the Steppe

Saiga antelopes, with their distinctive long noses and large eyes, have roamed the earth since the ice age. Once widespread across Eastern Europe, Asia, and Alaska, they now inhabit only Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russia, and Uzbekistan. Saiga are integral to the culture of the people in these regions.

Current Distribution and Threats

Saiga are now limited to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, and Mongolia. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to economic hardships that increased poaching, primarily for the male Saigas' horns used in Chinese traditional medicine. This poaching caused a reproductive collapse as the number of adult males plummeted. However, recent years have shown population recovery, especially in Kazakhstan, where Saiga numbers have grown due to favourable conditions and high fertility.

Current threats include oil and gas exploration and transportation, as well as the laying of new road and rail infrastructures which limit access to traditional pastures, as well as disease outbreaks and pressure from livestock farming.

Saiga Population Numbers

Saiga populations have fluctuated over the decades, with numbers plummeting to 48,300 in 2004 before recovering to over 1.9 million in 2023. Conservation efforts have played a critical role in this recovery.

As of January 2026, Kazakhstan's Saiga population reached 2,833,600, a 48% increase from the previous year. The Ural region holds the largest population, followed by Betpak-Dala and Ustyurt.

From Crisis to Celebration

The Saiga antelope faced a catastrophic decline in the 1990s, with over 95% of the population disappearing. A respiratory illness in 2015 killed over 200,000 Saigas in Kazakhstan. Despite these setbacks, the species has rebounded significantly. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reclassified the Saiga from Critically Endangered to Near Threatened in December 2023, highlighting the success of extensive conservation efforts over nearly two decades.

Uzbekistan hosts c.500 Saiga. c.200 of which were first discovered in the Aral Sea Region in 2021, the remaining 300 are isolated from the main Ustyurt population. In early 2023 a census of the Mongolian subspecies reported a population number of 13,925 individuals. An increase from 10,077 the previous year.

Saiga Conservation Alliance (SCA)

The Saiga Conservation Alliance (SCA) is a network of researchers and conservationists dedicated to the protection and study of the critically endangered Saiga antelope. Established in September 2006, the SCA gained Candidate Partner status with the Wildlife Conservation Network in November 2006.

Mission

The SCA aims to restore the Saiga antelope as the flagship species of the Central Asian and pre-Caspian steppes. Reflecting the Saiga's cultural and economic significance and its role in the ecosystem, the SCA promotes collaborative efforts, shares expertise, and disseminates information widely to conservationists, the public, governments, and the broader conservation community.

Objectives and Activities

- **Restoration:** Committed to restoring Saiga populations to sustainable levels.
- **Conservation and Education:** Promotes the conservation and protection of Saiga antelope and educates the public about these efforts.

- Research and Capacity-Building: Supports research, conservation actions, and capacity-building to highlight the Saiga's intrinsic, cultural, and economic value.

Supporting colleagues in four Saiga range states' protected areas

Protected Areas: 25

Total Landmass: 10,727,420 ha*

Uzbekistan

- Protected Areas: 5
- Total Area: 3,211,896 hectares

Kazakhstan

- Protected Areas: 4
- Total Area: 2,320,821 hectares

Mongolia

- Protected Areas: 8
- Total Area: 13,820 square km / 1,382,000 ha

Russia**

- Protected Areas: 8
- Total Area: 798,703 hectares

*Slightly Smaller than Greece/Larger than Iceland

**SCA ceased operations in Russia in 2022

Partners

- Nabu
- WWF Mongolia
- WCS Mongolia
- WCS China
- ACBK
- ADCI
- FFI
- IZU

Our People

Trustees:

- E.J. Milner-Gulland, Chair (UK)
- David Mallon (UK)
- Anthony Dancer, Treasurer (UK)
- Waleri Schmunk (Germany)

Steering Committee:

- E.J. Milner-Gulland, Chair (UK)
- Alexander Esipov (Uzbekistan)
- Buuveibaatar Bayarbaatar (Mongolia)
- Olga Obgenova (Russia)
- Aline Kühl-Stenzel (Germany)
- Elena Bykova (Uzbekistan)
- Chimeddorj Buyanaa (Mongolia)

