

ITG INTERNATIONAL TAKHI GROUP

Association for the reintroduction and conservation of the Przewalski's horse (takhi) in Central Asia

Annual report 2020



International Takhi Group ITG

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The President's Preface

Until the fulfillment of our vision - a thousand and more wild horses galloping freely across the steppes of the Dzungarian Gobi - we need a long breath. If the wild horse, which was saved from extinction by the skin of its teeth, is to become a truly wild species again, it will need our care today and for many years to come. And that means support especially in difficult times: when a snowstorm - a dzud - freezes the Gobi, when drought threatens to dry up the waterholes or when a sandstorm sweeps across the steppe. And also, when a corona virus paralyzes and frightens the human world.

In the steppe, only those survive who are prepared for all adversities and know how to fit into their rhythm. Wild asses and gazelles can do this: they have thousands of years of experience as wild animals. The takhi do not. Their knowledge of experience must be able to rebuild itself over generations. Less than thirty years have passed since ITG released the first unsuspecting zoo takhi into the wild in Takhin tal, the part of the protected area in the Mongolian Great Gobi where the last wild horses were sighted in the late 1960s.

By 2020, their numbers here will have cracked the 300 individual mark. This is a huge success, and yet the future of this precious wild species remains precarious until it has gained sufficient resilience to the greatest risks. These include water shortages and snowstorms, but also overgrazing and transmission of pathogens by domesticated grazing animals. The rare wild horse still needs us species conservationists to recognize such dangers in time and to develop strategies against them. And to implement them, it needs our commitment and financial resources. Especially in difficult times. After all, the tasks of protecting unique ecosystems remain even in extreme times - for nature, there is a permanent pandemic, so to speak. But I am convinced that, especially in times of need, there are always people who know how crucial their commitment is to the protection of wildlife and their habitats. Like now. That's why we stay tuned, as friends of the wild horses.



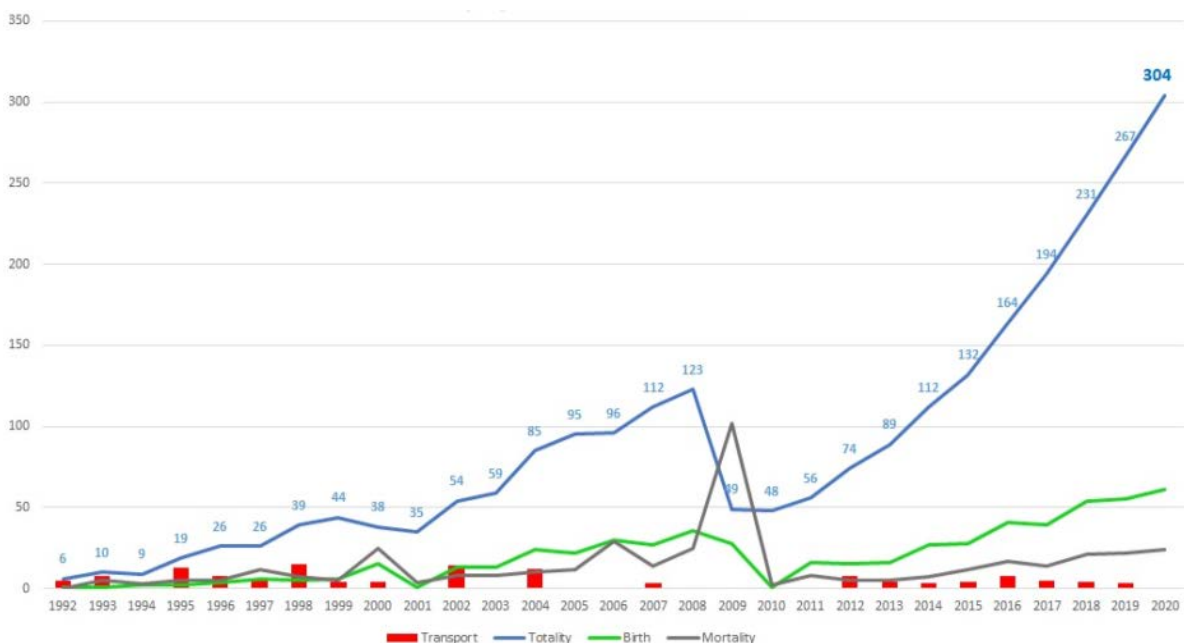
The Takhi in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of the Great Gobi in Mongolia.

