

## **Report on progress towards the CMS MOU in the period November 2008-June 2009.**

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### **Summary**

There has been good progress for saiga conservation in this reporting period. A major step forward was the signing of the MOU by Russia in June 2009, which means that all the saiga range states are now signatories to the MOU.

There are many ongoing activities in the field of public awareness in all the range states, and some progress is also being made on saiga monitoring, although more investment is required if we are properly to evaluate the achievement of the goal of the MTWP (stable or increasing populations within five years). This is because as yet we do not have a time series of population estimates in any of the range states that have been made using standardised methods with an associated measure of uncertainty, as required by the MTWP. However, the indications are that the status of all populations except Ustiurt is favourable, suggesting that Ustiurt should be a high priority focus for urgent conservation action.

Important information about the status of the little-studied Ural population in Kazakhstan has been published, suggesting that the population is doing well. Anti-poaching efforts have been ramped up in all the range states, as evidenced by the successful detection and prosecution of saiga poachers in the last few months, which will hopefully have a deterrent effect in the future. We have no information about activities being carried out in Turkmenistan or China in this reporting period.

There are only three A1 (urgent and high priority) actions which have had no discernable progress in the 2.5 years since the MOU came into force:

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

Actions 9.1/14.2. Establishing captive breeding facilities in Mongolia.

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

Little action in general appears to have been taken in the arena of international trade, either by range states or by China, and this deserves prioritisation in the lead-up to the next meeting of the parties to the MOU (hopefully to be held in 2010). Captive breeding has been downgraded in the national priorities for conservation of the Mongolian sub-species, and the priority level of this action within the MTWP should be revisited (and potentially reduced) at the next meeting. The status survey in Ural was a useful first step towards a higher profile for this population, and an urgent priority should now be to institute conservation actions for this population that engage local people.

This is the last progress report that will be compiled by the SCA under our two-year contract with the CMS to monitor implementation of the MOU on saiga conservation (which ran until the end of June 2009). We thank all those who have contributed reports on their activities during this period.

The full report can be found on the CMS reporting page of the SCA website (<http://www.saiga-conservation.com/mou.html>), along with all the previous reports.

## **Detailed report**

As this is the last of the reports to be filed under the monitoring contract from the CMS to the SCA, we give a brief assessment of overall progress on each action point in the whole period September 2006-July 2009 after the round-up of new actions in this current time-period.

### ***Section 1. Implementation***

On 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009, the Russian Federation signed the MOU on saiga conservation (*action 1.1*). There is also substantial progress towards the signing of a bilateral agreement between Russia and Kazakhstan to cover the Ural population (*action 1.9*), although this has not yet been completed.

In Uzbekistan, a working group for saiga conservation on the Ustiurt plateau has been established, and met for the first time in March 2009 (*actions 1.2, 1.3, 1.4*). *Saiga News 8* was published in January 2009, supported by CMS, FZS, WCN and WWF-Mongolia (*action 1.5*).

#### Overall assessment:

1.1: All range states are now signed up to the MOU.

1.2: National-level conservation action plans are in operation except in Russia.

1.3: There has been substantial investment by a number of international and national organisations.

1.4: Only in Uzbekistan is there a mechanism for cooperation and discussion for saiga conservation that encompasses the full range of stakeholders.

1.5: *Saiga News* has been published consistently throughout the period, and has included a round-up of activities supporting the MOU, with further documentation online at the SCA website. There is a draft e-library online, but it is not yet live.

1.6: There has been progress towards including the Mongolian sub-species in the MOU, but this has not been confirmed.

1.7: An international coordination mechanism for the MOU has not yet been established, although there was interest expressed in doing this at the interim meeting in October 2008.

1.8: National focal points exist.

1.9: There has been encouraging progress towards bilateral agreements between Russia and Kazakhstan and between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, though none yet with China.

