

NEWS

Honorary degree for Foundation's chairman

On June 22nd 2004 Inge Bouman received from the Vice-Chancellor of the Mongolian State University, Professor B. Jadamba, the honorary doctorate of this university. In his speech the professor emphasised on the great devotion and professionalism in regard of the ecological endeavours at Hustai National Park and the reintroduction of Przewalski horses.

After the death of her husband Jan Bouman, she together with Annette Groeneveld and Jolanda Grosjean founded the Jan-Bouman-Scholarship. Every year a carefully selected Mongolian university post-graduate gets the opportunity to study the free living Przewalski horses in Hustai National Park. Meanwhile a total of seven young biologists have been able to take advantage of the scholarship. This has led to much goodwill and has also furthered the co-operation between the university and the staff of Hustai National Park.

Bequest on behalf of the Jan-Bouman-Foundation

In commemoration of the initiator of the semireserves project and the reintroduction process, Jan Bouman, who passed away in 1996, the Jan-Bouman-Foundation was established in 2002. Its purpose is to offer support to local people living in the buffer zone, that was created around Hustai National Park, by means of rendering financial assistance to activities that focus on the improvement of their relation with the Park and on steppe ecosystem conservation. In addition the Jan-Bouman-Foundation contributes to the improvement of the health and social-economic position of the local herdsman families with special

attention towards poverty control and education.

In her last will Ms Cisca Broekhoven, who was one of the Foundation's first and most loyal donors, bequeathed EUR 60.000 on behalf of the Jan-Bouman-Foundation. In the last twenty-seven years we had come to

tures and other interesting bird species live up the experience. The exuberant flowering steppe refreshes body and mind. People with a romantic and adventurous turn will have the time of their life as guests of a local herdsman family and when they are passing the night in one of

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know her as an unselfish champion for the cause of the Przewalski horses. She helped selling souvenirs, organising events and helped us out with the correspondence. Although very moved by this generous gift, which will be used for the benefit of people in the buffer zone, we still miss her dearly.

The annual holiday fair in Utrecht: spotlight on Hustai National Park

The annual holiday fair in the 'Jaarbeurs' Utrecht will be held from 12 to 16 January. The CBI, the government subsidised centre for the stimulation of import from developing countries, will be there with a Mongolian stand. Again Hustai National Park has been invited to participate. Amjargal and Puujee, Hustai's tourist staff, will be there to entice people to come and stay in the wonderful National Park. In 2003 the number of foreign visitors has increased with 66%. Among the 5000 visitors were many Asiatic, American and European people. Some of the visitors stayed for more than a day. There are now several scenic routes set out through the Park and along the river Tuul. The freely roaming Przewalski horses, the imposing red deer, the black vul-

the simple small holiday abodes in the Molt Valley or even in an authentic ger, the nomads' round felt tent. For those who stand on convenience the tourist centre, from which a variety of excursions can be made, has much to offer. Have we wetted your appetite? Come to Hustai! Full enjoyment guaranteed! For more information, please contact Amjargal and Puujee at macne@magicnet.mn ■

Colophon

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The Przewalski Horse



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FREE-LIVING PRZEWALSKI HORSES IN DEVELOPMENT

Hustai's Przewalski horses are prospering. At the moment 161 of them freely roam the National Park. It is a 16.6% increase compared to last year's results. There is much activity during summer, in particular at day break or at sunset when the horses descend from the mountains to visit the water sources in the valleys.

By now there are fifteen harems and one large group of bachelor stallions. The latter often splits up into smaller sub-groups. Most of the harems know each other well, but respect a great mutual distance from each other during spring and summer. In case of an unavoidable encounter harem stallions meet in a ritualized manner. It is a wonderful sight to see them in action: proudly dashing into each other, stopping, gazing at one another at short distance, defecating (scent marking) and sniffing dung. Mostly they walk into each other with arched necks. After some nose-to-nose contact they will try to sniff at the other's genitals. After some high pitched screams and pounding the ground

with their hoofs they calmly return to their mares.

