

INTERNATIONAL TAKHI GROUP

Reintroduction Project Great Gobi B Annual Report 2015



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Message from the President

To watch Przewalski Horses gallop across the steppe of the Dzungarian Gobi – what a pleasure! I experienced it once again in October 2015, during my 4th visit to the Takhi's home: my first visit as President of the International Takhi Group, ITG. Horses enthused me in childhood; horse-back transportation troops were what I joined during my service in the Swiss Army, and as a young student, the social behaviour of equids formed the focus of my diploma thesis. So, when 10 years ago the board of the ITG asked me whether I would support them in bringing the Takhis back to their homeland, the Central Asian Steppe, it took me little time to agree. And now, during my visit last fall as newly elected President of the ITG, I was introduced to the Ministries for Environment in the Mongolian Capital Ulaanbaatar and in Urumqi (the capital of the Chinese, autonomous Republic Xinjiang), as well as to the vast protected areas SPA Gobi B and Kalamaili.

My impression on site: The project for the re-introduction of the Takhis is well on its way. Besides the more than 130 Takhis in naturally structured social groups in the wild, I met not only engaged people at all levels, but also, up to the highest political levels, the political will to support the project, to preserve the protected areas or even enlarge them, and to cooperate across borders. Specifically the latter – the cooperation between the various institutions and states to connect the still pristine habitats of the Takhi – one of the rarest mammals in the world – I would like to foster in the coming years.

