ITG INTERNATIONAL TAKHI GROUP

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

Annual Report 2025

International Takhi Group ITG
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The President's Preface

Endless steppe? A truly wise decision! On the recommendation of Mongolian and Soviet biologists, the Mongolian State Great Khural decided in 1975 to strictly protect the Great Gobi. This was anything but a matter of course in a huge country that at the time was still a satellite state of the Soviet Union with a population of just 1.5 million. It is thanks to this foresight that one of the world's most magnificent desert landscapes remains largely intact to this day. In its western Zone B, the last wild takhi had died out less than ten years earlier. In its eastern Zone A, the very last wild camels and Gobi bears hang on today. With our support and against all odds the takhi are fighting for a new existence in their last refuge. The camels and bears, on the other hand, remain critically endangered.

The two areas, Great Gobi B and Great Gobi A, in south-western Mongolia are not only strictly protected under Mongolian law; they are also a UNESCO biosphere reserve – covering 68,000 km^2, one of the largest in the world. This type of protected area was established with the aim of serving the shared goals of people and the biosphere and achieving positive development for both the people living in the area and for nature. Nomads have lived in the Great Gobi since time immemorial. Their way of life is fundamentally sustainable and compatible with the needs of the ecosystem and in particular the local wildlife.

In a biosphere reserve, both nature and culture must be preserved. This can work. In an extremely fragile, arid ecosystem such as the Gobi, however, it presents a particular challenge. Only specially adapted species can survive here. Yet since the nomads' traditional circular economy has given way to a linear monetary economy, their small livestock herds have grown to such an extent that their appetite exceeds the regenerative capacity of the pastures in many places. And climate change is further exacerbating desertification.

Can the former harmony between humans and nature be restored? This question has long been on our minds. The ITG is strongly committed to the protection and sustainable use of the Great Gobi B Reserve. For the sake of the Great Gobi's magnificence, the ITG, together with other institutions, is currently supporting the inclusion of this wild expanse on the UNESCO World Heritage List. As far-sighted as the Great State Khural was back then.

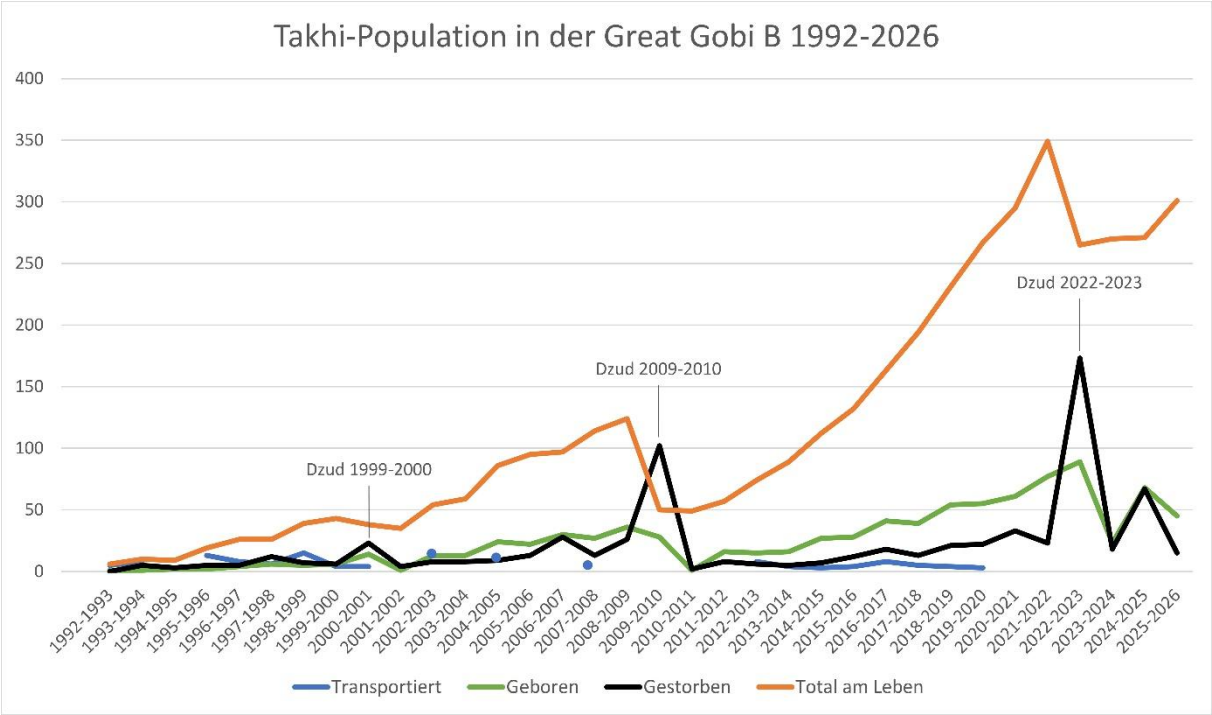
The takhi in the UNESCO-Biosphere reserve of the Great Gobi in Mongolia