A meeting of the signatories of the MOU was envisaged two years from the coming into force of the MOU in September 2006. Instead an interim meeting was held in October 2008, at which progress was assessed. It is hoped that a meeting will be held soon, potentially in 2010. It should be noted that the MTWP was written with a 5-year time horizon, and hence runs until the end of August 2011.

### ***Section 2. Anti-poaching***

Enactment No 155 of 7 May 2009 was signed by the prime minister of the Republic of Kalmykia, Mr Vladimir Sengleev, prohibiting commercial and sport hunting for saigas until 2013, according to the federal law "On the fauna". (*action 2.3*)

In December 2008, comprehensive training was organized for Saiga rangers, environmental inspectors and policeman from all soums in the saiga's range area in Mongolia. This training was carried out in collaboration with the State police department and focused on nature conservation related crimes. (*action 2.4*)

#### Overall assessment:

2.1. National anti-poaching strategies are not well developed, and in Russia there have been funding and implementation problems caused by the devolution of responsibility for wildlife protection to the local level, as well as territorial disputes between the Republic of Kalmykia and the neighbouring Astrakhan region.

2.2. Anti-poaching units in Mongolia and Kazakhstan are better funded than in the past, due to both governmental and international investment.

2.3: There have been a number of improvements in legal systems in the range states.

2.4: Active training of law enforcement personnel has been particularly notable in Mongolia and in the Altyn dala region.

Evidence for improvements in anti-poaching activities in all the range states can be seen in the increase in reported arrests and convictions for poaching, although poaching is still an ongoing problem range-wide.

#### ***Section 3. Sustainable use and trade***

No progress reported on this section.

#### Overall assessment:

There has been a general lack of engagement with trade issues throughout the reporting period. This needs to be rectified through, for example, more active engagement by China in saiga conservation activities. Some activities were reported in 2007 (see previous progress reports).

#### ***Section 4. Human factors***

Four local resource management communities have been established in Mongolia, as part of their ongoing saiga project. The goals are to improve herder income from sustainable livestock production and increase income opportunities from non-livestock based activities such as agricultural development. Three training sessions on alternative income opportunities and wool processing skills development were provided to members of 3 herder communities. (*action 4.1, 4.4*)

A project in Uzbekistan to train women in traditional handicrafts and to help them with marketing their products has entered its next phase in 2009. (*action 4.1*)

A project in Kalmykia in spring-summer 2009 is engaging local farmers in saiga monitoring by collecting distributional data, as well as extending previous attitudinal survey work (*action 4.3, 4.2*)

#### Overall assessment

4.1. Incentives and alternatives have been piloted in Kalmykia (rotating cows, saiga monitors), Ustiurt (Kazakhstan - small grants in Bosoi; Uzbekistan - handicrafts), Mongolia (resource management communities), Betpak dala (community rangers). However, the programmes tend to be small-scale pilots and not all of them have been followed through to sustainable long-run initiatives. For others it is too early to say.

4.2. There has been formal attitudinal research carried out in Russia, and informal attitudinal monitoring in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia. More formal research and better dissemination of the results would be helpful.

4.3. At the local level there has been a lot of work on stakeholder engagement everywhere except Ural (and the Kazakhstan part of Ustiurt has no current stakeholder engagement projects).

4.4. Sustainable rangeland use is a priority of the Mongolian saiga work and of the Altyn Dala project in the Betpak dala range of the saiga.

4.5. There has been no engagement of national focal points in this set of activities.

Overall, progress is good on some components of this section, although the engagement of stakeholders through the provision of alternatives and incentives needs to be scaled up, and formal monitoring of the effectiveness of these conservation activities is an urgent requirement.

