

ITG INTERNATIONAL TAKHI GROUP

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

Annual Report 2021



International Takhi Group ITG

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The President's Preface

The ITG year 2021 was marked by two events, the second "season" of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the planning of a new administration and information centre for the protected area in the Dzungarian Gobi in southwest Mongolia (Great Gobi B). Due to the pandemic, travelling was impossible. Nevertheless, the ITG team in Mongolia, the Great Gobi B staff and the ITG Board have maintained close and committed cooperation, newly via video conferences. And we have achieved an astonishing amount and great things in the process.

I am particularly happy about the completion of the planning for the construction of a new centre for the reserve, which combines the functions of an administration building, an information centre and a meeting place for the reserve's gamekeepers, locals and tourists. A protected area is only as good as its management. It needs knowledge, human and financial resources to implement the declared protected status. Wildlife rangers play a central role in this. They implement the goals on the ground and are the contact persons for the locals. The rangers of the Great Gobi B reserve are almost all from the region. The massive enlargement of the reserve in 2019 to 18,000km² (almost half the area of Switzerland) and the doubling of the number of staff requires an adaptation of the existing infrastructure.



The new centre, planned as a campus on a total area of 10,000m², is to be built in the village of Altai (Khovd province) on the northern edge of the enlarged reserve. Around an inner courtyard, the main building with a usable area of around 800m² will provide space for four main areas of use: a sector with offices for the administration and a meeting room for the rangers, an information centre with café with a multifunctional room for exhibitions and training, a sector with rooms for guests, as well as a sector with two flats for the management of the centre. In addition, there are other facilities on the campus grounds, such as garages, a greenhouse and guest yurts.

The new "House for the Gobi" should soon become a hub for effective and efficient protection of the Dzungarian Gobi ecosystem and an attractive place to work. The planning is done, now it is time to secure funding for the project. We, the ITG, are staying tuned.

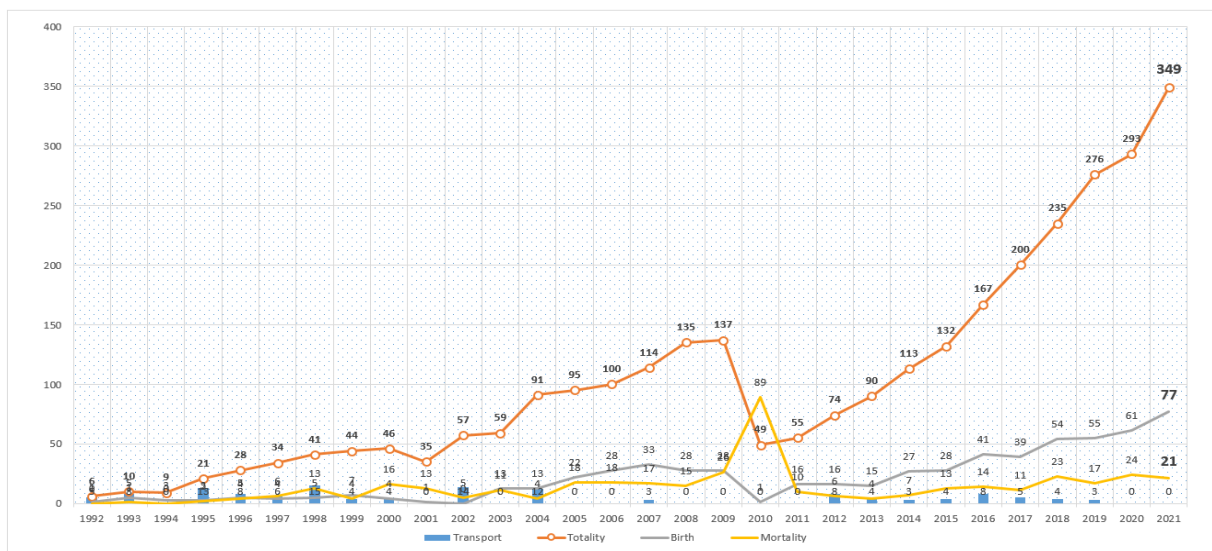
The takhi in the UNESCO-Biosphere reserve of the Great Gobi in Mongolia

The development of the population has been very positive in recent years. The analysis of the vegetation data of this period showed that the pastures had developed very well - also compared to earlier periods. However, with dry years, shortages can arise again at any time.

On 31 December 2021, there were 349 takhi living in Great Gobi B. They were divided into 24 harems and 2 bachelor groups. In spring, 77 mares were identified as in foal, and at the end of the year, 57 foals were still alive. This is a very good survival rate.

Development of the takhi population in the Great Gobi B SPA 1992-2021:

(Population within the biological "takhi year" from May until April: data on the graph until 31.12.21)



Takhi and wildlife monitoring on foot, by motorbike and jeep is still the main task of the rangers. Not only are important observations made on the wildlife, but also the vegetation, water levels and the nomads' movements are noted. In discussions with nomads and the border guards (military), news is exchanged and the interests of the protected area are promoted. Our research assistant, Dalaitseren Sukhbaatar, has meanwhile taken on important tasks in the takhi and wildlife monitoring. Among other things, he guides the new rangers in identifying takhi individuals and recording their distribution. He also manages the geo-database.

The large ungulate census had to be postponed for another year because of the pandemic.