- Anna Lushchekina (Russia)
- Professor Zhigang Jiang (China)
- Albert Salemgareyev (Kazakhstan)
- Yuri Grachev (Kazakhstan)
- Yuri Arylov (Russia)
- Guihong Zhang (China)

Programme Coordination:

- Olga Esipova, Research and Development Officer
- David Hill, Project Manager and Development Officer
- Peter Damerell, Interim Director

Funders of the Saiga Conservation Alliance (SCA)

- The Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN)
- The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES)
- Fauna and Flora International (FFI)
- The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN)
- The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Keeping Saiga Conservation on the Global Agenda; SCA's Role in MOS5 and the New International Work Programme

International conservation does not happen by accident. It requires strong partnerships, clear evidence, trusted coordination, and a shared commitment to action. In 2025, the Saiga Conservation Alliance played a central role in helping ensure that Saiga conservation remained firmly on the global agenda, through technical support and coordination for the 5th Meeting of the Signatories (MOS5) to the CMS Saiga Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and through the development of the updated Medium-Term International Work Programme (MTIWP).

To put this work in context, the CMS Saiga MOU is the only international instrument dedicated to the conservation of the Saiga antelope. It is a legally non-binding agreement that has been in force since 2006, and it has been signed by all five Saiga range states and consumer states. The MOU aims to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for Saiga based on the best available scientific information, while recognising the socio-economic value of Saiga for people across multiple countries. Alongside this, the MTIWP provides a practical roadmap to guide the implementation of conservation actions under the MOU. Its long-term vision is to restore Saiga populations to a point where sustainable use might once again be envisioned, with overarching goals to halt declines and drive populations towards an increasing trend.

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Activities under the MTIWP focus on priority areas such as improving population monitoring, assessing species distribution, reducing poaching, creating alternative livelihoods, raising awareness, strengthening protected areas, reducing illegal trade, and assessing long-term solutions for the species.

This international work also sits within a wider regional framework. The Saiga and the Saiga MOU form part of the Central Asian Mammals Initiative (CAMI), a CMS-led programme designed to coordinate conservation across multiple species and landscapes. At the Fourteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP14) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in February 2024, CMS Parties agreed that the CAMI Programme of Work will be revised for the period 2027 to 2032. This revision aims to streamline actions and

strengthen cross-cutting activities that benefit multiple species, while reflecting updated CMS mandates for the region.

Because Saiga conservation sits within CAMI, this evolving approach has also shaped the development of the new MTIWP. Unlike the previous MTIWP for 2021 to 2025, the updated framework follows a clearer division of responsibilities. Activities that support multiple CAMI species will be included under the revised CAMI Programme of Work, while the new MTIWP for 2025 to 2030 will focus more specifically on activities of special relevance for one or more Saiga populations. This shift ensures that Saiga conservation remains targeted and effective, while also contributing to broader regional conservation goals.

Under the CMS Saiga MOU, SCA is formally recognised as one of only two cooperating organisations with an official technical coordination role, alongside the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK). This shared mandate reflects SCA's long-standing contribution to Saiga conservation across range states, and its established experience in producing technical documents that guide international decision-making.

In preparation for MOS5, SCA helped enable and oversee the production of two cornerstone documents required by Signatory States. These included the Overview Report on the Conservation Status of Saiga Antelopes and Implementation of the Saiga MOU, and the draft MTIWP, which sets out the operational priorities for the next implementation period. SCA provided financial resources, technical input, and management oversight to support ACBK in delivering these documents to agreed standards and timelines, in line with CMS Secretariat guidance.

SCA worked closely with ACBK and the CMS Secretariat to shape the structure and analytical focus of the preparatory documents. This included ensuring that the Overview Report drew on peer-reviewed science, national reporting, CMS and CITES documentation, and evidence from on-the-ground projects. Where information gaps emerged, ACBK, supported by SCA, engaged directly with governments and NGOs to gather missing inputs, reinforcing the collaborative and range-state-driven ethos of the Saiga MOU.

The MTIWP remains one of the most important tools in international Saiga conservation. It provides the framework through which governments, conservation organisations, and partners can align efforts and coordinate action. SCA contributed to ensuring that the updated MTIWP reflects real-world experience, emerging threats, and practical implementation needs. By linking lessons from previous MTIWPs with the findings of the Overview Report, SCA helped ensure that the new programme is both evidence-based and achievable.

