

Report on progress towards the CMS MOU in the period July-December 2007.

Summary: There have been some steps forward for saiga conservation in this reporting period. Many of the projects reported upon in the previous period are still ongoing, and a number of initiatives are under discussion or are planned for 2008. Highlights of this reporting period are:

International:

- The first meeting of the Saiga Conservation Alliance's Steering Committee in September, including representatives from all the range states except China, Uzbekistan.
- The confirmation of the SCA as a Wildlife Conservation Network Partner at the WCN Expo in October in the USA.

National:

- The gazetting in February of a new Protected Area (Irgiz-Turgaiskiy State Nature Reserve) in the range of the Betpak-dala population, Kazakhstan.
- The holding of a round table of all key saiga stakeholders in Uzbekistan in November, committing all to key actions supporting the MTWP in 2008.
- A cultural exchange between Kalmykia and the UK in June, followed by a public awareness campaign.
- The presentation of recommendations for improvements to saiga aerial survey techniques to the Committee on Forestry and Game Animals, Kazakhstan, in October.
- The beginning of a substantial new project in Mongolia, from September, funded by the MAVA foundation.

In China, lack of funding support has hampered saiga conservation efforts. We have no information about activities being carried out in Turkmenistan in this reporting period.

For several of the action points in the MTWP, little discernable action has taken place in this reporting period; this is of concern, particularly for those measures which were listed as A1 (urgent and high priority). Priority A1 activities that show no concrete progress since the coming into force of the MOU are:

Action 1.1. Russia signing the MOU.

Action 3.1. Compliance with CITES recommendations by Russia and Kazakhstan, and lifting of the moratorium on exports.

Action 10.1. An action plan for saiga conservation in the pre-Caspian region, including securing long-term funding.

Action 10.2. Regular population counts in the pre-Caspian region using appropriate methods.

Action 10.3. Financial security for saiga conservation institutions in the pre-Caspian region.

Action 11.2. Public awareness and engagement in the Ural population.

Action 11.3. Conservation planning for the Ural population.

The other A1 actions in the MTWP have seen some progress in some range states. Further major steps need to be taken by all stakeholders if substantial progress is to be made towards fulfilling the MTWP before the next meeting of the signatories to the MOU.

Section 1. Implementation

The Steering Committee of the Saiga Conservation Alliance met formally for the first time in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in September 2007. One of the Committee's resolutions was to urge the

Russian Federation to sign the MOU (*action 1.1*). Another relevant action was a small grants competition giving support to four one-year projects in three range states, explicitly choosing projects that fulfilled actions specified in the MTWP, and funded by WCN (*action 1.3*; see article in this issue of *Saiga News*).

On 23rd November, at Nukus in Uzbekistan, a meeting was held between all interested parties (including government and NGOs), coordinated by the State Committee for Nature Protection of Republic of Karakalpakstan, Institute of Zoology and the Saiga Conservation Alliance. This meeting developed a roadmap for implementing the MTWP in Uzbekistan, including developing a detailed action plan by the end of 2007 (*action 1.2*). The meeting also discussed progress towards the signing of a bilateral agreement with Kazakhstan on joint management of the Ustiurt population, which is planned for the end of 2007 (*actions 1.9 & 12.6*).

In Kazakhstan, a new action plan for biodiversity conservation up to 2010 has been presented to the Government of Kazakhstan. This plan includes provision for annual aerial surveys of saigas (*action 1.2*).

In Mongolia, the MAVA foundation has made a substantial grant to support saiga conservation over the next 3 years, to be implemented by a consortium of government bodies and NGOs, coordinated by WWF-Mongolia (*action 1.3*). The objectives include law enforcement, mobilising support among local people, and managing the conflict with livestock. Progress against the objectives will be reported in subsequent updates.

Section 2. Anti-poaching

Ongoing anti-poaching work has been carried out in the pre-Caspian region by the Hunting Department of the Republic of Kalmykia, as well as the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve and Stepnoi Reserve, Astrakhan region. This includes checks on farmsteads around the Stepnoi reserve for compliance with firearms regulations (*action 2.2*).

Ongoing anti-poaching work in Kazakhstan is carried out by Okhotzooptom, under the auspices of the Committee for Forestry and Hunting, with support from the Government of Kazakhstan as well as the NGOs Arlan (Karaganda region) and Ak-Boken (KzI-Orda region).

The People's Trust for Endangered Species continues to support anti-poaching activities in the Stepnoi Reserve, Russia (*action 2.2*).