This year 41 foals were born. Thanks to the improved weather conditions of the last two years, the mares could enter the winter of 2003/2004 in healthy condition.

The free living harem of Tom in the eastern part of Hustai National Park



This year a total of fourteen foals were lost (34%). This is in conformity with the average 35.8% annual foal mortality. The lasting, cold winters test the stamina of the pregnant mares. The high death toll among foals owes much to the great disposition for infections and feebleness immediately after birth. Wolves are also a threat to the newborn foals. Nevertheless, it is hard to say whether they only prey on the weaker foals. Often wolves and scavengers have already extensively feasted upon a dead foal, thwarting further post mortem examination. The increasing pressure of wolves on the foals does worry the Mongolian team to a great extent. Therefore, much attention is being paid to wolf research in order to get better insight in how they live, make use of their habitat and in their food preferences.

were born in captivity. They are Patron, Tamir, Bayanhangai and Tom. Due to the increasing competition with the bachelors there is a tendency towards much smaller harems, consisting of only three to five mares and their offspring. Now we know that five to seven year old bachelors - after having demonstrated their dominance over other stallions - go in search of mares. It is a solitary quest, contrary to feral horses who team up. The lonely Przewalski bachelor wanders through the area, engaging himself in ritualized encounters with all harem stallions. He is gathering knowledge about their strength. While he gradually shortens the distance, he keeps grazing close to the harem of his choice. What follows is a period of exhausting contest during which the bachelor challenges the harem stallion. After a brief

an exhausting effect on the harem leader. The bachelor, however, still has spared enough energy for the decisive battle. In that way Khaan lost his harem to Margad in 2000, Paritet to Tamir in 2001, Ares to Narstai in 2002 and Bayan to Bernard in 2003. Such contest not always ends with one declared winner. In 2003 bachelor Temuujin fought Margad for seven days. It ended in a draw and the harem was split up between the two. The conquered harem mares do not always accept their new leader. In 2003 Terguun took over from Mangir. The latter made several attempts to get his mares back. It surely must have caused tension in Terguun's group. In June 2004 Terguun killed two foals that had been conceived by the disposed harem leader. Two other mares, still pregnant, left Terguun and rejoined Mangir. Between mares and their stallion strong bonding can exist. Under the wakeful eye of their natural father two healthy foals saw the light. It had never happened before that a free-living stallion killed his rival's offspring. In captivity there had been more of such occurrences, but that could be attributed to stressful situations. ■

gists very useful tips on how to improve the wolf research. Hopefully we will soon know more about Hustai's wolves and lynx and their impact on takhi foals.

before have I met so many cheerful people - I will always remember driving a Russian jeep with two men inside who were scared to death (thanks again for letting me

(thanks to all of you!!!), Mugi's worries (you should have a coffee and take a break!), discussions with Enkthur (well, I don't agree...), challenging Enkhkhuyag and being challenged by him (Enkhkhuyag, now I need new data.... - show me what you did with the data I already gave you, Franziska!!!!), joking around with Seegii and Uuree in our office, asking Mr. Bandi and Mr Sukh for help (is it possible to get a car at the weekend?) and the delicious meals at the research centre and at the tourist camp - all of you made my stay unforgettable and I will miss you a lot!

Franziska Roth, biologist ■

The research manager, Enkhkhuyag, and I worked together during the three months to analyse the database data. Enkthur, Usukhjargal and Sergelen, Hustai's takhi biologist, wildlife biologist and botanist, assisted in interpreting the results by explaining them with the outcomes of their own research.