SCA also supported inclusivity in the MOS5 process by ensuring key documents were translated into Russian, recognising that meaningful engagement depends on accessibility. This step strengthened participation across Saiga range states and ensured that discussions and commitments reflected the full Saiga conservation community.

During MOS5 itself, SCA continued its coordination role with both Parties and observer organisations. In a more complex geopolitical environment, discussions between signatories were more robust than in previous years. In this context, SCA's position as a trusted technical actor and central presence across the wider alliance of stakeholders became even more important.

This work is often invisible to the public, but it is vital. It ensures that Saiga conservation remains grounded in science, guided by shared priorities, and supported by credible international frameworks. It also builds donor confidence by strengthening transparency, accountability, and coordination across countries.

SCA remains deeply grateful for the strong working relationship with both CMS and ACBK, and we remain committed to supporting the Saiga MOU process into the future. Thanks to our donors and

partners, we are helping secure not only the survival of the Saiga, but also the international cooperation needed to protect it for generations to come.

Saiga Day 2025: A Celebration of Hope, Education, and Community Action in Uzbekistan

Every May, communities across Karakalpakstan come together to celebrate a remarkable symbol of the steppe: the Saiga antelope.

This year marked a decade of Saiga Day celebrations and the second year since Uzbekistan officially recognised the holiday through Presidential Resolution No. 171, making it a required part of environmental education outreach across protected areas. Making Saiga Day an official part of the school curriculum.

In 2025, the Saiga Day tradition reached new heights — engaging hundreds of students, teachers, rangers, and parents in one of the most vibrant conservation celebrations in Uzbekistan's history.

The festivities opened with a large online seminar for educators and leaders of Steppe Wildlife Clubs. Teachers received a new curriculum module, *"The Network of Life and the Role of Protected Areas,"* developed to help students understand food chains, nutrient cycles, and the Saiga's vital role as a keystone species.

Celebrations took place in seven schools across six towns and villages, including Kyrk-kyz, Elabad, Jaslyk, Karakalpakia, Muynak, and Nukus.

In total, 870 students, 47 teachers, 15 protected area staff, and around 100 parents participated in Saiga Day open lessons. As always, these events combined fun and learning — from eco-games, art and music, and nature quizzes to survival skills, migration challenges, and conservation lessons.

One student reflected on the importance of Saiga with striking clarity: "The Saiga isn't just a beautiful animal; it's a keystone species... its disappearance could mark the beginning of the destruction of the entire steppe ecosystem."

The final and largest Saiga Day event was held at School No. 46 in Nukus, bringing together around 280 students, teachers, administrators, and guests from the Ministry of Environment. Just as in Muynak, rangers from the Saigachy Nature Reserve attended to meet students, share stories from the field, and demonstrate equipment used in monitoring and protecting Saiga.

Children explored vehicles, observation hides, scopes, tents, and other tools of the trade; offering a memorable, hands-on glimpse into the world of wildlife conservation.

Thanks to generous donor support, Saiga Day continues to inspire the next generation of conservation leaders, strengthen local pride, and reinforce a shared commitment to protecting the endangered Saiga antelope.

Together, we are keeping the Saiga and the steppe itself, along with its resilient communities, alive in Uzbekistan.

Protecting the Protectors: Supporting Rangers Across the Saiga's Range

Rangers play a vital and often unseen role in wildlife conservation. From tracking migrations to deterring poaching, they are the first, and sometimes only, line of defence for endangered species. The Saiga antelope is no exception. Its survival depends on the dedication, resilience, and courage of rangers who patrol vast steppe and desert landscapes in extreme weather and isolation.

The Saiga Conservation Alliance (SCA) deeply admires and respects these “boots on the ground”. The men and women who spend weeks in the wilderness, guided by an unwavering love for the wild places they protect. Rangers safeguard Saiga, monitor their movements, study their habitats, and engage with the communities who share their landscapes.