Takhi-Population:

The 2025 reporting year was once again marked by positive developments in the overall project and in the takhi population. The population has continued to recover, partly thanks to the resumption of hay feeding over the winter. However, population growth is slower than hoped for. This is due to the poor quality of the pastures, which are suffering from drought and intensive grazing. In the winter of 2024/25, based on the risk assessment, systematic feeding of hay to the wild horses took place, which helped to keep population losses to a minimum. Plans for the winter of 2025/2026 followed a similar pattern, and feeding began with the onset of winter in early December 2025.

Development of the takhi population in the Great Gobi B SPA 1992-2025:

(Data covers the biological horse year from 1 May to 30 April. The figures for the year 2025–2026 are based on observations up to 31 December 2025.)



Births, deaths and total population of the takhi in the Great Gobi B Reserve. Unlike the death rate (black line) and birth rate (green line), the orange line does not show the actual fluctuation in the total population, but rather the number of takhi as at 30 April each year (survivors after the winter). The previous peak population figure prior to the extreme winter (dzud) of 2022/2023 was approximately 400 individuals. During the dzud of the winter of 2022/2023, approximately 180 animals died, including foals. The Takhi population stands at around 300 animals as of the end of 2025, including foals. Clarity regarding winter mortality in 2025/2026 is expected in early summer 2026.

Collaboration with politics and research in Mongolia: priorities for 2025

Management of the Great Gobi "B" Protected Area and takhi monitoring

The key tool for managing the protected area is the new 'Management Plan 2025–2035'. Within the objectives of this plan, the protected area administration and its parent authority, the Ministry of Environment & Climate Change, define specific activities in terms of location and timing, the responsible implementing bodies and the required budgets. The 2025 annual programme was discussed at an ITG workshop in January, enabling the ITG to provide optimal support for shared priorities.

The takhi and wildlife monitoring programme is a key component of the management plan, which has received financial and personnel support from the ITG since the reintroduction project began. During the reporting year, there was another staff change in our office in Mongolia regarding this programme: unfortunately, following the successful completion of her Master's degree, Ankhzaya Nasantogtokh sought a new challenge outside ITG. We are delighted to now have Tsogtdelger Batsaikhan, a dedicated Master's student who speaks fluent English, on our team to continue the programme. In 2025, the former park director, Ganbaatar Oyunsaikhan, continued to provide intensive support to Ankhzaya and later to Tsogtdelger in monitoring the takhi, sharing his extensive knowledge of the wild horses with them. This close collaboration will continue twice a year in the future.

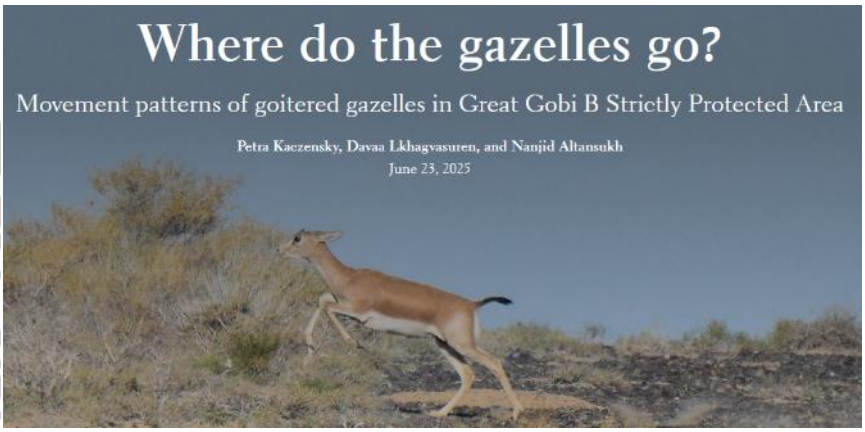
Regular patrols to monitor the takhi and wildlife populations and to secure the protected area remain the essential foundation of the protected area's management. Thanks to his IT skills, Tsogtdelger was able to quickly familiarise himself with the SMART programme and adapt it to better meet the rangers' needs. The graphical analyses generated from the data are both informative and visually appealing.

Fay Goedbloed's internship focused on pasture management and veterinary care for grazing animals in the buffer zone surrounding the protected area. As part of her research, she interviewed several veterinary specialists and was able to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of veterinary practice across all five park municipalities.