I did not only learn a lot about takhis in the wild but also about Mongolian people and their life. It is very different and a lot harder than my life in Germany, but never

drive, Toggi!!!), driving on and falling off a Russian motorbike (is this your normal way of stopping, Uskhu?!), celebrating the biggest birthday party I have had in years

Most of the Przewalski horses in Hustai are wild born (71.8%)

Most of the Przewalski horses in Hustai are wild born (71.8%). Only four of the present harem stallions

fight he gives up, but will soon return. The many fights and the often kilometers long chases have

NEWS ABOUT THE GOUDPLAAT IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Foundation still takes care of six stallions whose genetic background was not interesting for reintroduction in Mongolia. The Przewalski stallions living on this peninsula will enter winter in good condition. By and by the gorse bushes are taking over, so in the oncoming months it will be more difficult to find nutritious grasses. However, there is more to find on the eastern part of the Goudplaat. Most of the time it is the solitary domain of the sixteen-years-old Maran, but at the moment this section is also more often frequented by Usch with his mates Amarchan and Burchanbileg, whose own home range through which they daily wander is situated in the central part of the area. Usch can act as a real potentate, especially when Ireq and Almas dare to come too near. He storms towards them and drives them away in western direction where these two spend most of their time. The encounters between Usch and old Maran are much more

peaceful; they do not often engage in serious fighting. The stallions are not alone. There is a threesome of fallow deer and often some roe deer, this year with young. Since the foxes have gone, pheasants and rabbits have returned. From August onward the gracious little egrets are returning. Three pairs of

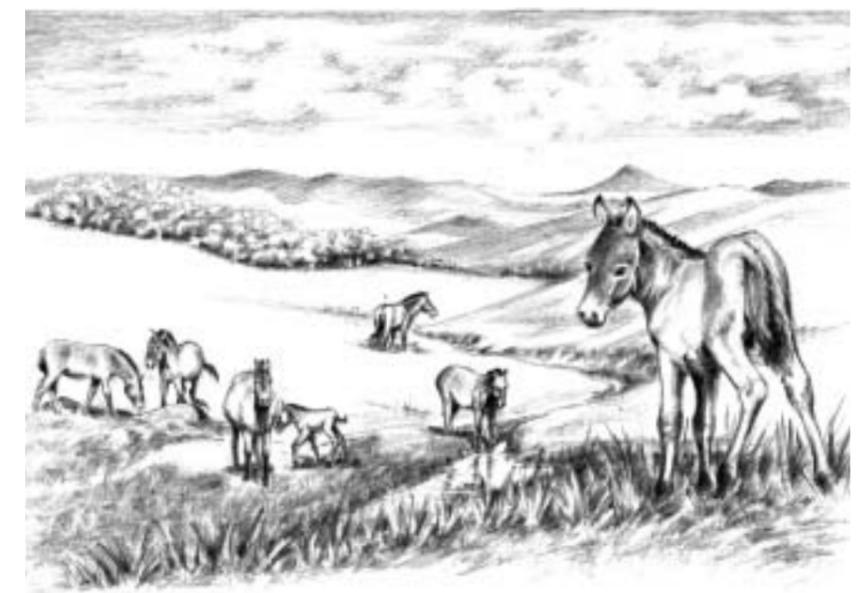
them found repose on the peninsula. Unfortunately, the prolific but exotic Egyptian goose is taking over from the indigenous goose species: there are three pairs of them, who took care over their hatch of which there are still seventeen alive. Caretaker Wim de Kok and his wife Sien not only attend to the Przewalski horses with the most loving affection, every creature be it great or small gets their warm attention. ■

HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK: AGAIN THE MOST EFFECTIVE PROTECTED PARK IN MONGOLIA



"The national ranger courses are annually held in Hustai National Park. The 18 Park rangers all participated in the for Mongolian new ranger training"

For the second year in a row the governmental committee on Protected Areas has rated Hustai National Park the best-protected area in Mongolia. Mr Bayarmangai from the Ministry for Nature Conservation and Environment praised Hustai as a shining example to the country's other parks and reserves. This year's announcement came at a national meeting of park and reserve managers. Last year it was made at the UNESCO conference on Man and Biosphere Reserves, which was held in Hustai. ■



One of the wolves tranquillised from a blow pipe and ready to receive a radio collar. From left to right: research manager Enkhkhuyag, wildlife biologist Uskhuu, vegetation biologist and ranger Tumbayar



because of a changed number of herbivores (prey), et cetera.

