

International Workshop on the re-introduction of the Przewalski's horse

We were pleased to host the 2nd International Workshop on the re-introduction of the Przewalski's horse from 12-17 June in Takhin Tal, Great Gobi 'B' Mongolia. Thirty-six people from 8 countries attended: Austria, France, Germany, Mongolia, Switzerland, Tanzania, The Netherlands, and USA. We had 22 talks on various aspects of takhi re-introduction and conservation in Mongolia. All talks were of excellent quality and provided interesting and important information and insights for the final discussion round. The workshop was especially fruitful as representatives from the two ongoing re-introduction projects (Hustain Nuruu and Takhin Tal) and a third projected re-introduction project (Khomin Tal), were present. Abstracts as well as the most recent biannual report on the research and conservation activities in Takhin Tal, Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area can be downloaded from www.takhi.org and www.wildvet.at

Workshop abstracts

Historical information of wild horses (takhi)

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The presence of wild horses in Mongolia was already noted in the books and writings of the 10th-11th centuries. During the 17th-19th centuries, the Mongolian kings gave wild horses to foreign visitors as gifts. In 1637, King of Manchuria sent his people to Mongolia to catch the wild horses. According to these sources Takhi have occurred in Mongolia since ancient times. Later, in 1878, the Russian tourist and investigator, Przewalskii, found some takhi remains from the Mongolian Gobi. He sent these remains to the Russian scientist Polyakov who named the species as *Equus przewalskii Poljakov, 1881*. At about this time, western countries started to develop an interest in the wild horses for exhibition in zoos. Even though this had a negative impact on takhi in the wild, nobody knew at the time, that the captive horses would eventually provide breeding stock for a reintroduction program. Mongolian takhi occurred in a relatively small area and in low numbers. They had already suffered from human impacts (poaching, reduction of their breeding and grazing area) and natural disasters (such as droughts and hard winters) and became endangered during the 1970's. However, international conservation organizations and professionals decided to reintroduce them back to Mongolia. The idea of reintroducing takhis

[Short Communications]

eventually obtained support from the Mongolian Government. From 1992, takhis started to be transferred into Mongolia. Some of these horses were reintroduced in the area of Takhin Shar Range, Khomin Us Gobi, Bij River, and Takhin Tal, where the last wild horses occurred. Special attention and care were needed because the takhis were no longer used to the harsh climate of the Mongolian Gobi desert. This became most obvious during the reintroduction process. The Mongolian government established a "Research and Experiment Center of Wild Horse Reintroduction". Since 1992 more than 70 individual takhis have been transported from foreign zoos to Mongolia. Although half of them were lost, 60 females have given birth and were able to cover the losses. At the moment, about 60 individuals in 5 herds are grazing in the wild. In addition, one breeding group was established and is grazing in a fenced area and under human control. Meanwhile we know that wild horses are able to adapt to the harsh conditions of the Mongolian Gobi Desert and today individuals of several generations already inhabit the Gobi. This indicates that takhis can be successfully reintroduced to their native land.

Reproduction status of takhi being reintroduced in Hustai National Park

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In Hustain Nuruu National Park, the reproductive rate of adult mares over the last ten years was 60.4%, with 56.4% of their foals surviving. Mortality of young foals can be attributed to the following categories: 51.95 % due to wolf attacks, 18.9 % due to weakness after birth or miscarriage, 8.8 % due to injuries, 5 % due to mothers, which did not want to let their foal suckle and 12.6 % due to unknown reasons. Young mares dispersed from their natal harem when they reached 2-4 years of age and became sexually mature at age 3-4. 10.3 % of mares born in Hustai Nuruu started foaling at an age of 3 years, 71.4 % at an age of 4 years and 8 % at an age of 5 years.

Mortality of takhis and its causes

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During the period 1992-2000, the Dutch Foundation Reserves for the Przewalski Horse (FRPH) brought 24 stallions and 60 mares, in total 84 takhi, to Hustain Nuruu. Within 12 years, from 1992 until the end of 2003,