Study on the goitered gazelle

The research project was successfully continued in 2025. Once again, six gazelles were captured as planned. Monitoring the gazelles via their transmitters is yielding very interesting new insights and, in some cases, revealing long-distance migrations by individual animals. The project will continue in 2026 to analyse further data and replace any tagged gazelles that have died. A Mongolian student is also writing his master's thesis as part of the project.

You can explore the project further via the link below or by scanning the QR code: https://arcg.is/1jaGnf3

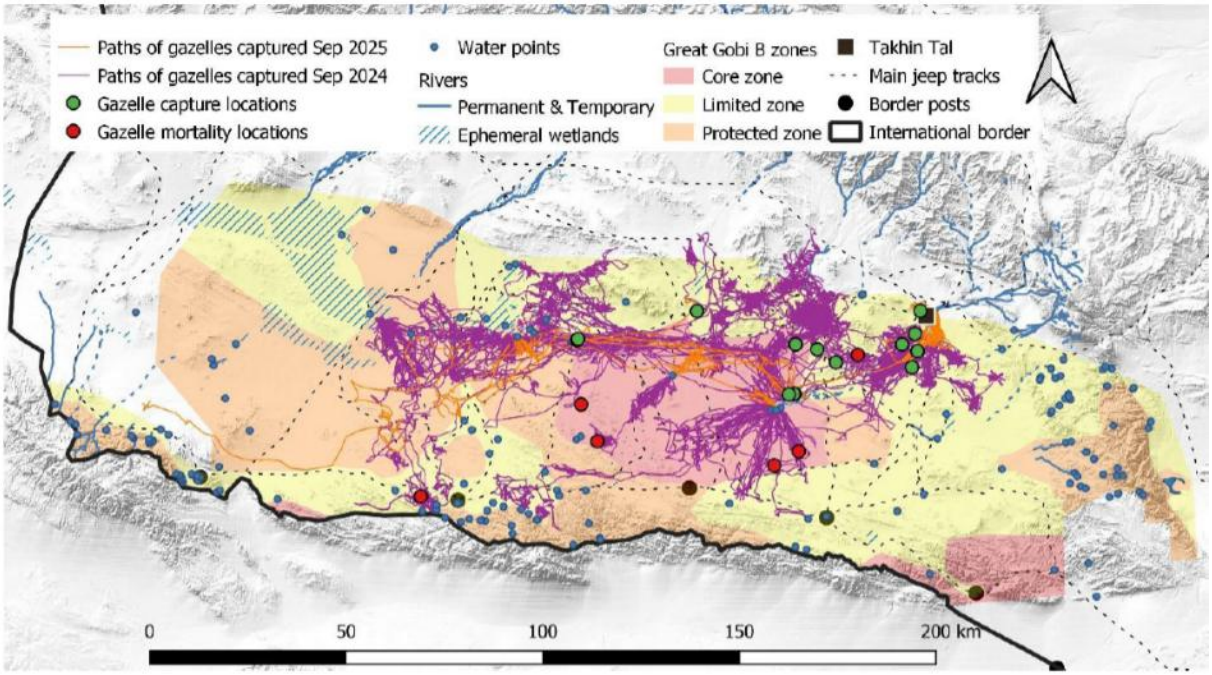


Collaring, blood sampling, DNA sampling, release: all within 5 minutes

The blood samples from the gazelles, which were analysed at the state veterinary laboratory, showed that all the animals are free from infectious diseases such as "peste des petits ruminants" (PPR), foot-and-mouth disease, sheep and goat pox, brucellosis, listeriosis and anaplasmosis.

A total of 75 males, 253 females and 4 newborn calves were counted across 62 observations. Unfortunately, none of the collared gazelles gave birth during the observation period. A follow-up observation in September 2025 was not possible due to time constraints, partly because the animals had already moved far to the west of the reserve.

The small number and very young age of the calves, as well as the sighting of heavily pregnant females, suggest that we were a little too early and that the calving season had only just begun at the end of June, towards the end of our observation period.



Movements of tagged gazelles in the conservation area: purple = collared in 2024, orange = collared in 2025

Team involved in the trapping and collaring operation: Director N. Altansukh, scientists and rangers from the GGB; Prof. P. Kaczensky; master's students Lynn and Paula; G. Javhlantugs, a veterinarian from Mongolia

