

ITG INTERNATIONAL TAKHI GROUP

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

Annual Report 2022



(Photo: P. Kaczensky)

International Takhi Group ITG

c/o Wildnispark Zürich

Alte Sihlstrasse 38

8135 Sihlwald

+41 44 722 55 22

info@savethewildhorse.org

www.savethewildhorse.org

The President's Preface

On 6 August 2022, a large community of committed people from the circles of politics, authorities, universities, nature conservation organisations and civil society celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the reintroduction of the wild horse in Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar. Those responsible for the three reintroduction projects in the Great Gobi B Protected Area, Hustai National Park and Khomyn tal National Park jointly organised the worthy occasion. And together they reported on the number of takhi living in the wild in Mongolia: 433 in Hustai, 423 in the Dzungarian Gobi, and 138 in Khomyn tal, i.e., 994 in total. I myself was able to observe 393 individual takhi in the protected area of the Great Gobi B in three days at the end of July 2022... what a joy!

Yes, the reintroduction of the wild horse in Mongolia is a great conservation success. With a thousand wild horses, the survival of the species in the wild is not yet assured; their populations are too small and fragile. But the fact that the wild horses could be saved at all so close to their final disappearance borders on a miracle.

It took decades of rehabilitation work to rebuild a small population in the wild from the puny remains of a once flourishing life form. The rescue was enormously costly and only succeeded through the tireless efforts of people who were not indifferent to the primeval wild horses. This story proves that even demanding species can be saved from extinction.

But actually, it should not come to this. The fact that protected areas and even zoos increasingly have to act as an ark because the ecological footprint of one kind of human is pushing countless other species to the brink of existence is alarming. We humans must succeed in preserving ecosystems and biodiversity in the interests of ourselves and all other life forms. If we are to succeed, we must protect much larger areas than before, from and for ourselves. This is an enormous task, arguably the most important our species has ever faced in its evolutionary history.

A key to the success of this mission can be passing on the fire to like-minded people. The celebration on 6 August 2022 in Ulaanbaatar, where greying pioneers celebrated the takhi projects together with many young wild horse fans of the mobile phone generation, gives hope. One thing is certain, the ITG remains part of the mission.



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

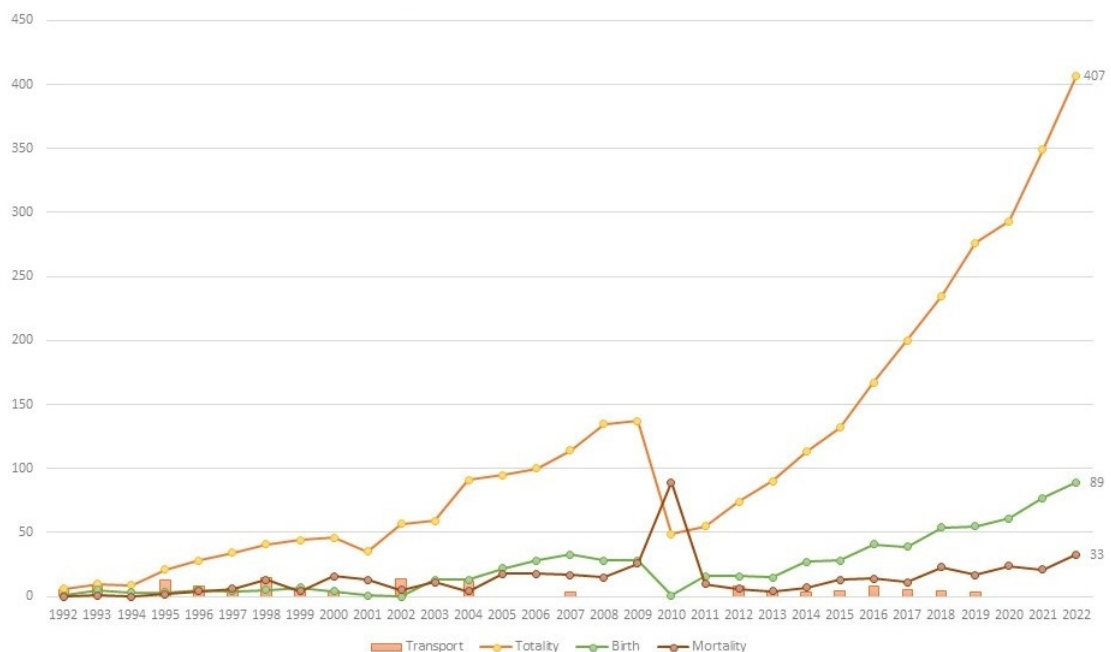
The positive **development of the takhi population** in recent years continued in 2022. At the end of the year, the rangers could count a total of 415 takhi, divided into 32 harems and 3 to 5 unsteady young stallion associations. A total of 89 mares gave birth to foals, of which 59 foals could still be observed in December (66%). The largest harem had 25 animals, the smallest 4. About 300 takhi regularly use the pastures around the Khonin us oasis in the east of the protected area, the other 100 the Thaki us region in the central part of the area.

