

# INTERNATIONAL TAKHI GROUP

## Reintroduction Project Great Gobi B Annual Report 2016



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## Message from the President

To assume responsibility for the conservation of a near-extinct species and to re-introduce it into the wild – its formerly lost home – is a rewarding task. The International Takhi-Group (ITG) has committed itself to this heartfelt project about 20 years ago. Successfully so, as the 2016 annual report impressively demonstrates again. The Takhi population in the Dzungarian Gobi is developing nicely, the team of national park administration and rangers is highly competent and motivated, the national park building in Takhin tal, built by ITG, provides great service and also functions as a meeting point for people from the region, and ITG has become a respected partner for many institutions of both governmental and private character.

Has the time to rest come? No, on the contrary. If ITG had thrown its stepping stones far ahead in the past, we want to keep our ambitions soaring. Let's anticipate the future already now and keep throwing those stones far into the years ahead. This notably includes the development of strategic partnerships with the national parks in the southern Gobi and the authorities of the Chinese Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, as well as the study, cartographic mapping and conservation of migration corridors for future herds of Takhi, Khulans and Gazelles.

The vision of a network of large protected areas, connected with networking corridors and stepping stone habitats, is dreamt. Now this dream needs nourishment. Many discussions in the past two years with partners in Mongolia, in China, but also among the international family of species conservationists make me believe that the envisioned future can become real. What we need? A strong ITG with cooperation partners pulling at the same end of the rope, an ITG with financial partners believing in us and in our ideas, and an ITG with motivated people who can seize their dreams. Tackling it, let's enable the future.

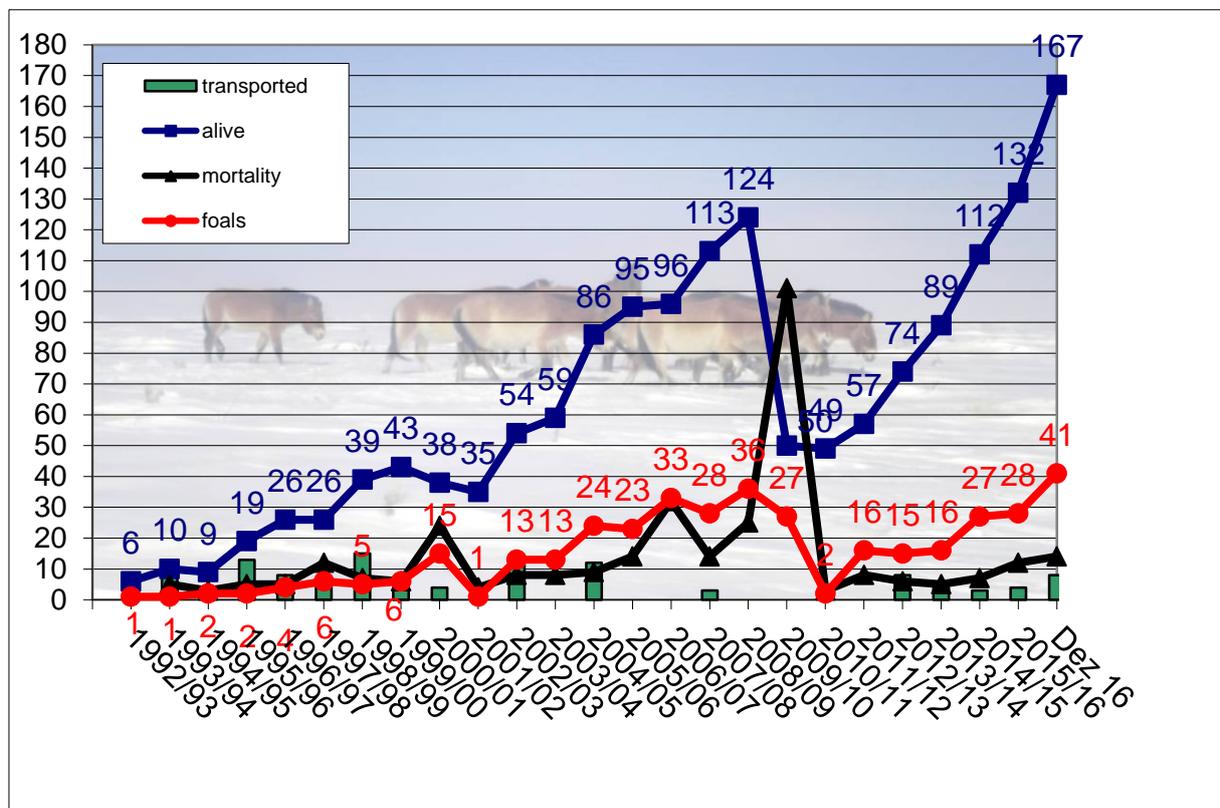
Reinhard Schnidrig, President



## Statement of Accounts

### Population Development

The population is increasing steadily. At the end of December 2016, the rangers counted 167 Takhis in the Gobi B. The foaling season lasted from April to November and produced a record of foals. Even the two oldest mares, Imj and Od (24 years) each gave birth to a healthy foal. In July, 4 mares were re-introduced from Europe to Takhin tal with the support of Prague Zoo. Afterwards, 3 additional mares and one stallion were transported in the same Czech Air Force plane from the Hustai Nuuru re-introduction project to the Gobi B. Both transports were completed successfully, and the 8 newcomers together with two more Takhis are familiarizing with the new environment in the fenced re-introduction areas of Takhin tal und Takhin us.



