



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Saiga in Decline

Saiga in the wild

1993 =	1,000,000
2000 =	200,000
2002 =	50,000
2003 =	30,000



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In November 2004, the World Conservation Congress noted that *"unless current conservation measures are dramatically strengthened, poaching will continue and rapidly lead to extinction or near-extinction of the remaining populations, especially the Betpak-Dala population in Kazakhstan"*.

Declared critically endangered by the World Conservation Union in 2002, saiga antelope was once abundant in the steppe grasslands and semi-arid desert habitat of southern Russia and Central Asia. Its numbers in the wild have dropped from over 1,000,000 in the early 1990s to fewer than 30,000 today.

The species has been decimated as a result of poaching for export of horns used in traditional Asian medicine, and for meat.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has provided over \$47,550 in grants and technical assistance for saiga conservation since 2000. More help is needed. Only timely action addressing illegal trade, poaching, conservation education and sustainable livelihoods for local communities will enable the saiga to survive.



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Saiga are one of the most ancient mammals, having shared the Earth with saber-toothed tigers and woolly mammoths. At that time saiga inhabited a vast territory ranging from the British Isles to Alaska.

Immense herds of saiga, numbering in the tens of thousands, once roamed the steppe landscape.

This evolutionarily unique animal, the only species in the genus Saiga, has cultural and historical significance for the people of Central Asia as a symbol of the traditional nomadic lifestyle.



Michael Dunbar, USDA

Saiga have survived for millenia in a land of harsh and extreme weather conditions. But organized gangs of poachers, equipped with automatic weapons and all-terrain vehicles, have threatened the saiga's continued survival.

Three of the five remaining population groups of saiga consist of fewer than 6,500 animals each.

FWS has provided grants to the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve in Kalmykia, Russia to equip rangers with radio equipment and field gear to better protect saiga.



Peter Ward, FWS

Funding has also been awarded to assist in the construction of a visitor center in Kalmykia that will increase awareness of the saiga's plight and urge greater involvement in conservation by local communities.

But immediate action is needed to enhance anti-poaching programs by providing equipment to wildlife rangers and strengthening efforts to control illegal trade as called for in the Saiga Action Plan developed in 2002.

FWS will continue to work with partners for the survival of this unique animal throughout its range.

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