The research data that have been gathered throughout the years will be used to built the model, while new information will be gathered within the project as well. Wolf scats, collected by the park rangers and analysed by the joint research team will reveal more about the wolves diet. Interviews with the locals give more insight in the loss of livestock and is very important for awa-

reness building. A telemetry study on radio collared wolves, caught by the research team, will give more insight into the wolves home range. Till now, four wolves have been caught and radio collared. The park biologists and rangers will follow the wolves using an antenna and receiver. Unfortunately, one wolf was lost while the collars of two

Biologist who follow the wolves spend hours in the park. Sometimes they have all the luck meeting that other large predator: the Eurasian lynx



others were tracked down the gers of locals; the 'trophy' still signalling from inside.

Local hunting pressure on wolves seems to be high. It's obvious from interviews and scat analyses that the wolves livestock kills must have a substantial negative impact on the local economy. No scientific model is needed to understand that livestock needs a better protection system. Sometimes it's good to look back at the old days to find the answer to a problem. A so-called Banchar, an impressive livestock guarding dog, was formerly used to protect the livestock. This impressive dog, having Tibetan mastiff blood running through its veins, has disappeared from the area of Hustai National Park. If we can find the funding for it, we will start a pilot-project. Find some individuals in Mongolia, select some families around Hustai to start working with this bred and evaluate whether to expand the project or not. In near future I hope to tell here, that wolves, wildlife and livestock will live in the area in a way, that active management on wolves is no point of discussion anymore.

René Henkens
Projectleader. ■

WORKING IN MONGOLIA

Since I have studied the takhis for several years in semi-reserves and in Hortobágy National Park in Hungary I have always been eager to see Hustai's reintroduction project. From August 23rd until November 17th I had the chance to visit Hustai National Park to work together with Hustai's biologists. Fortunately the Foundation and the Park could sponsor the costs. Our goal was to analyse the data they had already collected on population dynamics and habitat use of the takhis in order to publish a paper in one of the scientific magazines.

Soon I learned that the scientists keep record of the takhi population very carefully and that they have a detailed database. Their ArcView system works well and with the help of ecovolunteers and new equipment it will even improve next year. The research manager, Enkhkhuyag, and I worked together during the three months to analyse the database data. Enkthur, Usukhjargal and Sergelen, Hustai's takhi biologist, wildlife biologist and botanist, assisted in interpreting the results by explaining them with the outcomes of their own research. It was the first

time I saw a takhi project where the horses have to deal with a predator – the wolf. From our results we saw that the wolf seems to be one of the main reasons for foal mortality. However, to confirm this result research on wolf population has to be improved because right now not much is known about population density and habitat of these predators. Furthermore, also lynx live in Hustai and they probably can hunt and kill foals, too. At the beginning of November experts on large carnivores from America, Croatia and Germany visited Hustai National Park after attending the Gobi bear congress in UB and gave the biolo-

WORKSHOP IN TAKHIN TAL

Almost immediately after the arrival at Ulaanbaatar Airport we, although still drowsy from the long flight from Amsterdam, board the smaller machine that will bring us and the other participants of the Przewalski horse workshop to Takhin Tal. In 2000 the first International Workshop for the Przewalski Horse was held at Hustai National Park. Now four years later the second is about to take place at Takhin Tal in the Dzungarian Gobi in Southwest Mongolia. It had been fourteen years since we first went there and we are eager to see how this project has developed.

A total of 23 visual presentations on numerous subjects pass the review. Very important are the presentations by the teams of Takhin Tal and Hustai on takhi reintroduction.

Onboard we find ourselves in a familiar situation again: the crowding at the entrance, the saggy chairs and smell of the sheepskin dels (traditional coats) of our Mongolian fellow-passengers.

There is some heavy thermal current as we cross the Tuul River. Hustai National Park is sliding by below us. Yet two hours to go till the first stop in Altai..., but not really! After an hour already the plane begins to lose altitude. An unscheduled stop is made in Uliastai, the chief town of the Zavkhan province. Here the machine gets refuelled. The Mongolian are used to such delays. To while away the time the onboard Hustai staff introduces a fast-moving game in which small stones are involved.