Wildlife monitoring at waterholes using solar-powered cameras

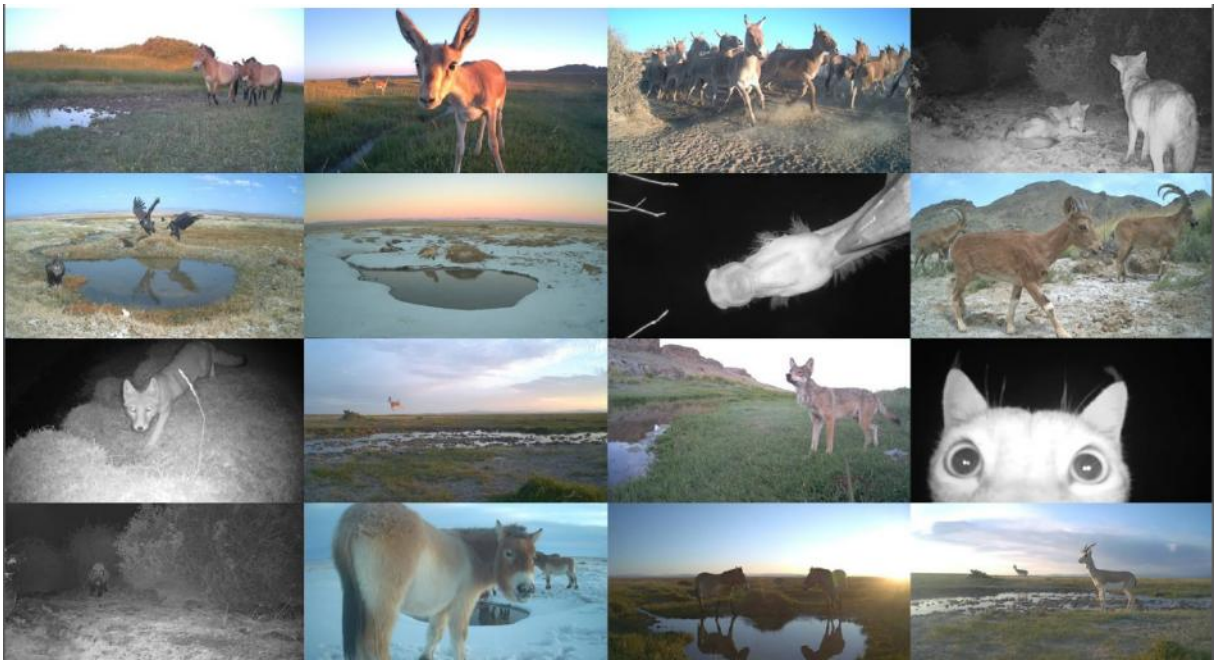
In the summer of 2025, the administration of the GG 'B' protected area and international partners launched a camera trap project to document the presence and interactions of large and medium-sized mammals at waterholes. Beyond its scientific objectives, the project aims to showcase the austere beauty and unique wildlife of the Gobi Desert, reveal its often-hidden inhabitants, and generate broader public interest in the conservation of this remarkable landscape. Two solar-powered cameras were installed at each of 20 waterholes in the eastern part of the area. Between April and November, over 300,000 images were downloaded during 266 monitoring sessions. The

analysis of these images is being carried out using state-of-the-art technology, partly with the aid of AI, and forms part of the master's theses of two German students.

Initial results show that almost all waterholes are frequented by more than 15 and, in some cases, up to 25 species of animal. The most commonly sighted wild animals are khulans (1,132 sightings), goitered gazelles (990 sightings), wolves (913 sightings), takhis (656 sightings) and tolai hares (478 sightings). We also observe that the takhi mainly visit the waterholes early in the morning, whilst the goitered gazelles tend to arrive around midday.