Cooperation with politics and research

The 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, in particular through the Managing Director of the ITG office in Ulaanbaatar, Batsukh Jamiyandorj. At the end of January, the ITG again organised the ITG workshop, which has already become a fixed annual agenda event, in the form of a video conference between the MET, the director of the Great Gobi B reserve, the ITG office in Ulaanbaatar and the ITG board members in Switzerland and the Czech Republic.

The three takhi reintroduction projects in Mongolia - Hustai Nuuru, Khomyn tal, Takhin tal - are now coming together to exchange information on a regular basis. In 2019, the three projects started to create a joint framework programme for the conservation of the wild horse in Mongolia, which has now been accepted by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism MET in 2021.



The study to improve water management in cooperation with the University of Khovd and the GGB administration was successfully completed in the reporting year. 10 spring catchments were protected and provided with information boards. A map with all water points of the GGB was created. Together with the data from the new weather stations, this provides us with important information for the zoning of the extended protected area. Water samples were also collected in various work assignments in the field and then analysed in the laboratory.

The water monitoring project was the first project in many years to be carried out by the 3-member team of GGB, Khovd University and ITG. All participants praised the good cooperation, the lively exchange among each other and the mutual gain of information. The co-financing of this project by the SDC Mongolia, the Jean-Pierre and Sonja Siegfried Foundation, the University of Khovd, the GGB administration and the ITG made this positive result possible.



Lena Michler's PhD thesis is one of the ITG research priorities and aims to develop adapted management strategies for the cooperation of local herders and protected area management of the Great Gobi B SPA, so that both the ecosystem there and the associated wildlife habitat, as well as the traditional nomadic way of life in and around the protected area, are preserved. Lena Michler's first scientific manuscript from this work was accepted for publication on 21 March 2022 and is due to appear in the *Journal for Rangeland Ecology and Management* in May under the title *Moving towards the greener side: environment and vegetation guiding pastoral mobility in Dzungarian Gobi, Mongolia*.



The research project on possible hybridisation between takhi-domestic horses not only fell behind schedule because of the Corona pandemic, it also had to be relaunched in December 2021 because of errors in the sequencing programme. A new company was contracted to do the sequencing. In the meantime, 15 samples have been successfully sequenced. Thus, work can continue with this procedure.

The publics' information

Our website www.savethewildhorse.org, information brochures, Facebook & Instagram and the Takhi Post in German, English and Mongolian provide information about the activities of the ITG association. In May, the Takhi Post had the motto "Creating the Future", in August the topic was "A House for the Gobi", and the one in November was dedicated to the topic "More than Climate". In addition, ITG board members regularly answer questions from journalists from newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

In the project to improve water management, special attention was paid to informing the population and especially school children: water is the elixir of life for humans, flora and fauna. Information boards were therefore installed at the newly fenced springs.



Illustrative visual material, posters and an experimental kit are also intended to convey the topic didactically in schools.

Cashmere textiles from Mongolia should be produced and marketed via a sustainable production method and value chain, i.e., without overexploitation of the pastures. ITG agroecologist Lena Michler presented our socio-economic project at the Fashion Week in Berlin in autumn.



At the same occasion, the journalist and book author Stefan Schomann from Berlin presented the excellently researched non-fiction book "In Search of the Wild Horses", in which he tells the story of the wild horses. A chapter is also dedicated to the reintroduction project in the Dzungarian Gobi.

The association ITG

At the end of 2021, the ITG association consists of four organisations (Wildnispark Zurich Langenberg; Wildpark Bruderhaus Winterthur; Prague Zoo; Nuremberg Zoo) and ten natural persons, who will also form the Board of ITG (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; Karin Hindenlang, representative of Wildnispark Zurich; 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 one workshop, three meetings and various working group meetings - all of this mostly in the form of video conferences - the Board dealt 2021 with the following topics, 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;
- Development of a new ITG strategy 2022-2030;
- 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 pasture ecology, water management, and takhi-domestic horse hybridisation;
- Socio-economic projects with nomads in the vicinity of the reserve;
- Cooperation with other takhi reintroduction projects in Mongolia;

- Maintenance and further development of the infrastructure in the protected area in the Gobi;
- Develop the know-how and capacity of the Gobi B Protected Area staff;
- Further development of the ITG office and its activities in Ulaanbaatar.

The ITG office in Ulaanbaatar is headed by Batsukh Jamiyandorj. Batsukh is supported by Dalaitseren Sukhbaatar as a research assistant and Yondon Gansukh as a scientific programme manager.

The ITG is financially supported by the "Friends of the Wild Horse Association". A loyal crowd of around 250 members 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.

Finances

Contributions from members, donations and support from foundations generated income of CHF 166'008 in the year under review. We owe considerable contributions to the Jean-Pierre and Sonja Siegfried Foundation, the Temperatio Foundation and a foundation in Zurich. The Friends of the Wild Horse Association also made a substantial contribution.

Funds were invested in the management of the protected area, the monitoring of the takhi, research as well as the further development of the infrastructure and of course for the new administration centre.

The ITG association closed the year with an overspending of CHF 9'910. The association's assets as of 31.12.2021 amount to CHF 115'383, of which the liquid assets are CHF 98'381.

The annual accounts can be viewed here: <https://savethewildhorse.org/en/medias/>

Reinhard Schnidrig, President