On June 11, 2020, the 300th takhi was born in the Great Gobi B. This marks yet another small milestone on the long road to a self-sustaining takhi population. The mother of the newborn foal is named Dorothee. She was one of the first foals born in 1999, after the start of the reintroduction of the Przewalski's horses in the Great Gobi B. She is named after the honorary member of the ITG, Dorothee Stamm.

By the end of 2020, including newborn foals, a good 320 takhi lived in the protected area, divided into 23 harems and 3-5 bachelor groups. In the spring, nearly 80 mares were identified as being in foal, with almost 60 of those giving birth to a foal. Thus, the number of foals exceeded that of 2019, but unfortunately the survival rate was somewhat smaller.

Successful Takhi stock development: 1992 – 2020

Population within one biological horse year = May - April



In spring 2020, a takhi group wintering in the enclosure in Takhin tal, together with the three mares transported from Europe to Mongolia in 2019 with the help of the Air Force of the Czech Republic, were released into the wild without any problems, together with the stallion "Hustai", who had joined the mares in the enclosure outside the fence the previous year and was therefore taken into the enclosure after some time. For the time being, the last transport of another 4 wild horses from Europe, again organized by Prague Zoo, had to be cancelled due to the worldwide coronavirus pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions.

After the Mongolian Parliament approved the expansion of the Great Gobi B Protected Area to 18,000 km² in May 2019, its boundary has now been re-marked and 20 information boards installed. This required 100 concrete posts, 3'500 kg of cement, 100 pairs of gloves, 29 paintbrushes, 65 liters of paint and 20 liters of thinner, and of course a dedicated team consisting of the ranger team who carried out the work. The result is indeed something to behold.



A larger protected area also requires more staff to fulfill the tasks at hand. In the 2nd quarter of 2020, the GGB administration hired fourteen additional rangers on a temporary basis. The fact that these employment contracts were renewed in 2021 is a positive signal for the importance of the GGB within the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.



Training and education were supported by the Ministry, the GGB administration and our office in Ulaanbaatar. The water monitoring project provided a welcome opportunity for multi-layered "hands-on" training. However, workshops with international experts, e.g., in the veterinary field, had to be postponed to a time when international travel to Mongolia will be possible again.

The cooperation with politics and research

ITG works in Mongolia under the umbrella of a contract with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism MET and maintains regular exchanges with the Mongolian authorities. At the end of January, ITG again organized a workshop in Switzerland on the implementation of the management plan in the GGB protected area, in the presence of four people from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism of Mongolia and the director of the protected area. Even though a trip to Mongolia from Europe was not possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we have always kept in touch with virtually conducted video conferences and have been able to move forward with many topics despite the difficult circumstances.

The research priorities developed at the ITG workshop in 2017 were in principle also pursued in 2020. The study to improve water management in cooperation with the University of Khovd and the GGB administration was in full swing. In addition to three longer field work assignments, interviews were conducted with herders and three spring wells were protected.



Lena Michler worked on the evaluations for the study "Strategies for the cooperation of local herders and the protected area management of the Great Gobi B". However, field research was unfortunately not possible in the 2020 season. This makes the cooperation and collaboration of the herders all the more important. Lena already distributed thirty digital cameras among the herders in 2019 and motivated them to keep an observation diary. These observations will help the park administration to further develop the management of the protected area.