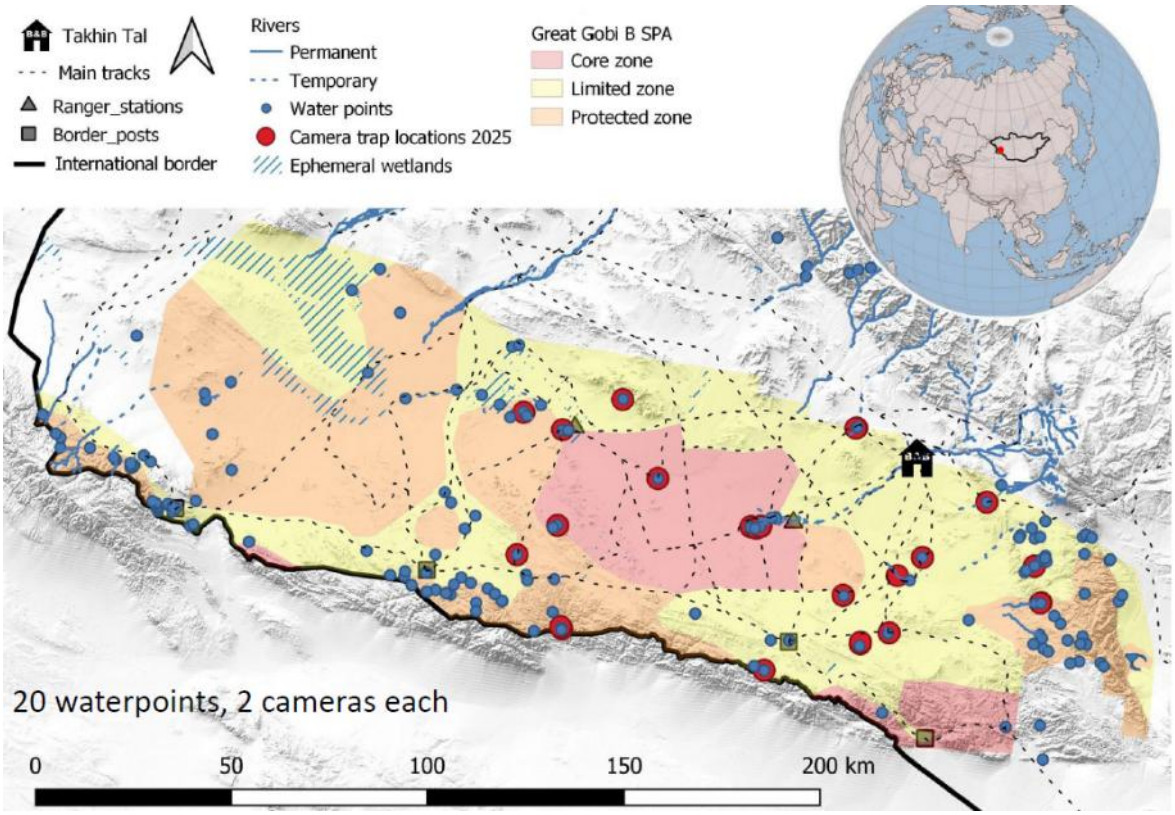
The project will continue in 2026, with a further 20 cameras to be installed in the western part of the conservation area.

The GGB team and the master's students setting up the cameras and monitoring the waterholes.



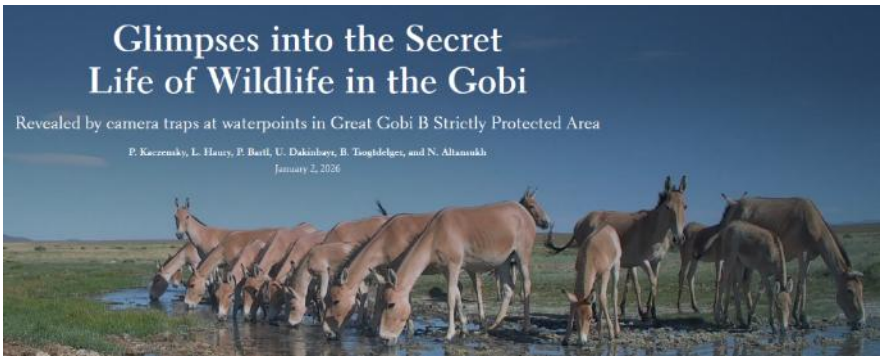
A collage of some visitors to the waterholes

The cameras provide fascinating insights into the animals' behaviour: takhi drinking and wallowing.



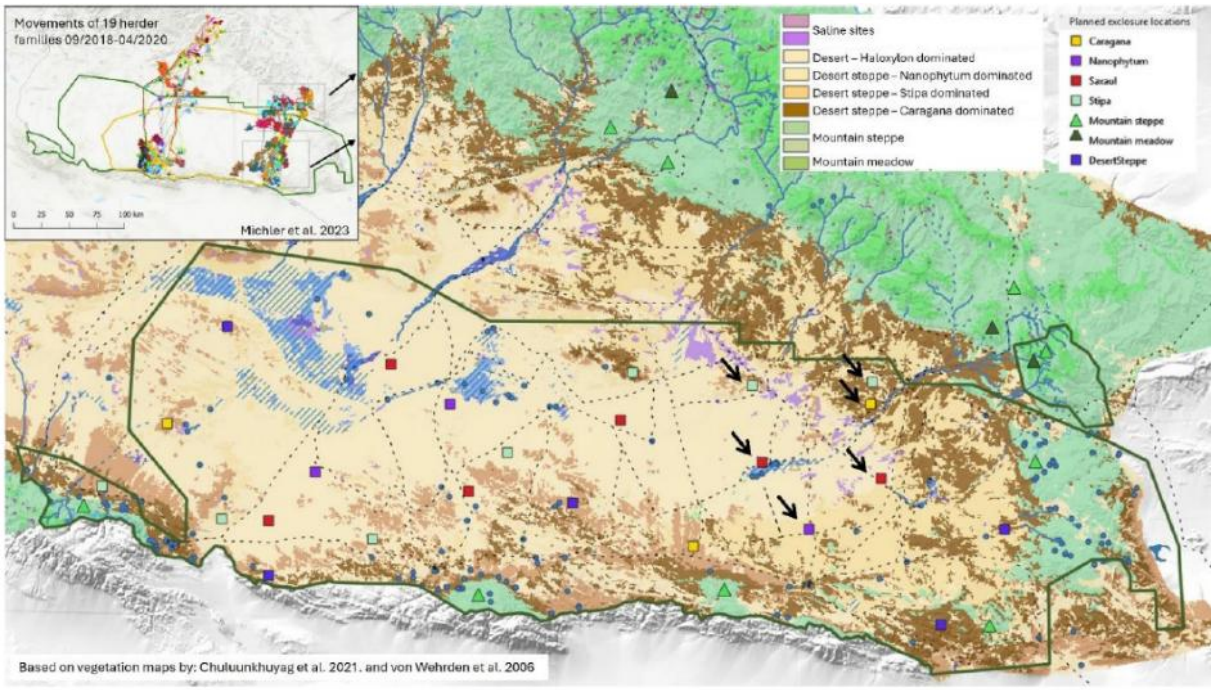
The red dots indicate the 20 waterholes in the eastern part of the area, each of which has been fitted with 2 traps.