Their work is physically demanding, emotionally challenging, and vital to conservation success. Since 2015, SCA has provided direct support to rangers in the Stepnoi Sanctuary in Russia, and since 2016, to rangers in Saigachiy Reserve and Aralkum National Park in Uzbekistan. This support has ranged from life-saving equipment to training, infrastructure, and winter gear. Over the years, SCA has helped deliver:

- insulated ranger stations
- binoculars and night-vision equipment
- protective uniforms, jackets, trousers and gloves
- winter boots and cold-weather clothing
- camera traps and field monitoring training
- technical support through reserve restructuring
- off-road patrol vehicles and field gear

Due to the current geopolitical situation and international restrictions, SCA is unable to provide direct support to Stepnoi rangers at this time. We remain in close communication with partners and hope to resume support when conditions allow. Their commitment has not wavered, and neither has ours.

In Uzbekistan, SCA has supported Saigachiy and Aralkum rangers continuously for nearly a decade. Rangers have received training in camera-trap monitoring, population tracking, and field survey methods, greatly improving long-term Saiga monitoring and habitat assessment.

In 2025, donor support helped SCA deliver 35 winter uniforms and durable boots for rangers in Aralkum National Park as well as an all-wheel-drive cargo ATV/dump truck for Saigachiy Reserve to expand patrol reach across challenging terrain. These upgrades directly improve ranger safety, mobility, and comfort—allowing them to operate effectively during the harsh winter months and across remote desert landscapes.

Thanks to our incredible donors and partners, rangers across Uzbekistan are warm, equipped, and on the move, protecting Saiga at a time when their habitats are rapidly changing. Together, we continue to lift up the frontline defenders of the Saiga antelope; and ensure that the steppes remain safe for one of the world’s most extraordinary species.

A New Source of Life: Uzbekistan Installs Its First Solar Powered Watering Hole for Saiga

The Saiga Conservation Alliance is proud to announce a major conservation achievement on the Ustyurt Plateau of Uzbekistan: the installation of the first-ever solar-powered, fully automatic watering point for Saiga and other steppe wildlife.

This milestone made possible through our colleagues from the Saigachy Wildlife Reserve, with the generous support of WCN, Stephen Gold, and the Wild Solar team marks a turning point for Saiga survival in one of the region’s driest landscapes.

Climate change and habitat degradation have left Saiga struggling to find reliable water sources, especially during scorching summer months. However there is a solution hiding in plain sight. Abandoned wells once dug by nomadic pastoralists. Dozens of these old herders’ wells still dot northern Ustyurt, most have been abandoned for decades but are still viable.

This created a unique opportunity: revive these forgotten wells and transform them into lifesaving water points for wildlife at a critical time of year.

For the pilot project, conservationists chose a well positioned on traditional Saiga migration routes with good water quality. Together with staff from the Saigachy Wildlife Refuge, they installed a robust, low-maintenance solar pumping system featuring a submersible pump, solar panels, sensors and a water flow meter to fill a new man made, 3 m³, concrete scrap or shallow basin. Shallow sloped walls created for safe access for wildlife.

Once installed, the system runs entirely on its own, requiring only two brief visits per year for routine shutdown and restart. This autonomy is crucial in a remote environment where human access is limited.

The first watering hole is already active, and camera traps are now monitoring which species use it. If successful, this pilot will become a model for a network of solar-powered watering holes across the region, a critical adaptation measure as climate pressures intensify each year.

This project demonstrates what's possible when innovative technology, local expertise, and donor support come together. By bringing water 'back' to the steppe, we're bringing hope to Saiga.

Further project delivery funding will be required for Field research and water testing, Mapping and assessing of well locations, Construction phase the Technical development and monitoring. SCA may seek matched funding for this element of the project.

This is a scalable transboundary project with Expansion to neighbouring regions in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Saiga News: Connecting People and Protecting Saiga Across Borders

For nearly twenty years, Saiga News has been one of the most important tools in Saiga conservation: a multilingual, cross-border online magazine that brings together scientists, rangers, policymakers, educators, and communities from every country where Saiga lives; and every country where Saiga products are consumed.

Saiga News was first launched in 2005 as a biannual bulletin to address a critical need: conservationists had no unified way to share scientific findings, field updates, policies, or anti-poaching challenges across the Saiga's vast range.

Since then, it has grown into a multilingual publication available in six languages: English, Russian, Kazakh, Uzbek, Mongolian, and Chinese. Ensuring that vital information reaches both Saiga range states and Saiga consumption markets.