In the late afternoon, after an intermediate landing in Altai, our destination comes in sight. It is an almost surreal experience as the plane descends on a rough bumpy strip of

gravel in the middle of the desert. The welcome is most cordial. The staff has spared neither effort nor expense to make their guests' sojourn as pleasant as possible. Many gers, Mongolian tents, are put up to lodge all 41 workshop participants. In two barracks there are showers and other washing facilities. The sun heats up the water that is stored in a big tank on the roof. Three intensive days follow. A total of 23 visual presentations on numerous subjects pass the review. Very important are the presentations by the teams of Takhin Tal and Hustai on takhi reintroduction. The geneti-

cist Munkhtuya talks about the project in West Mongolia, Khomiin Tal, where in September twelve Przewalski's were released. In between the discourses we go to see the Przewalski horses, that recently arrived from Europe. They are kept in a wide-ranging acclimatisation enclosure; next year they will

A beamer presentation by Sergelen, one of the Hustai staffmembers



be released. To further the spreading of the groups over the entire area, they will not be immediately released from the enclosure, but instead will be moved to another location in the Gobi. There they will also be kept in a fenced-in area in advance of the definitive release. The moment of the first arrival of Przewalski horses at Takhin Tal paralleled that of Hustai Nuruu. Since 1992 a total of 87 Przewalski horses had arrived from Europe in Takhin Tal. In July 2004 Tahin Tal numbered 92 Przewalski horses, including 21 foals. At Hustai National Park, however, a total of 84 horses had arrived from the semire-serves since 1992. In July 2004 the number of freely roaming takhi had increased to 162. Evidentially Hustai has a much greater population growth than Takhin Tal has. In its first years Takhin Tal had to cope with many untimely deaths. However, since the International Takhi Group (ITG) was founded in 1999, there have been progressive improvements. ITG coaches the originally intended project according to the IUCN guidelines on reintroduction of wild animal species. The infrastructure and also the veterinary care have improved. Experts from abroad complement the local staff, which makes it possible to do more research. Good research equipment

is available. A radio communications system was installed and there are jeeps. The zoos that participate in the project are sending Przewalski horses with a broad genetic variation according to the directions of the European Captive Breeding Program, EEP. The project, as it seems, cannot do without foreign financial back-up, because Mongolia's own nature and environment ministry can hardly manage to pay out the salaries of the six Mongolian rangers and the reserve manager. Such a small staff is already insufficient to guarantee consistent protection for takhi and other wildlife. Mongolian researchers are not keen on working in this out-of-the-way corner. Therefore, the greater part of the research is executed by experts from Salzburg Zoo with the help from foreign students.

The conference - in which much information is mutually exchanged - happens in the very best of spirits. The ultimate highlight is the excursion by jeep into the Dzungarian Gobi in search of the free roaming Przewalski horses. At present there are three free-living harems in Takhin Tal. In two of them one horse has a transmitter around its neck by which means the movement patterns of these groups through the

area are registered. For the most time the three harems lead by Mondul, Tayan and Pas wander across Takhin Tal's base camp and the water sources Gun Tamga and Chonin us. During the wonderful trip through the Gobi we spot many wild asses and some Mongolian gazelles. Then, finally, nearby Gun Tamga we see the large harem of Pas! The horses are in good condition. The night before we had seen Mondul's group, which is currently being monitored by a student from France. Dung analysis gives insight in the food preferences of the takhi. Apparently the present free roaming harems manage to make adequate use of the situation, much better than we had dared to hope for back in 1992.

Especially wild ass and wolf studies come more and more in the focus of attention. This kind of ecosystem approach is also important in regard of information and the contacts with 100 local herdsman families with their 60,000 head of livestock.

The local herdsman are glad that their takh has returned, but they look upon the wild asses as competitors of the Przewalski's and their own livestock. Wolves they totally despise. Sentiments like this might

stimulate further poaching and clandestine hunting. It already occurred that a takh was shot, because it was erroneously looked upon as being a wild ass.