### ***Section 5. Awareness***

Press interest in saigas has continued in the local press of each country, including a number of articles in the local press in Russia, Mongolia and Uzbekistan, regular radio and TV appearances in Mongolia, and a TV show on the alternative livelihoods project in Uzbekistan. (*action 5.1*)

The animated cartoon “Saga of the saiga”, produced by the AniMaster studio, was awarded a winner's certificate at the 13<sup>th</sup> international television festival “Save and secure”, which was held in Hanty-Mansiysk on 2-6 June 2009, and also won a prize in an international environmental film festival in Orenburg in January 2009. In May 2009, the network Meloman released the first licenced DVD in Kazakhstan containing this cartoon and others in the Kazakh language. WWF Mongolia has produced a documentary film on Mongolian saiga biology and ecology for the general public, in cooperation with the Scientific and Environmental Cinematographic Society for Mongolia, as well as a song about a saiga calf. In April, 2009, staff of the Centre for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia and the N.N. Palmov National Museum of the Republic of Kalmykia made a number of school visits to tell children about saiga conservation issues, and the environment in general. In Astrakhan province of Russia, regular visits for members of the public take place in the Stepnoi reserve. On 26 May 2009, the results were announced of a republic-wide contest in Kalmykia for school children, “The steppe antelope”. This was part of an annual conservation event called the Days of Protection from Environmental Threats. Shortly before the end of the school year in summer 2009, teachers and pupils from two villages in Uzbekistan celebrated a saiga day. Also a saiga schoolbook has been widely distributed in the Uzbekistan part of the Ustiurt plateau. (*action 5.2*)

The Saiga Conservation Alliance website is regularly updated with news items (*action 5.3*)

In December 2008, *Saiga News* won the prize for the best environmental publication in Uzbekistan, and in January it was awarded a Rufford Small Grant (*action 5.4*)

### **Overall assessment**

There has been much progress made in the public awareness section, with substantial activity, especially that targetted at children. In Russia, a formal assessment of the impact of these activities was carried out, but elsewhere it would be helpful if this could be done, to ensure that these activities are as effective as they can be, and represent good value for money. For example, is the targetting of children particularly beneficial, or should more effort be placed on targetting other, less easy to reach, groups?

### ***Section 6. Mapping distributions***

Two papers analysing the factors affecting the distribution, calving site locations and migration patterns of saiga antelopes in Kazakhstan have been prepared and submitted to international journals, based on the archive records of the Institute of Zoology in Kazakhstan. (*action 6.1*)

A project in Kalmykia in summer 2009 is mapping saiga distributions outside of protected areas using local knowledge. (*action 6.1*)

An agreement has been signed between the Institutes of Zoology of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Tottori University Japan and Imperial College London, to carry out a small-scale satellite tracking project in the Ustiurt population, starting in September 2009 (*action 6.2*)

#### Overall assessment

Encouraging progress is being made on this section. There is now a good baseline for larger-scale work on saiga movement patterns and distributions, which could then lead to effective conservation planning. However substantial funding will be required for this. There is a need to incorporate environmental change into this planning, and to extend it range-wide. Currently a comprehensive spatially-explicit landscape level conservation planning process is underway only in the Altyn dala region of Kazakhstan.

### ***Section 7. Protected areas.***

No progress reported in this period.

#### Overall assessment

There has been some good progress on protected areas, with new or improved protected areas being implemented in all range states. This is a section that is not easy to implement quickly, and it will benefit both from the signing of bilateral agreements (Ural and Ustyurt populations) and from conservation planning based on an understanding of drivers of saiga movement (section 6).

### ***Section 8. Monitoring***

Aerial counts of saiga antelopes were carried out from 2 to 24 April 2009 in all 3 populations of saigas in Kazakhstan. According to an agreement between Gosbiokontrol of the Republic of Uzbekistan and their Kazakh colleagues, the aerial counts of the Ustyurt population were carried out simultaneously in both countries for the first time, on 5th-7th April 2009. A population count was carried out in Mongolia in January 2009. (*action 8.1*)

A detailed survey of the Ural population was carried out from spring 2008 to early 2009, and found that the population's status was relatively stable. This is in addition to the ongoing monitoring carried out in Kazakhstan each year. (*action 8.2*)