This year's edition, Saiga News 31, is especially significant.

Due to sharp reductions in US overseas aid, Saiga News faced the real risk of delay or cancellation.

Thanks to generous additional support from the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), Issue 31 was completed and released. A powerful reminder of how donor support sustains conservation work during uncertain times.

Saiga News remains the only publication that systematically reports on:

- Saiga population monitoring

- anti-poaching and ranger operations
- field conservation successes
- policy and CITES updates
- ecological research
- education and community programmes
- Saiga horn consumption and demand trends in China and Southeast Asia
- cross-border collaboration

With 31 issues published to date, it has become the international hub for Saiga conservation knowledge.

The strength of Saiga News lies not only in its content but in its community.

By sharing stories in multiple languages, it bridges villages in Uzbekistan with labs in Mongolia, rangers in Kazakhstan with policymakers in China, and donors around the world with the people safeguarding the steppe.

In a year marked by global uncertainty, Issue 31 stands as a symbol of resilience, collaboration, and the impact donors make possible.

As we celebrate the close of another year, Saiga News reminds us that conservation is a shared effort.

SCA's Work at CITES CoP20 in Uzbekistan

Between 24 November and 5 December 2025, Parties and Observers to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) gathered in Uzbekistan for the 20th Conference of the Parties (CoP20). For the Saiga Conservation Alliance, this meeting carried special significance. Not only did it shape global decisions about the future of Saiga horn trade, but it also took place in Uzbekistan, a Saiga range state where SCA has a long history of supporting and guiding conservation efforts.

Like many international meetings hosted in Central Asia, CoP20 created an important opportunity to bring together global and regional partners, strengthen relationships, and ensure that Saiga conservation remained firmly on the international agenda. Recognising this, SCA registered as an Official Observer organisation and committed to an intensive programme of events, meetings, and technical contributions throughout the conference.

At the heart of CoP20 was one of the most significant policy developments for Saiga conservation in recent years. SCA worked closely with NGO partners to inform a collective position on Kazakhstan's proposal regarding the resumption of Saiga horn exports, as well as the amendments that emerged during the voting process. SCA staff attended side meetings, supported coordination among observer organisations, and liaised closely with the Uzbek Government delegation to help build a shared position with allied NGOs.

The proposal ultimately passed with near-universal support. The Kazakh delegation received widespread praise for its openness and willingness to introduce safeguards designed to ensure sustainability. Among range states, Mongolia was the only country that did not support the proposal, reflecting the complexity of regional perspectives. Importantly, the agreement includes a formal review of the trade decision at CoP21 in 2028, ensuring continued scrutiny and accountability.

Beyond the vote itself, SCA played a leading role in shaping the evidence base for Saiga trade discussions. During CoP20, SCA hosted an official side event focused on evidence gaps in the Saiga horn trade chain. This event presented findings from a major study originally initiated under

SCA's USFWS-funded wildlife trade portfolio in 2022, and later completed by Ruth Arnold as part of her Mbiol thesis. The side event attracted strong attendance from researchers, conservation practitioners, and government delegations, including representatives from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, China, and the United States.

The session presented key findings on the gaps in available trade evidence, before moving into a panel discussion chaired by SCA Director Peter Damerell. Ruth Arnold joined a high-profile group of experts, including SCA Chair Dame Professor E. J. Milner-Gulland, Steffen Zuther of the Frankfurt Zoological Society, and Stephanie von Meibom from TRAFFIC. Together, they explored what is known, what remains unclear, and what must be addressed to ensure that future trade decisions remain grounded in reliable science and transparent monitoring.

To support informed decision-making beyond the conference itself, SCA also produced and distributed two policy briefs for CITES Parties and delegates.

These included:

- Saiga Trade; Evidence Gaps and Trade Flows, a policy briefing note for CITES Parties
- Making the Most of Incomplete and Biased Data, a methodological framework for understanding supply chains of traded species

These documents helped ensure that discussions at CoP20 did not end with a single vote, but continued to build the foundations for long-term research and responsible governance.