In Mongolia, anti-poaching work has been carried out, under a project coordinated by WWF-Mongolia and supported, until June 2007, by the Large Herbivore Foundation and Tiergarten Schonbrunn (*action 2.2*).

Section 3. Sustainable use and trade

In December, a meeting was held in Novosibirsk, to discuss developments in international cooperation for the implementation of CITES in the Altai-Sayansk ecoregion, under a UNDP/GEF project, and including representatives from CITES and the saiga range states. This meeting discussed issues relevant to the Mongolian, Russian and Kazakhstan populations (*action 3.2*).

Section 4. Human factors

In Uzbekistan, ongoing projects have continued on setting up a “Saiga Friends” network and supporting craft clubs, carried out by the SCA and Institute of Zoology, and funded by FFI/BAT and WCN (*actions 4.2, 4.3, 12.4*).

In Kalmykia, a cultural exchange between the UK and Kalmykia took place in May-June 2007, funded by the Darwin Initiative, and leading to enhanced understanding of the issues of saiga conservation and ways to address it in future (*action 4.3*, see this issue of *Saiga News*)

The Association for Religions in Conservation (ARC) continues to fund an ongoing project coordinated by the Centre for Wild Animals, Kalmykia, linking saiga conservation and Buddhism, and including the building of a small shrine (stupa) at the CWA (*action 4.3*).

In Bosoï, Kazakhstan, Fauna and Flora International’s second round of small grants aimed at providing alternative livelihoods to local men living in the range of the Ustiurt saiga population was carried out, and completed in mid-2007 (*actions 4.3, 12.4*)

In 2006, WWF-Mongolia coordinated a round-table of saiga stakeholders, and instituted a system of volunteer rangers, which is backed by Government decree (*action 4.3*).

Section 5. Awareness

The Saiga Conservation Alliance attended the Wildlife Conservation Network’s annual Expo in Sand Francisco in October 2007, raising awareness of the saiga internationally, and were confirmed as WCN Partners for the year 2008 (*action 5.1*).

In Kalmykia, the Centre for Ecological Projects has distributed *Saiga News* and calendars with children’s artworks among local people, given lectures in schools, organised a children’s craft competition and shown a film on the saiga crisis at several farmsteads within the saiga range. The Centre for Wild Animals has hosted 24 educational visits to the saiga breeding centre. The Stepnoi Reserve in the Astrakhan part of the pre-Caspian region has also carried out school visits and film shows, funded by IFAW (*action 5.2*).

Animaster studios in Kazakhstan has launched a competition to find a script for a second animated film about saigas, to be judged in early 2008, see <http://saiga.kz/> (*action 5.2*).

In Uzbekistan, ongoing projects have continued on public awareness, including the distribution of hard copies of *Saiga News* in Uzbek and lectures in schools, carried out by the SCA and Institute of Zoology, and funded by WCN (*actions 5.2, 12.7*). Progress on saiga conservation is regularly reported at <http://www.econews.uz/econews/rus/news/>

The cultural exchange in Kalmykia led to a number of articles in the local press in Kalmykia and in the UK (*action 5.1*). The Centre for Ecological Projects carried out a propaganda campaign in September-October 2007, also funded by the Darwin Initiative (*action 5.2*).

In Kazakhstan, a TV film on saigas shot by Gala Films in 2006 was shown a number of times on national TV. Booklets entitled “Lets conserve saigas for future generations” have been distributed among local people (*actions 5.1, 5.2*).

In Mongolia, several newspaper articles were published in late 2006, revealing cases of saiga poaching (*action 5.1*), brochures were distributed to people living in the saiga range and a children's art competition run, also in late 2006 (*action 5.2*).

The Saiga Conservation Alliance's new website was launched in October 2007 at www.saiga-conservation.com, and the *Saiga News* mailing list continues to expand (*actions 5.3 and 5.4*).

Section 6. Mapping distributions

In the Pre-Caspian population, information continues to be added to a database of saiga distributions, herd size and structures in the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve and Stepnoi Sanctuary from 2003 onwards (*action 6.1*).

In Mongolia in 2006, the saiga area was mapped in a GIS which included livestock density and poaching locations (*actions 6.1, 6.3*).

Section 7. Protected areas.

In Kazakhstan in February 2007, the Irgiz-Turgaiskiy State Nature Reserve was gazetted in the eastern part of the Aktiubinsk province, in the area of the Betpak-dala saiga population (*action 7.1*)

The status of the Stepnoi protected area (zakaznik) in the pre-Caspian region was altered in August, dividing it into one zone specifically for saiga protection and another for sustainable use. This will improve the powers of the Reserve authorities to protect saigas effectively (*action 7.1*)

Section 8. Monitoring

In Kazakhstan, aerial surveys were carried out in all three saiga populations in spring 2007 (*action 8.1*). Monitoring of population status (age-sex structure, distribution and calving) is also ongoing in all three populations (*action 8.2*).