An ecological audit of Vozrozhdeniye peninsula in the Aral Sea in March 2009 found evidence for worsening environmental conditions for the peninsula's resident breeding saiga population, since the opening of the peninsula to people in 2007 (*action 8.2*)

A project is ongoing to estimate saiga calf mortality using radio-tracking of calves in Mongolia. (*action 8.2, 8.7*)

Four scientists from the Institute of Biology at the Mongolian Academy of Sciences traveled to Missoula, Montana, USA, to participate in a saiga population estimation methodology

workshop in February 2009. The workshop recommended the use of distance sampling as a methodology, and a pilot application of the technique was implemented in Mongolia in 2008. (*action 8.3*)

#### Overall assessment

There are ongoing population counts and ecological studies in all saiga populations, varying in their methods and targets, their inherent uncertainties and biases and the degree to which these uncertainties are reported and accounted for. Participatory monitoring programmes involving local people are being developed in all the range states.

There have been assessments of monitoring needs (for example for aerial survey in Kazakhstan, and recently for ground surveys in Mongolia), and of the biases in current monitoring in Russia and in Kazakhstan.

There is still not a single integrated monitoring strategy, but this may not be appropriate given the range of circumstances which pertain in the different populations. It is clear, however, that current monitoring programmes will be inadequate to assess whether the 5-year goal of the MTWP has been achieved. This is because the uncertainties are both too great and not properly accounted for in current monitoring programmes.

#### ***Section 9. Captive breeding***

No progress reported.

#### Overall assessment

Captive breeding is being carried out in a number of sites in Russia, although not in the other range states. There has been transfer of knowledge from the Centre for Wild Animals to the new sites. However the high level strategic actions in the MTWP have generally not been addressed, including developing guidelines for captive breeding and reintroductions (9.2), resolving issues of genetic distinctiveness (9.4), changing the CITES rules to allow export of live animals for captive breeding (9.5), and creating and maintaining a stud book (9.6).

Captive breeding appears to have reduced in importance in the conservation priorities of the range states, perhaps as the status and conservation of the species in situ has improved (particularly in Mongolia). At the next MOU meeting it will be important to discuss whether this is appropriate and should be reflected in the next MTWP for the species.

#### ***Sections 10-14. Population-specific measures***

##### *North-west Precaspian:*

Lukoil is supporting the writing of a children's book of fairytales about a saiga calf (*action 10.4*)

A project mapping saiga distributions outside protected areas was carried out in the summer of 2009 (*action 10.4*)

On 19 June, a meeting of the association for the solution of ecological problems of the Severny Kavkaz [North Caucasus] was held in Grozny, attended by the head of the Department of Forestry, Kalmykia, at which saigas were discussed (*action 10.5*).

### Overall assessment

10.1: A long-term action plan, including for funding, has not been developed.

10.2. There have been regular calving surveys throughout the period, and rangers are collecting observational data on saiga distributions and population structure. There has also been some work on the issues surrounding error and bias in these methods, and the initiation of a pilot participatory monitoring programme. However there is still no robust estimate of total population size made using standard techniques. This is a major concern as conservation effectiveness cannot be assessed in the absence of a valid population estimate.

10.3. There has been a lot of activity surrounding public awareness and education, particularly focussed on children, by protected areas, the breeding centre and local NGOs. However the consolidation of funds has not been achieved.

10.4. There has been funding provided for public participation, albeit on a short-term pilot basis.

10.5. The administrative structures for saiga conservation are not working effectively.

There has been much hard work on the ground for saigas in the reporting period. However, there are administrative and financial issues which are hampering full implementation of the MTWP.

#### *Ural:*

A status report including information on herd distributions, sizes and composition was completed in spring 2009. (*action 11.3*)

There has been a lot of progress towards the signing of a bilateral agreement between Russia and Kazakhstan in this timeperiod, and it is hoped that the agreement will be signed in August 2009 (*action 11.4*)

### Overall assessment

11.1. The government hunting inspectors are active in this region.

11.2. There has been no public engagement work.

11.3. The population's status is now better known, but conservation planning is still lacking.

11.4. Cooperation will hopefully strengthen in the near future.

The Ural population is still relatively neglected, but it does seem to be relatively healthy, based on the official population counts and recent more detailed surveys.

