

Current Status of the Przewalski's Horse Populations Reintroduced to Mongolia

Amarkhuu Enkhtur

Department of Zoology, Faculty of Biology, National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar 210646, Mongolia

Abstract

In 1992 the reintroduction program of the Przewalski's horses in Mongolia was initiated, and totally 84 individuals of Przewalski's horses were brought to the Hustai National Park between 1992 and 2000. At the same time another reintroduction program of the Przewalski's horses was started, and 87 individuals were released in the Tahiin Tal (Bijiin Gol) area in the semi-desert ecosystem of Southwestern Mongolia. Recently, in the Khomyn Tal area of Western Mongolia transferred 24 individuals of Przewalski's horses from zoos (the reintroduction program was started in 2004). All captive Przewalski's horses were released into the wild (in 1994 in Hustai, and 1996 in Tahiin Tal), and the populations of horses are gradually increasing in both sites. In this work, the results of analyses on the population dynamics of Przewalski's horses, reintroduced in these two sites are discussed.

Key words: *Equus przewalskii*, reintroduction, population, Mongolia

Introduction

The Przewalski's horse (*Equus przewalskii* Poljakov, 1881) is an endangered species and is extinct in the wild. Only captive breeding in zoos and national parks has saved this wild horse from the brink of total extinction. The size of the captive population has grown to the point where sufficient individuals are available for reintroduction into the wild. The Przewalski's horse is one of the first wildlife species to return to their native habitats after 10-14 generations in captivity (Bouman, 1998). The reintroduction of the Przewalski's horse can be considered as an important conservation measure to restore and protect the natural ecosystem and other endangered species.

A reintroduction of captive bred animals into the wild always was and still is one of the ambitious goals of the modern zoos, because a successful reintroduction is the key argument to justify captive breeding programs. The process of acclimation to the wild requires going through a stressful period for a captive born Przewalski's horse and only the strongest will pass this bottleneck on the way back to nature (Zimmermann, 2004).

The reintroduction program of the Przewalski's horses in Mongolia is initiated with the support of

various international sponsors. In 1992 the first groups of captive born horses were airlifted to the Hustai National Park in Central Mongolia, which represents the typical forest-steppe landscape, and the Tahiin Tal (Bijiin Gol) area in Southwestern Mongolia in the semi-desert ecosystem.

To date, a total of 84 individuals of Przewalski's horses have been transported to the Hustai National Park, and 87 horses to the Tahiin Tal area. Besides of these, a third reintroduction program was started recently (in 2004) in the Khomyn Tal area of Western Mongolia, and 24 individuals of Przewalski's horses have been transferred there from different zoos.

The harem groups of Przewalski's horses were released into the wild from the adaptation enclosures (in 1994 in Hustai and 1996 in Bijiin Gol), and in both sites the populations of horses are successfully raised in the wild.

Currently (by the end of 2008), 219 free ranging individuals of Przewalski's horses live in Hustai National Park, 136 individuals in the Tahiin Tal area and 27 individuals in the Khomyn Tal area. Among them, 87.2% (191 individuals) of all Przewalski's horses in the Hustai National Park, and 75.7% (103 individuals) of all horses in Tahiin Tal area are composed of individuals born in Mongolia. Patterns of population dynamics of Przewalski's horses in these two sites will be discussed hereunder.