You can find more beautiful and striking photos, as well as interesting information about the animals caught in the traps, via the link below or by scanning the QR code: https://arcg.is/0SXXyK0

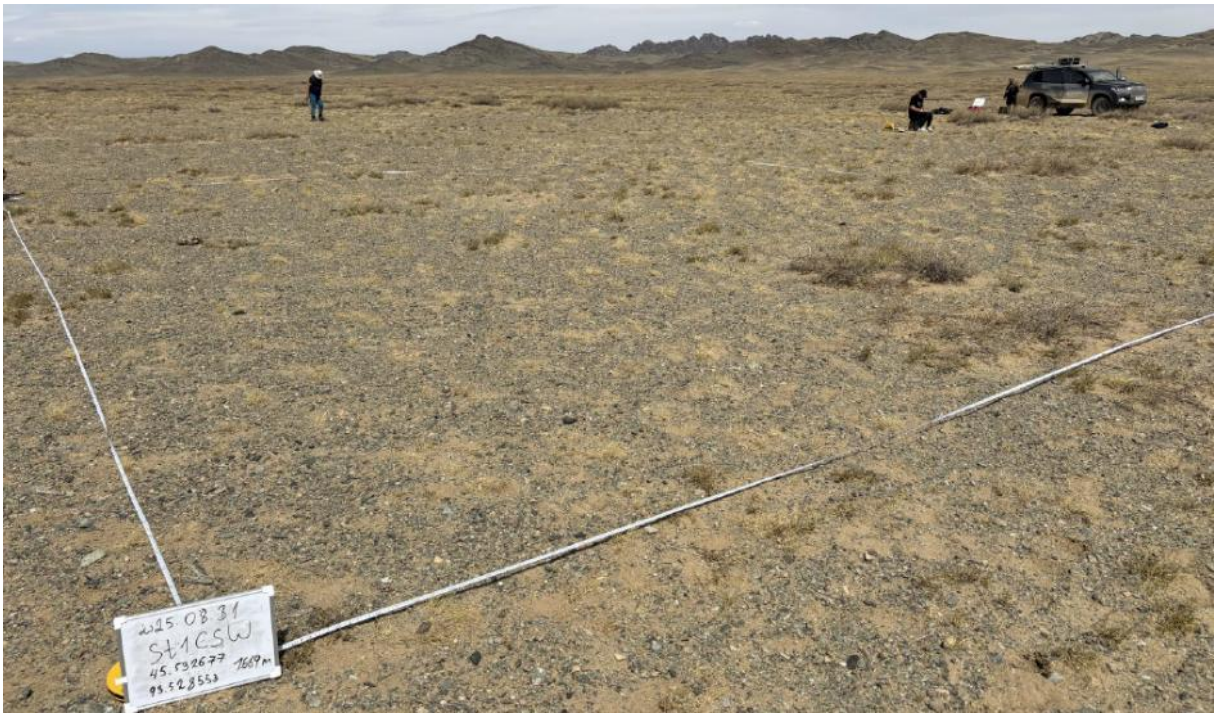


Ecology of steppe landscapes and mountain ecosystems

In 2025, a new, important project to monitor pasture vegetation was launched. Three plots were established (fenced-off areas, each 30x30 metres) and initial surveys of the existing vegetation were carried out. T. Namuulin, a Mongolian PhD student, was able to conduct initial assessments of soil quality and carry out a survey of the existing vegetation. The project will continue in 2026, and three further plots will be established in the mountainous region of the protected area.