#### *Ustiurt:*

According to an agreement between Gosbiokontrol of the Republic of Uzbekistan and their Kazakh colleagues, simultaneous aerial counts of the Ustyurt population were carried out for the first time on 5th-7th April 2009. A participatory monitoring project is ongoing (*action 12.2*)

Alternative livelihoods projects are up and running in Uzbekistan, and there have been continuing and expanding public engagement activities. (*action 12.3*)

A GEF pre-project has been approved and is about to start, which aims to engage industry with biodiversity conservation in the Ustiurt region of Uzbekistan, using saigas as the flagship species (*action 12.9*)

### Overall Assessment

There has been substantial progress over the period in the Uzbekistan part of the Ustiurt plateau, in public awareness, engagement of stakeholders including industry and government, and capacity building. New initiatives are taking place, involving UNDP and other international partners. There is a need to institute formal monitoring of the outcomes of conservation actions to ensure that effectiveness is maximised.

On the Kazakhstan side, government hunting inspectors are present and monitoring is ongoing, with regular aerial and ground surveys. In terms of conservation and public engagement, the alternative livelihoods project in Bosoi village is now over, so there is an urgent need for some activity in the Kazakhstan part of the plateau. There is also a need for proposed bilateral agreements to come to fruition.

#### *Betpak-dala:*

A case of saiga poaching was detected in January 2009, attracting widespread publicity (*action 13.2*)

### Overall assessment

13.1. There is a landscape-scale planning process ongoing, and movement and distribution data are available, although the degree to which the one informs the other is not clear.

13.2. There has been substantial investment in additional anti-poaching units

13.3. There is public participation included in the ADCI project.

13.4. There is no information on whether infrastructural development is bearing the saiga's needs in mind.

The Betpak dala population has benefitted from substantial international and national-level investment, mostly based around the Altyn dala Conservation Initiative.

#### *Mongolia:*

New IRVES software is being piloted for the detection and logging of wildlife crimes, and a training session for law enforcement officials was held in December 2008. Two cases of saiga poaching were recently detected. (*action 14.1*)

A new documentary and song have been produced, and public awareness activities are ongoing. Four resource management committees have been formed and training in alternative livelihoods given (*action 14.3*)

A workshop on monitoring methods was held in February 2009, at which a standardised method for population estimation for saigas was agreed upon, to be implemented in September 2009 (*action 14.4*)

A study on the effects of domestic dogs on saigas has been carried out (*action 14.6*).

### Overall assessment

14.1. There has been good progress on anti-poaching, through the funding of additional units, training and capacity-building.

14.2. No progress on captive breeding.

14.3. There has been good activity on local engagement.

14.4. Progress has been made on methods for monitoring of populations.

14.5. Good information on saiga distribution and movement patterns has been obtained.

14.6. Research on interactions between saigas and humans (including livestock) has been initiated, though results will take a while to be generated.

Overall, the Mongolian saiga population has received substantial conservation investment, both financially and in terms of conservation effort. It has also been a good example of international and national organisations coming together to harmonise their conservation efforts.

***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](http://www.cms.int/species/saiga/1st_saiga_range_states_meeting.htm) and <http://www.saiga-conservation.com/mou.html>.

This report is compiled based on information submitted by the range states to the Saiga Conservation Alliance, and on news items submitted to *Saiga News*. We apologise if any eligible activities have not been included, but this report can only be as good as the information submitted. The opinions expressed are those of the author alone. If you wish to learn more about any of the activities, please contact the SCA ([mail@saiga-conservation.com](mailto:mail@saiga-conservation.com)) or the authors of the relevant *Saiga News* article.