An interesting development is that with the growing takhi population and the many young stallions, harems are increasingly being shared. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to clearly identify the new harem stallions individually.

As a result of the dry summer, pastures have been of rather poor quality, which is likely to affect winter mortality in 2022-2023.

Development of the takhi population in the Great Gobi B SPA 1992-2022:

(Population within the biological "takhi year" from May until April: data until 30.12.2022)



The main responsibility for takhi monitoring lies with the ITG research assistant, Dalaitseren Sukhbaatar. Together with the rangers of the protected area, he regularly makes tours by motorbike, jeep and on foot. Not only are important observations made about the wildlife, but also the vegetation, water levels and the nomads' passages are noted. In conversations with nomads and the border guards (military), news is exchanged and the interests of the protected area are promoted. Dalaitseren also keeps the takhi and Geo databases and reports monthly to the ITG board on developments in the protected area.

About every 5 years, Prof. Petra Kaczensky, with the support of the ITG, carries out an **area-wide count of ungulates in the protected area**. After 2010, 2015 and the postponements of this complex undertaking with about three dozen observers in the last two years due to the Covid 19 pandemic, this large wildlife census could now be carried out in 2022. It showed that the khulan population of about 5'000 animals seems to remain stable, while the goitered gazelle population has increased since 2010 to about 11'000 animals.



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 exchange with the Mongolian authorities, in particular through the managing director of the ITG office in Ulaanbaatar, Batsukh Jamiyandorj. In 2021, the continuation of the cooperation agreement until 2031 was renegotiated with the ministry. On 8 June 2022, ITG-Mongolia Executive Director Batsukh Jamiyandorj was able to sign this contract together with Environment Minister B. Bat-Erdene. In the summer of 2022, I was also able to refresh contacts with national and regional authorities during a three-week trip.



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 and his team, the ITG office in Ulaanbaatar, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Zurich and the ITG board members in Switzerland and the Czech Republic.

The **three projects for the reintroduction of the takhi in Mongolia** - Hustai Nuuru, Khomyn tal, Takhin tal - now meet to exchange information on a regular basis. In 2019, the three projects began to draw up a joint framework programme for the conservation of the wild horse in Mongolia, which was accepted by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism MET in 2021. In 2022, the actual implementation began. The highlight of the annual programme was the joint celebration of the 30th anniversary of the takhi reintroduction in Mongolia on 6 August and the Naadam the following day in Hustai National Park.



Cooperation with the **administration of the strictly protected area of the Great Gobi "B"** has been the most important factor for the successful takhi reintroduction from the very beginning. Oyunsaikhan Ganbaatar, a young graduate student in Takhin tal 23 years ago and director of the reserve since September 2003, resigned at the end of September 2022. Over the years, Ganbaa has distinguished himself through his high level of commitment and has become an outstanding takhi expert.

His good networking with regional and national authorities and politicians was essential for the expansion of the protected area in 2019. Ganbaa takes over the management of the organisation "We help them to survive - Mongolia", which was founded and financed by ITG member Zoo Prague. Among other things, this organisation wants to examine another area in eastern Mongolia in Dornod Aimag for a fourth takhi reintroduction project.