Population development of Przewalski's horses in the National Park Great Gobi B SPA until 30 April 2016. (The numbers are filed within one horse year, which annually begins on May 1<sup>st</sup> and ends on April 30<sup>th</sup> of the following year).

The entire population displays strong dynamics. In 2016, more than 100 Takhis changed groups and joined new harems temporarily or permanently. In fall, several harems merged into a larger, loosely connected herd, just like in the previous year. A steady increase in the home range of some harems could again be observed in 2016.

On December 31, 2016, 167 Takhis were structured in 14 harems, one bachelor group and two single stallions. Group size ranged from 3 to 24 individuals. The number of harems and the interchange has increased compared to 2015.

### **Infrastructure**

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. However, the viewing platform in Khonin us is damaged and should be repaired in 2017.



Several fences had to be repaired after the heavy precipitations in spring 2015. The ranger team used the opportunity to rearrange the fence lines of the acclimatization enclosure. In June 2016, 2 fences were removed in Takhin tal, and the material was used to build an additional acclimatization enclosure in Takhin us. In addition, a shelter (6x10m) and a hay storage were built in Takhin us in October.

In early October, thanks to support from the Czech Development Agency, a drilling team found water at a depth of 140 m, and a well could be established 450 meters from the National Park Centre. The water flows continuously and is of good quality. The next step is now to improve the sanitary infrastructure in the camp.

### **Partnerships**

The work of the ITG is based on a contract with Mongolian Government. During a visit in fall 2016 with the new representatives of the ministry of environment and tourism, Reinhard Schnidrig (President ITG) could re-enforce this collaboration and Minister D. Oyunkhorol promised her support to the project and the enlargement of the protected area. Even the President of Mongolia, T. Elbegdorj, met the ITG delegation, which was reported by Mongolian media.

Research builds an important basis for the successful re-introduction of a species. As a consequence of this credo, there is a long-standing partnership between ITG and the **Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology of the University of Veterinary**

**Medicine, Vienna** (FIWI). The researchers' focus will continue to be on the monitoring of the Takhi population and the entire fauna with regards to the management of the entire protected area together with our partners in Mongolia, the National University of Mongolia. Promising discussions took place about future research projects in Mongolia based on this (Prof. Samya) and the Mongolian Academy of Science (Prof. Lkhagvasuren Badamjav).

**Prague Zoo** is a member of ITG and the most active partner of all the parks. In 2016, the responsible team of Prague Zoo jointly with the Czech Air Force again organized a transport of Takhis from various zoos and parks in Europe to Takhin tal, followed by an inner-Mongolian transport from Hustai Nuuru to Takhin tal. Both transports could be successfully completed within a few days – a logistical masterpiece. The water drilling in Takhin tal was also initiated and managed by Prague Zoo, besides financial support for various other items.

A vivid exchange of experiences is taking place between the three Mongolian Takhi re-introduction projects. Regular meetings and small-scale workshops are conducted between the responsible teams of the Great Gobi B SPA and **Hustai Nuuru**. The cooperation for the transport within Mongolia was excellent and fundamental for its success.



In September 2016, **WWF Mongolia** organized a first workshop of the **GG6** in Takhin tal. Directors of Mongolian parks, representatives of the Mongolian Government and of Nature protection groups met for a 2-day workshop to discuss the conservation of the six flagship species of the desert area of the Great Gobi - Takhi, Khulan, Saiga, Gobi Bear, Goitered Gazelle, Bactrian Camel -, the future of Gobi conservation as well as the development of a sustainable ecotourism. The **Takhiin Tal Appeal** lists goals and activities of the coming years and a next workshop is planned for fall 2017.

The collaboration with **Tama Zoo** is established, based on a foundation of regular financial support as well as exchange of expertise.

During the past few years, the contact with the Chinese Przewalski Wild Horse Breeding and Research Centre in **Jimsar** and the representatives of the responsible Department of Xinjiang in Urumqi has been increased, and in 2016, the basis was established for exchanging Przewalski Horses. Further meetings and discussions about a transport of Takhis from Europe to China are planned for 2017.

During a visit of the ITG President, Reinhard Schnidrig, and the ITG Actuary Mirjam Würsch, many good contacts could be strengthened and new ties could be established. A profound exchange with the **Swiss Development Agency (SDC)** led to the sponsoring of a cultural project in Ulanbaatar in 2017, celebrating 25 years of Takhi reintroduction to Mongolia. Promising discussions regarding the support of future projects took place with the **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)** and the **Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)**.