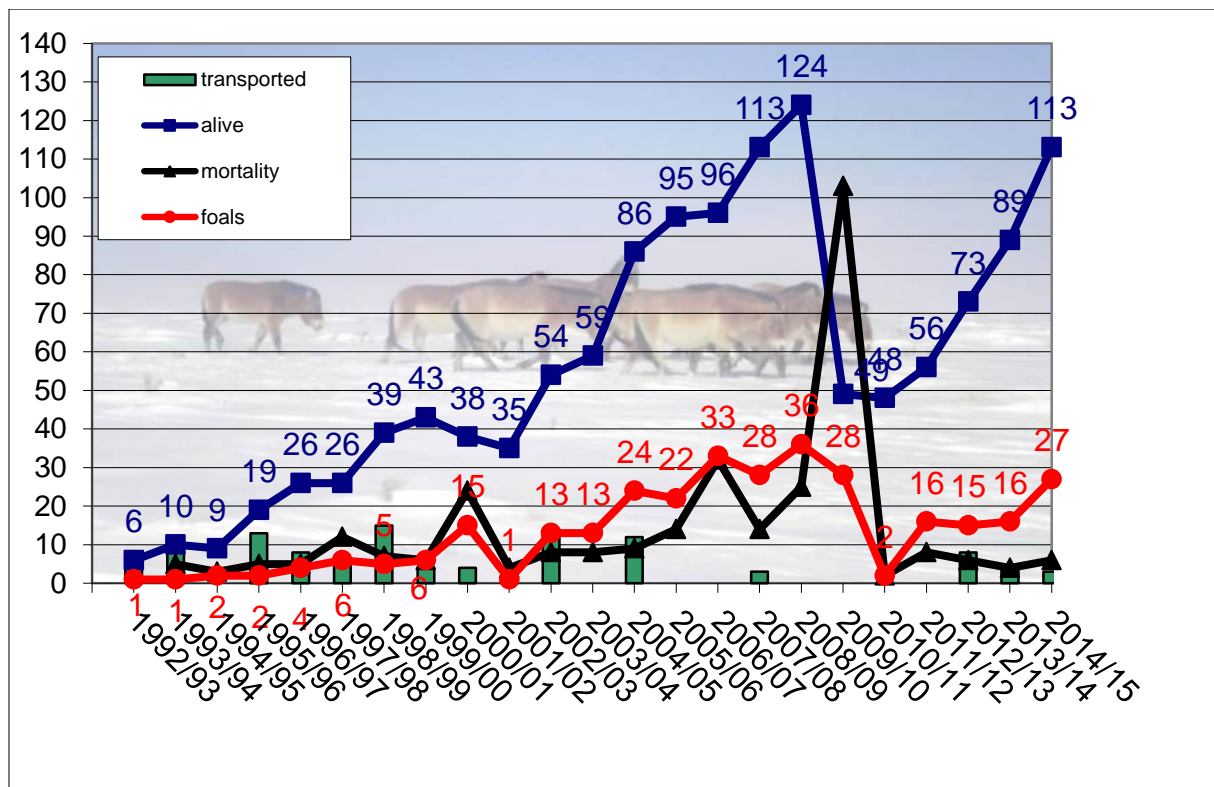
Reinhard Schnidrig, President



Statement of Accounts

Population Development

The positive development of the population in the past six years has continued in 2015. The population of Takhis now totalled 132 animals at the start of 2016. An important factor in this enjoyable development in 2015 was the birth rate: from April to August, 28 foals were born, and 21 of them survived. Moreover, in July three more mares from Prague could be transported to Takhin tal. Two thirds of the Przewalski population in the Great Gobi B SPA are females, which bears great breeding potential for the future.



Population development of Przewalski's horses in the National Park Great Gobi B SPA until 30 April 2015. (The numbers are filed within one horse year, which annually begins on May 1st and ends on April 30th of the following year).

The Przewalski horses are currently organised in 11 harems and 2 bachelor groups. Two mares and three stallions are located at the acclimatisation enclosure in Takhin tal. In the behavioural dynamics in the free roaming groups we witness the emergence of ever more characteristics known from reports prior to the disappearance of the Takhis from Gobi B. This includes the so called fusion/fission-behaviour, i.e. the intermittent merging of small social units into larger loose groups which temporarily create the impression of large herds. The rangers' monitoring activities revealed a slow but steady increase in the home ranges of some groups, as well as the emergence of spontaneous longer-range migrations, a behaviour known from Khulans. Other groups, however, remain more local. There were about 60

exchanges of individuals between the social groups, which is in line with the monitoring results of previous years.

Infrastructure and personnel

Both the National Park Centre in Takhin tal and the Ranger camps in Takhin us and Khonin us are in good condition, and the mobile radio telephone antenna near Bij enabled a reliable connection within the Mongolian telephone network.

The heavy precipitations of 2015 triggered flash-floods in the Bij region. These were so violent locally that some fence lines of the acclimatization enclosure were partially destroyed. Until fall, part of the damage could be undone, whereas new poles will be needed for the remainder. Reparation work on the enclosures will continue in 2016.



At present, Mongolia undergoes a recession which also affects the Mongolian Parks. The budget of Great Gobi B SPA suffered significant cuts. However, the personnel account is expected to remain at the level of December 2014.

Park extension

Due to the staff change in the ministries and the prioritisation of other political business, the agenda item regarding the extension of the Great Gobi B SPA was postponed. However, there is continued strong support at local and regional (Aimag) levels for the extension. The new Minister of Environment, Green Development and Tourism, Battserreg Namdag, knows the project well and would like to submit it to Parliament in 2016.

Partnerships

The partnership with the **Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology of the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna (FIWI)**, has always been an important basis for the successful reintroduction of the Wild Horse in Mongolia. The collaboration focuses on the monitoring of both the Takhi population and other wildlife with regard to the management of the protected area. First evaluations of a fall 2015 wildlife count suggest that the population of both Khulans (app. 4000 individuals) and gazelles (around 3000 individuals) have increased.

Prague Zoo again organized a Takhi transport from Europe to Takhin tal and through several sponsoring projects was able to contribute funds for ranger equipment in Gobi B. With regard to the transportation planned for 2016, Prague Zoo also provided education on the anaesthesia of horses to O.Ganbaatar and a staff member from Hustai Nuruu.



The collaboration with **Tama Zoo** in Japan is also developing well. On the one hand, it is based on the financial support of the Takhi project by the Japanese. On the other hand, access to ITG expert knowledge is of interest to the Japanese zoo.

The three Mongolian Takhi reintroduction projects regularly exchange experiences. There is a closer cooperation with **Hustai Nuruu** aiming at reintroducing Takhi from Hustai into the Dzungarian Gobi. For 2016 it is planned to transport 3-4 Wild Horses from Hustai to Takhin tal, using the same Czech military airplane that will bring Wild Horses from Prague.