Lena Michler's PhD thesis is one of the ITG research priorities and aims to develop adapted **management strategies for the cooperation of local pastoralists and protected area management of the Great Gobi B SPA**, in order to preserve both the ecosystem there and the associated wildlife habitat, as well as the traditional nomadic way of life in and around the protected area. Lena Michler's first scientific publication from this work appeared in the Journal for Rangeland Ecology and Management in May under the title "Moving Toward the Greener Side: Environmental Aspects Guiding Pastoral Mobility and Impacting Vegetation in the Dzungarian Gobi, Mongolia". Further publications will follow.

Building on the understanding of the use of the barren pastures in the Gobi by the populations of wild ungulates and the livestock of the nomadic herders, Lena Michler has been developing the **socio-economy project "Sustainable Cashmere Use and Ecotourism"** for two years in parallel to her doctoral thesis and on behalf of the ITG. Cashmere wool is the main source of income for herders in Mongolia. Over the years, this has led to shifts in herds with more and more goats and additional overuse of grazing land. One, if not the central challenge of the Great Gobi B as a biosphere reserve is pasture management that allows wildlife and domestic animals to coexist. The focus of the cashmere project is to create more value from fewer animals.

During a journey of several weeks in April-May, Lena laid the foundation for the establishment of the new herder's cooperative "Khuvchiin Tsagaan Sort" in the villages of Bij and Perm in the buffer zone of the Great Gobi B Protected Area. In a first step, a certain part of the raw cashmere is to be bought from the herders of the cooperative, processed and the quality of the cashmere is to be evaluated in this context. Lena Michler is working with specialists to do this.

The second part of the project is about sustainable tourism. Here Covid had some after-effects and the planned model trips could not take place in 2022 either - they are now planned for 2023.



The **research project on the genetics of the takhi** and the possible hybridisation between takhi and domestic horses was methodically relaunched several times. Due to the poor quality of the samples (faecal samples are a challenge for genetic analyses anyway), the actual analysis could not be carried out

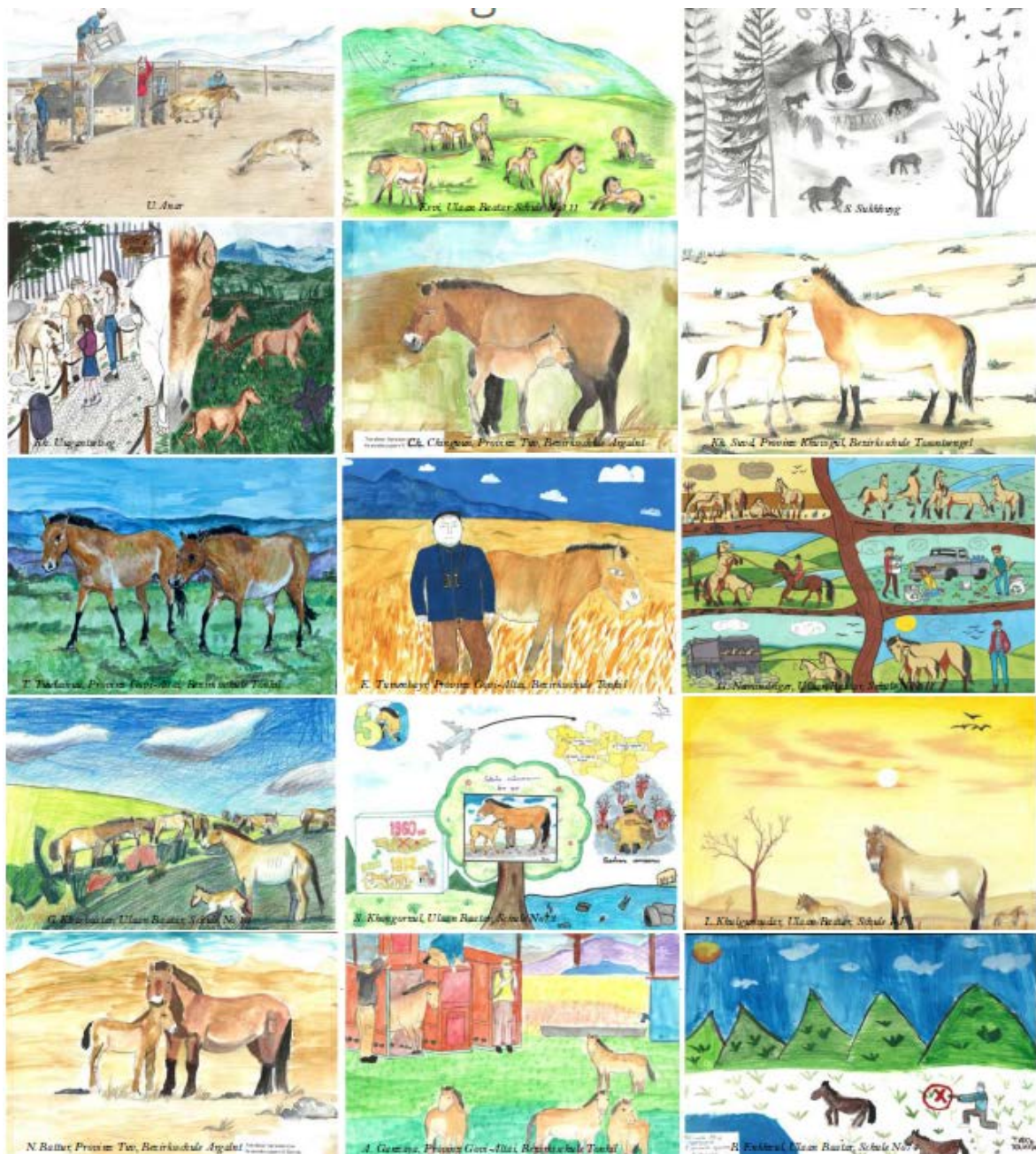
The "Great Gobi" - a huge UNESCO biosphere reserve consisting of areas A and B - protects globally unique habitats of the Central Asian steppe and cold desert including the "Great Gobi Six", the six endangered large mammal species wild camel, saiga antelope, goitered gazelle, Gobi brown bear (Mazaalai), wild ass (khulan) and wild horse (takhi). In cooperation with the Succow Foundation, the ITG is supporting the preparation of an application by the Mongolian government to declare this area a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