Key vegetation in the protected area: red squares = saxaul, green squares = stipagrass



Marking out the plot before fencing

Socio-economy projects

The socio-economic project made significant progress; the key activities included a workshop with herding families from the area surrounding the protected area, the development and marketing of knitted goods made from camel wool, and the design and successful implementation of tourism initiatives, which generated a substantial financial contribution. The herders' cooperative plays a central role in the project, taking charge of the entire implementation of the wool projects. It also symbolises the future in which, in line with ITG's strategy, all activities are to be in Mongolian hands by 2030.

The shepherds' workshop held in June marked an important first step towards the planned strengthening of cooperation with nomadic families in the area surrounding the protected area. The workshop covered all topics relevant to herders, but focused in particular on veterinary medicine, animal husbandry and pasture management. The cooperative established as part of the socio-economic project provided the basis for the organisation, and the two Mongolian ITG staff members played a crucial role in the planning and implementation. Interest was very high, with 93 participants – exceeding expectations. Renowned experts such as Prof. Undarmaa, a specialist in pasture vegetation, and Prof. Narantuya, a specialist in animal breeding, gave presentations. The workshop provided important information and opportunities for networking. It was decided to repeat it in 2026 with herders from Tonkhil and Bugat and to offer it on a larger scale to herders from Altai, Uench and Bulgan as well.

Following the herders' workshop, a smaller-scale meeting took place in September between the ITG (board member and veterinarian Ruth Baumgartner), the region's veterinarians and representatives of the protected area's administration. An agreement was reached with one of the participants to carry out post-mortem examinations on dead wild horses – an important step towards improving our understanding of the causes of death.

New park administration centre in Altai of Hovd

Planning for the new centre in Altai Hovd progressed during the reporting year. However, due to personnel changes within the Mongolian government and administration, as well as the relevant contracting organisations, there were delays towards the end of the year regarding the imminent tender for the construction work. Planning for the exhibition section by ITG made good progress.

International Cooperation

International cooperation proved very successful during the reporting year: the application for the designation of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, drawn up by the ITG in collaboration with other expert partners and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, was submitted by the Government of Mongolia to the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris at the end of January 2025. Cooperation among Takhi projects worldwide has been strengthened by the establishment of the PHCA (Przewalski Horse Conservation Alliance) and formalised through an agreement between 11 organisations actively involved in establishing wild and semi-wild Takhi populations across 10 countries. The ITG was also actively involved in the development of the new 2026–2032 programme of work for the Central Asian Mammals Initiative (CAMI). CAMI brings together 14 Central Asian states which, under the umbrella of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species, aim to work across borders to protect 17 endangered mammal species, including the Przewalski's horse. The new work plan was adopted by the 14 states in Tashkent at the end of June for submission to CMS COP15. Among other things, the new CAMI plan designates the Gobi as a priority region for transnational conservation (Mongolia, China).

The ITG is now also active in Kazakhstan. Wild horses and wild asses (khulan), together with saiga antelopes, are to repopulate Kazakhstan's golden steppe, the Altyn Dala. The ITG shares this objective of the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (ADCI). This large-scale, long-term project aims to restore fully functioning ecosystems with their original fauna across the grasslands of Kazakhstan, covering an area of around 700,000 km^2. The ADCI is a joint project co-founded by the Frankfurt Zoological Society (ZGF) and ITG member Nuremberg Zoo, and is led by the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK). However, over the last two years, the camp for the reintroduction of wild horses and wild donkeys has been flooded due to the recent, very rapid snowmelt during warmer springs. ITG, with the support of the Fondation OptisomAs, therefore helped to build a new centre situated at a higher altitude. Prague Zoo and Tierpark Berlin, both members of the ITG, have taken on responsibility for transporting the wild horses from European zoos.

The publics' information

Information about the activities of the ITG association is available on our website www.savethewildhorse.org, in information leaflets, on Facebook and Instagram, and in the Takhi-Post, published in German, English, Mongolian and French. In addition, the members of the ITG Executive Board, the Managing Director of the ITG office in Switzerland and Project Manager for the socio-economic project, Lena Michler, former board member Mirjam Würsch, and the director of the ITG office in Ulaanbaatar, Batsukh Jamiyandorj, regularly answer questions from journalists from newspapers, magazines, radio and television, as well as during lectures.

The first issue of the Takhi-Post in spring 2025 focused on the theme 'A great vision: 50 years of protecting the Great Gobi'. The second issue, published at the end of the year, focused on ensuring sustainability in the Great Gobi Biosphere Reserve. The production of the Takhi Post is sponsored by the 1wild Foundation.