CITES CoP20 also provided a rare opportunity for SCA to engage directly with the United States Government delegation. Following major cuts to US federal funding, and the ongoing pause in the USFWS wildlife trade portfolio, face-to-face conversations proved invaluable. SCA used these meetings to highlight the progress already achieved under the trade research programme, and to emphasise the importance of analysing and interpreting the high-quality datasets that remain essential for evaluating the resumption of legal trade.

Alongside the official CITES agenda, SCA used its time in Uzbekistan to strengthen the Saiga conservation community. On 1 December, SCA held its Annual General Meeting, beginning with a networking session where six programme updates were presented by partner organisations and academic researchers. The AGM included an overview of organisational accounts and a summary of SCA's global activities in 2024, reinforcing transparency and shared accountability across the alliance.

Following the AGM, SCA hosted an informal social evening with a diverse group of collaborators. This gathering provided space for relationship building, friendship, and informal discussion of emerging opportunities and threats for Saiga conservation. These moments, while less visible than formal conference sessions, remain essential to sustaining the trust and cooperation that long-term conservation requires.

CoP20 also served as an important milestone for the future of the organisation. Members of SCA's international and Uzbek teams used time together during the meeting to begin discussions about activities planned to mark SCA's 20th Anniversary, ensuring that this milestone year will not only celebrate the past, but help shape the next phase of the Alliance's work.

Ultimately, CITES CoP20 was an intensive and historic meeting. It highlighted both the complexity of managing Saiga recovery, and the strength of the international network committed to ensuring that conservation success does not become complacency. Thanks to our donors and partners, SCA was able to play an active role in shaping global policy discussions, strengthening scientific evidence, and reinforcing collaboration across range and consumer states.

2025 Finances in Review

TBC

Twenty Years for Saiga; Looking Forward to the Next Twenty

For twenty years, the Saiga Conservation Alliance and the Wildlife Conservation Network have worked side by side to protect one of the world's most extraordinary and endangered mammals. Together, we have helped the Saiga antelope step back from the edge of extinction and begin a remarkable recovery across the Eurasian steppe.

When this work began, Saiga numbers were in free fall. Poaching was widespread, habitats were fragmenting, and political and economic uncertainty made conservation fragile. Today, the picture is strikingly different. Global Saiga numbers now exceed three million, driven largely by recovery in Kazakhstan. Stronger laws, courageous rangers, growing political stability, and long-term partnerships have reduced poaching and helped secure critical calving grounds, migration corridors, and protected areas.

Over two decades, we have stayed committed through population crashes, disease outbreaks, pandemics, political upheaval, and global recessions. That persistence has paid off. The Saiga's IUCN Red List status now reflects one of the most significant conservation success stories of recent decades, and the species is being used as a case study for the Green List, with an estimated 30 percent recovery score. This progress shows what is possible when science, local leadership, and sustained donor support come together.

As we commemorate SCA's 20th anniversary in 2026, we are proud of what has been achieved, but clear-eyed about what lies ahead. Saiga conservation demands both continuity and change. We must protect the gains made in Kazakhstan while expanding recovery across the species' full historic range. With you as our partner, we are preparing for the next chapter.

In the coming years, SCA will develop clear goals aligned with global initiatives such as 30x30 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, using the Saiga as a keystone species and promoting nature-based solutions that benefit wildlife and people alike. We will build a new long-term strategy based on success in Kazakhstan and extend this approach to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgistan, Mongolia, and, when circumstances allow, Russia.

We will grow our advisory board, mentor a new generation of conservation leaders in both range and consumer states, and work closely with local partners in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to help them establish strong, independent national NGOs. At the same time, we will continue tackling disease risks, reducing trade in Saiga horn and meat, and renewing demand-reduction campaigns for traditional medicine markets in Singapore, Malaysia, China, and Japan.

The challenges are real. Geopolitical instability, new roads and railways, expanding extractive industries, food insecurity, climate change and debates over population control all place pressure on Saiga and the people who live alongside them. Yet the opportunities are equally powerful. Translocations, new protected zones, community-based conservation, green jobs, wildlife tourism, and cross-border cooperation can reshape the future of the steppe.

Twenty years ago, Saiga were close to disappearing. Today, they once again run wild across vast landscapes. With your support, the next twenty years can secure this recovery across all Saiga range and end demand in consumer states, creating resilience for wildlife, people, and nature alike.