The president of ITG could establish valuable contacts and revive the collaboration with the **Chinese Wild Horse Research and Breeding Station (WHBC)** in Jimsar

and the **Xinjiang Forestry Department** in charge. Conversations topics included the exchange of Takhi for genetic diversification, the organisation of workshops on the keeping and reintroduction of Takhi and the vision of a trans-frontier network of protected areas. With regard to continuative collaboration, a mutual agreement was signed by ITG and the WHBC at the end of the visit. For 2016, a first transport of female Takhi from WHBC to Gobi B is planned.



In summer, three students of Ecology at the **National University of Mongolia** have been doing field work in Great Gobi SPA. Under supervision by O. Ganbaatar and D. Lhagyasuren they were investigating the morphology of the Przewalski horse, the biodiversity of small mammals and the birds in Gobi B.

Good contacts have also been established in Mongolia with the **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (DEZA)** in Ulaanbaatar, the **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)** and the **German government-owned development bank (KFW)**. All of these are operating projects in Mongolia which are or can become of importance.

Regional initiatives for the Takhi

At the Museum of Natural History in Khovd, Aimag Governor Damdindorj Tseveenravdan and ITG President Reinhard Schnidrig opened an exhibition section on the Przewalski horse in October 2015. The Bugat district plans the installment of a conservation office in 2016

Finances

ITG is still based on a thin economical basis. It is highly dependent on a small number of regular key donors, of whom the **Jean-Pierre & Sonja Siegfried Foundation** was the most important in 2015, followed by **Mr. Peter Widmer-Wyss**. Peter Widmer, former co-owner of the Papierfabrik Widmer-Walty AG at Oftringen, became aware of the Takhi project through his son Jürg, a school friend of Christian Stauffer. Since the end of the 1990ies, he very generously supported the Takhi project annually. Peter Widmer died last September at the age of 80 after a long illness.

We are deeply indebted to both the Siegfried Foundation and Mr. Widmer-Wyss' long-term, most generous dedication to re-establishing Takhi populations in the wild.

Funds totaled CHF 55'888.50 of which CHF 37'888.50 were donated by individuals through the Friends of the Takhis. Again the 'Takhi Post' renewed awareness among donors and resulted in a rapid financial response.

ITG is determined to expand the financial basis of ITG by increasing awareness of ITG and its project among the global community of conservation donors who also support various other projects, as well as among Mongolian enterprises. A respective list of action items was submitted to the Board.

Staff of the International Takhi-Group

Board

Reinhard Schnidrig, President	Christian Stauffer, Vice-President
Rebekka Blumer, Treasurer	Mirjam Würsch, Actuary
Ruth Baumgartner	Miroslav Bobek
Jaroslav Simek	Sven Hoffmann
Karin Hindenlang Clerc	Anita Fahrni

Thomas Pfisterer, Honorary President

All board members work as volunteers. The ITG maintains an office in Ulaanbaatar and, in cooperation with the Mongolian government, manages the Strictly Protected Area (SPA) Great Gobi B.

In 2015 Dorothee Stamm (honorary member of the ITG and Thomas Pfisterer (honorary president of the ITG) were awarded Honorary Doctorates of the Vetsuisse faculty of the University of Zurich for their contribution to the conservation of the Przewalski's horse.

Office Mongolia

Enksaikhan N., Manager

Employees in the Great Gobi B SPA

Ganbaatar O., Director

Khatanbaatar T., Senior Ranger

Chinbat B., Ranger

Baast Z., Ranger

Amgalan Ya., Ranger

Myagmarjav, Ranger

Narantuya R., Bookkeeper

Tunga S., Cook

Altansukh N., Deputy Director

Nisekhkhuu G., Ranger

Batsuuri B., Ranger

Oinbayar L., Ranger

Ganbataa Kh., Ranger

Altantsetseg E., Assistant Veterinarian

Tumur N., Housekeeper

Altansukh N. und Altatsetseg E. have started a master study on nature conservation at the biological institute of the University of Khovd, which they will complete in 2016.