In 2016, two students were conducting **research** in the **Great Gobi B SPA**: Sanatar Soilmetzidou conducted water and sediment analysis in the context of the AquaVir Project of the Leibniz Society; concurrently, rodents were captured for a EHV-Screening (Equine Herpes Virus). Data for both projects are currently being evaluated. From June to August, Dashpurev Purevdorj, master student at the National University of Ulaanbaatar, was studying the ecology of small rodents in the Gobi B. He investigated the correlation of the small rodents fauna and the geographical distribution, and estimated the species diversity of small rodents. Uli Rutz, a retired teacher from Switzerland, spent several weeks in Takhin tal teaching the rangers English.

### **Regional Cooperations**

A vivid exchange exists between the park administration of the Great Gobi B SPA and the local communities. The locals not only support the Takhi project but also the park enlargement idea. Considering this good cooperation, ITG supported the 70 year anniversary of Bugat sum.

In September, a group of 25 pupils from Bugat sum visited Takhin tal and observed the Takhis in the wild. Such excursions are important to maintain the acceptance of the Takhi project by extending it to future generations.

## Finances

The goal of ITG to expand the financial basis by increasing awareness of ITG and its project among the global community of conservation donors was successful. Besides the longstanding support of the **Jean-Pierre & Sonja Siegfried Foundation**, substantial funds were provided by the **Temperatio Foundation**, the **Fondation de bienfaisance Jeanne Lovioz** as well as by the **Vontobel Foundation**.

Besides the foundations, many private persons and associations have deserved thanks for campaigning for our project: Presentations, collections during exhibitions and at various private anniversaries resulted in additional funds.

The two editions of the “Takhi Post” (Mai and November 2016) created a great response and increased the awareness of our project; substantial funds could be noted on our account after each mailing. In addition, we were graciously permitted to mail the “Takhi Post” to the Friends of the Tierpark Bruderhaus, Winterthur and the supporters of the Wildnispark Zurich, Langenberg, thus significantly increasing the number of recipients. The costs for printing and mailing the “Takhi Post” were generously sponsored by members of the ITG board.

In total, contributions of CHF 136'857.90 were received, of which CHF 43'057.90 were donated by individuals through the association ‘Friends of the Takhi’.

An action plan for further expanding the financial basis in 2017 is being developed by the board. A strong focus is to increase the awareness of the project amongst Mongolian enterprises, entrepreneurs and private individuals to receive funds and support locally in Mongolia.

Since spring 2017, the Takhi-Post is also being published in Mongolian and is distributed in Ulaanbaatar and in the region of the Gobi B national park. This is increasing the awareness of ITG as well as the Takhi re-introduction project also within Mongolia, and hopefully will lead to an increasing support.

## 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

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.

## Office Mongolia

Enksaikhan N., Manager

### Employees in the Great Gobi B SPA (December 2016)

Ganbaatar O., Director

Altansukh N., Deputy Director

Altantsetseg E.,

Nisekhkhoo G., Ranger

Baast Z., Ranger

Batsuuri B., Ranger

Amgalan Ya., Ranger

Oinbayar L., Ranger

Myagmarjav B., Ranger

Ganbataa Kh., Ranger

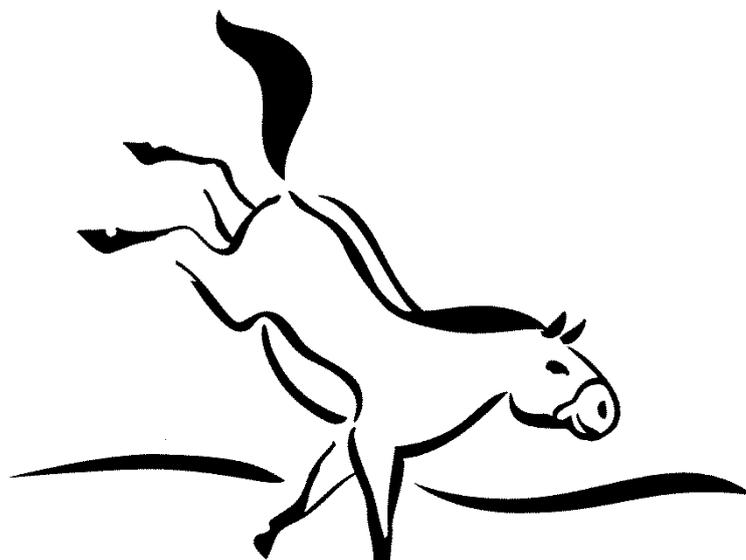
Narantuya R., Bookkeeper

Tunga S. Cook / Maintenance

Lkhagva B., Maintenance Camp

Tumur N., who was responsible for the maintenance of the camp, retired in March, and Ranger Chinbat B. retired in April 2016. ITG thanks both of them for their great support of many years.

Deputy Director Altansukh N. as well as the rangers Oinbayar und Myagmarjav attended a **Training of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)** on the SMART-Programme. The «spatial monitoring and reporting tool» (SMART) should help to align the various laws of the different protected areas and to implement them nation-wide.



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