In August, the two protected area administrations of the Greater Gobi in Bayantooroi, together with local residents from the surrounding areas and in the presence of the Minister for the Environment and the President of the ITG, held a large folk festival – a Naadam – to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the protected area, featuring horse racing, wrestling and archery.

The association ITG

By the end of 2025, the ITG association will consist of five organisations (Zurich Langenberg Wildlife Park; Bruderhaus Winterthur Wildlife Park; Prague Zoo; Nuremberg Zoo; Berlin Zoo) and eight individuals, who also form the Executive Board (Reinhard Schnidrig, President; Christian Stauffer, Vice-President; Rebekka Blumer, Treasurer; Ruth Baumgartner, Secretary; Sven Hoffmann, Legal Adviser; Barbora Dobiášová, Representative of Prague Zoo; Jaroslav Simek, Representative of Prague Zoo; Karin Hindenlang, Representative of Zurich Langenberg Wildlife Park. The ITG Honorary President, Thomas Pfisterer, is invited to attend all Executive Board meetings as a guest.

Lena Michler has been heading the ITG office in Switzerland on a 50% basis since June 2024 and is also responsible for the socio-economic project. During the reporting year, she completed her doctoral thesis. The ITG office in Ulaanbaatar is headed by Batsukh Jamiyandorj. Batsukh is supported in administrative matters by Dugarjav Munkhjargal and Tsogtdelger Batsaikhan, who acts as a research assistant. In Takhin tal, Buyantogtokh Dorjbat works as project coordinator and Altantsetseg Erdenebayar as project assistant for the socio-economic project.

The ITG receives financial support from the 'Friends of the Wild Horse' association. Thanks to donations from a loyal group of around 250 members and supporters, the ITG has been able to carry out its work consistently for more than 25 years. All board members of the ITG and the Friends association work on a voluntary basis.

At the end of January, the ITG once again organised its annual workshop, which has now become a regular fixture on the calendar. The workshop took place in Winterthur at the 'Kompanima' building near the Bruderhaus Wildlife Park, with very good attendance from Mongolia and partner organisations. The main agenda items included joint deliberations on strategic challenges relating to pasture and water management in the Gobi, discussion of the next steps in the socio-economic projects, as well as reports on ongoing research projects and discussion of new ones.

During a workshop, four meetings and various working group sessions, the 2024 Executive Board addressed the following issues, amongst others:

- Cooperation with political bodies and the relevant state institutions, the aimags of Gobi-Altai and Khovd, and the five park municipalities in Mongolia;
- Strategic management and further development of the ITG offices in Ulaanbaatar and Switzerland;
- Implementation of the new 2024–2034 management plan for the Gobi B SPA; Monitoring of the wild takhi population in the Gobi;
- Implementation of the National Takhi Programme in Mongolia;
- Research priorities and research support, particularly in the areas of wildlife/livestock health monitoring, gazelle ecology, wildlife monitoring at waterholes, and the establishment of vegetation monitoring;
- Socio-economic projects with nomads in the vicinity of the protected area, including the establishment of a supply chain for sustainably produced cashmere and camel wool and the development of ecotourism offerings;
- Cooperation with other takhi reintroduction projects in Mongolia, China and Kazakhstan;
- Collaboration on establishing a network of takhi experts;
- Planning work for the construction of the new park centre in Altai/Khovd;
- Application for the nomination of the Mongolian Gobi as a UNESCO World Heritage Site;
- Development of expertise and capacity among the protected area's staff, including the establishment of a student exchange programme with local universities;
- Public awareness campaign targeting the general public and schools regarding the expanded protected area and species and nature conservation in general: continuation of the 'Young Researchers / We Are Gamekeepers!' programme.

Finances

Thanks to membership fees, donations and support from foundations, we were able to generate income of CHF 328,520.- during the reporting year. We are grateful for significant contributions from the Jean-Pierre and Sonja Siegfried Foundation, the Lovioz Foundation, the Fondation OptisomAs, a foundation in Zurich and a private benefactor. The Friends of the Wild Horse Association also made a substantial contribution once again.

Funds were invested in the management of the protected area, the monitoring of the takhi, research, the socio-economic project 'Coexistence of Wild Animals and Nomads', and the further development of infrastructure. In addition, a significant contribution was made for the first time to the wild horse reintroduction project in Kazakhstan. The ITG Association closed the year with a loss of CHF 7,499.- As at 31 December 2025, the Association's assets amounted to CHF 221,938.- of which cash and cash equivalents totalled CHF 186,344.-

The annual accounts can be viewed here: https://savethewildhorse.org/mediathek/