The publics' information

Information about the activities of the ITG association can be found on our **website** www.savethewildhorse.org, information brochures, Facebook & Instagram and the Takhi Post in German, English, Mongolian and French. In addition, ITG board members, PhD student Lena

Michler, and the director of the ITG office in Ulaanbaatar regularly answer questions from journalists from newspapers, magazines, radio and television, as well as in lectures.

In May, the **Takhi Post** had the anniversary year motto "Wild again - 30 years of reintroduction". The December issue was dedicated to the theme "Carrying on the legacy" and published a selection of wonderful drawings by school children on the takhi reintroduction. The drawing competition that produced these great works of art by little hands was launched by the three takhi projects to mark the 30th anniversary.



The exciting **children's books by Anita Fahrni-Minear**, illustrated by Rina Jost, are widely read in schools in Mongolia.

The association ITG

At the end of 2022, the ITG association will consist of five organisations (Wildnispark Zürich Langenberg; Wildpark Bruderhaus Winterthur; Zoo Prague; Zoo Nuremberg, Zoo Berlin) and ten natural persons, who will also form the board (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 Zürich; 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, four meetings and various working group meetings - after the end of the Covid 19 pandemic now again with physical meetings combined with video conferencing - the 2022 Board dealt with the following topics, among others:

- Cooperation with the political authorities and the competent 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 mountain wildlife monitoring (snow leopards, argali, ibex) and takhi genetics;
- 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;
- Zoning of the extended protected area;
- Development of know-how and capacity among the staff of the protected area;
- 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 research assistant and Yondon Gansukh as research assistant. 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 SFr. 194'025 in the year under review. We owe considerable contributions to the Jean-Pierre and Sonja Siegfried Foundation, the Temperatio Foundation, the Boguth-Jonak Foundation, the Vontobel Foundation, the Fondation de bienfaisance Jeanne Lovioz, BirdLife Switzerland, the Basel Foundation for Biological Research and a foundation in Zurich. The "Friends of the Wild Horse Association" again made a substantial contribution.

Money was 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 a plus of SFr. 17'158. The association's assets as of 31.12.2022 amount to SFr. 132'541-, of which the liquid assets are SFr. 116'340.-.

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

Reinhard Schnidrig, President