In October 2007, a report on aerial census techniques funded by Frankfurt Zoological Society was presented to the Committee for Forestry and Game Ranching and the Institute of Zoology, and its recommendations accepted (*action 8.3*). Training in new census techniques is planned for 2008.

In the Pre-Caspian population, monitoring of saiga demography, calving, herd size and structure and distribution has continued to be carried out as in previous years by the Stepnoi and Chernye Zemli reserves, funded by the Darwin Initiative, Large Herbivore Foundation, IFAW and the People's Trust for Endangered Species (*actions 8.1, 8.2, 8.7*). A pilot participatory monitoring project has received funding from the British Council, to start in January 2008 (*actions 8.2, 8.3, 8.6, 10.2, 10.4*).

In Uzbekistan, a participatory monitoring programme has been set up, starting in January 2007, funded by FFI (*action 8.6*).

Section 9. Captive breeding

In June 2007, the Director of the Centre for Wild Animals, Kalmykia, made a presentation to the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria's antelope group in the UK, and a round table was held on measures that could be taken by European zoos in support of saiga conservation (*action 9.7*).

In September 2007, a preliminary assessment visit was made to the Dzheiran Ecocentre, Bukhara, Uzbekistan, to assess its suitability for captive breeding of saigas. Delegates included the Director of the Centre for Wild Animals in Kalmykia (*action 9.3*).

Small grants towards the ongoing running costs of the Centre for Wild Animals in Kalmykia have been received from the Large Herbivore Initiative and from Zoos Help, but additional funds to cover the basic running costs of this flagship breeding centre are urgently needed (*action 9.3*).

Sections 10-14. Population-specific measures

North-west Precaspian: Work on monitoring, public awareness and conservation activities (*actions 10.2-10.4*) has continued, see above.

Ural:

An aerial survey was carried out to obtain data on numbers, age-sex structure and distribution of the population (*action 11.3*).

Anti-poaching work has continued, and in August two cases of poaching were uncovered and appropriate action taken. The guilty parties are currently being subjected to court proceedings (*action 11.1*).

Ustiurt:

In Kazakhstan, an aerial survey was carried out to obtain data on numbers, age-sex structure and distribution of the population (*action 12.2*). Anti-poaching work has continued (*action 12.1*).

In July 2007, a horn confiscation was made on the Uzbek side of the Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan border. The guilty parties are currently being subjected to court proceedings (*action 12.1*).

The Uzbekistan filial of the Saiga Conservation Alliance has been active in bringing stakeholders together including government, NGOs, educationalists and scientists, at the local, national and international levels, and in building local support for saigas through a range of educational and awareness-raising activities (*action 12.4*).

The network of saiga friends in Uzbekistan, plus scientific expeditions conducted by the Institute of Zoology in July 2007, have given further information on the timing and location of saiga presence in Uzbekistan (*action 12.2*).

Efforts continue to engage with oil and gas companies, and to set up bilateral agreements and improve protected area management, though currently without any concrete outcomes (*actions 12.5, 12.6, 12.9*).

Betpak-dala: A new protected area has been gazetted (*action 13.1*). An aerial survey was carried out to obtain data on numbers, age-sex structure and distribution of the population. Data on fecundity were also collected in the birth areas. Anti-poaching work has continued (*action 13.2*).

Mongolia:

Anti-poaching activity has been high in 2006, and a new grant to continue this work has just been awarded (*action 14.1*).

There was a feasibility study carried out for the establishment of a captive breeding facility in the second half of 2006, coordinated by WWF-Mongolia and funded by the MAVVA foundation, but there has been no progress reported on this in the current period (*action 14.2*).

Progress has also been made on public awareness, local engagement, population estimation, mapping of distributions and investigation of saiga-livestock conflict (*actions 14.3, 14.4, 14.5, 14.6*).

Compilation of the progress report

The full text of the MTWP, for cross-referencing with this report, can be found at http://www.cms.int/species/saiga/1st_saiga_range_states_meeting.htm.

If any new activities in fulfilment of the MTWP, which occurred during the reporting period June-Dec07, have not been included in this round-up, please send us details and we will include them in the next round-up. We can't include activities that we have not been informed about.

If you want to know more about any activity reported here, contact either the author of the Saiga News article which expands on the activity or the editorial team member for the country in question.