The research project on hybridization, on the other hand, has come to a standstill due to the Corona pandemic, as work in the laboratory was only possible to a limited extent. The large ungulate count also had to be postponed by one year.

The public's information

Our website www.savethewildhorse.org, information brochures and the Takhi Post in German, English and Mongolian provide information about the activities of the ITG association. The website was completely revised and relaunched in 2020. In May 2020, the Takhi Post had the motto "Wildlife conservation: let's keep going", while the one in November was dedicated to the topic of steppe ecosystems. In order to be able to organize the necessary funds to support wild horse conservation even in the difficult times of the pandemic, Peter Kistler produced an extra edition of the Takhi-Post. In addition, ITG board members regularly answer questions from journalists from newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

Despite the restrictions caused by the Corona pandemic, our team in Ulaanbaatar was committed to promoting environmental awareness. 10'000 copies of the children's book "Tuya's Trip", written by Anita Fahrni, ITG board member, were distributed to schools in UB and western Mongolia. The book is about the girl Tuya who has to accompany her mother to Takhin tal during the school vacations to help with conservation projects. Tuya is not at all enthusiastic about these vacation plans, but on the spot, she falls for the charm of the impressive nature and gets to know the flora and fauna.



The association ITG

At the end of 2020, the ITG association consists of four organizations (Wildnispark Zürich Langenberg; Wildpark Bruderhaus Winterthur; Prague Zoo; Nuremberg Zoo) and ten natural persons, who also form the board of directors (Reinhard Schnidrig, president; Christian Stauffer, vice-president; Rebekka Blumer, Treasurer; Ruth Baumgartner, Actuary; Sven Hoffmann, Legal Advisor; Anita Fahrni, Associate; Miroslav Bobek, representative of Prague Zoo; Jaroslav Simek, representative of Prague Zoo; Lundeg Purevsuren, representative of the Mongolian Government as Ambassador of Mongolia to Switzerland). The ITG Honorary President, Thomas Pfisterer, is invited to all board meetings as a guest.

On the occasion of a workshop, two meetings and various discussions in working groups, the 2020 board dealt with the following content, among others:

- Cooperation with the political authorities and the relevant institutions of the state and the Aimags in Mongolia;
- Renewal of the cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism of Mongolia;
- Implementation of the management plan for the protected area in the Gobi;
- Monitoring of the free-ranging takhi population in the Gobi;
- Research priorities and research support, especially in the areas of water management and takhi domestic horse hybridization;
- Establishment of a socio-economic project with nomads in the vicinity of the protected area;
- Cooperation with other reintroduction projects in Mongolia;
- Maintenance and further development of the infrastructure in the protected area in the Gobi;
- Further development of the ITG office and its activities in Ulaanbaatar.



The ITG office in Ulanbaatar is led by Batsukh Jamiyandorj as dedicated Executive Director. Batsukh is supported by Dalaitseren Sukhbaatar as Research Assistant in a 50% position, Khandam Tserentjav for Marketing (until July 2020) and since January 2021 by Yondon Gansukh as Research Associate.

The ITG is financially supported by the association "Friends of the Wild Horse". A loyal crowd of around 250 members and supporters has made the constant work of the ITG possible for more than 20 years with their donations. All board members of the ITG and the Friends Association work on a voluntary basis.

The finances

Contributions from members, donations and support from foundations generated income of CHF. 189'076. We owe considerable contributions to the Jean-Pierre and Sonja Siegfried Foundation, a Foundation in Zurich and the Temperatio Foundation. The Friends of the Wild Horse Association again made a substantial contribution.

Funds were invested in the management of the protected area, the monitoring of the takhi, and research. Thanks to strict resource management and delays in certain projects, the ITG association closed the year with a surplus of CHF. 75'166.

The annual financial statements can be viewed here:

<https://savethewildhorse.org/en/medias/>

Reinhard Schnidrig, President