In the future the staff hopes to dispose over sufficient financial means to secure continuity of research and to be able to do more for local people. Another point, which they hope to realise, is the build-up and training of a qualified Mongolian staff. Without the foreigners and their financial back up the protection of the Przewalski horses and the research activities would come down as a house of cards. Let us hope that the present team will keep up this effort for a long time.

In the concluding discussion the need for further collaboration between the three reintroduction projects is stressed. Regarding the wolf research in Hustai National Park, the team receives a lot of help from Takhin Tal's Petra Kaczensky. Hustai's director Dr Bandi gets an invitation to witness the release of twelve Przewalski horses at Khomiin Tal. The Khomiin Tal project is lead by the biologist Munkhbat, who had been on the Hustai staff for several years and the former veterinarian of Takhin Tal, Sukhbaatar. ■

mares on loan. Meanwhile the Villaret population consists of 55 horses.

Five years ago Claudia Feh started with the initial preparations for the release of the group's descendants in Khomiin Tal.

Khomiin Tal is part of the 2500 square kilometres large buffer zone of the Khar Us Nuur National Park; its natural boundaries are the Telin

River in the North, the Zavkhan River in the East, sand dunes in the South and Lake Khar Us Nuur in the West.

Khomiin Tal is part of the 2500 square kilometres large buffer zone of the Khar Us Nuur National Park;

In collaboration with the University of Khovd comprehensive studies were performed to determine whether the area suited the purposed objective: the reintroduction of Przewalski horses. From the beginning the local population had been strongly involved in its build-up. Meanwhile a 23 kilometres long fence was built to enclose a 25,000 ha large terrain for the release of the Przewalski horses. An extra water source was made for the horses and reed screens were put up to offer them shelter against, among other things, the many sandstorms that often ravage the flat landscape. Summer brings many

insects, including ticks. Therefore, it was decided that instead of at the beginning of summer the twelve

were to be reintroduced in Khomiin Tal in September. A disadvantage, however, is the short time given to build up condition and what is more they immediately have to cope with the autumn cold.

The twelve Przewalski's know each other very well. One more transport of twelve Przewalski horses is scheduled. If all horses manage to survive their first year in Khomiin Tal the basis population will consist of 24 animals. This rather small founder population of Przewalski horses with its narrow genetic basis triggered some critical questions at the

Takhin Tal workshop in June. Eighty livestock keeping families live in the remaining buffer zone area. From their numbers four rangers were appointed. The biologist Munkhbat (WWF Mongolia) and the veterinarian Sukhbaatar are in control. They both gained a lot of experience with Przewalski horses in respectively Hustai National Park

Arrival of Przewalski horses at Khomiin Tal, Photo N. Bandi



and Takhin Tal. Unfortunately, their other engagements withhold them from being permanently available at Khomiin Tal. ■

THE WOLVES PROJECT

Sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund and the Dutch Foundations 'Doen' and 'Dierentuinen Helpen', the management of Hustai National Park and the Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) were able to start a wolves project in May 2003. Now, 1.5 years later the project is still in progress and improving. The basis to continue the project is solid as the Mongolian park staff is still enthusiastic and new students from the WUR are ready to join the research team in early 2005.

The main goal of the project is to support the Hustai park management with scientifically founded answers to management questions on wolves. The function of a top-predator like wolf and lynx within

the parks ecosystem is undisputed, but sympathy for wolves becomes difficult if livestock and Przewalski foals are a substantial part of their menu. One theory states that the population of wolves in Hustai is too

difficult question indeed. Climate, vegetation, herbivores and predators, they are all related. To get more insight in these relationships, an ecosystem model will be developed within the wolves project. This model will connect the several trophic levels helping the park manage-

In particular, does this mean that a sustainable population of 500 horses is impossible without an active management on wolves?

big due to an overload of livestock prey in the bufferzone. If this is true, does this effect the Przewalski horses population as well? In particular, does this mean that a sustainable population of 500 horses is impossible without an active management on wolves? This forms the basic question of the wolves project. A

ment to understand the 'chain reactions' within the ecosystem if certain changes occur; what will happen to the number of Przewalski horses if the vegetation changes due to climate change?; or if the herbivore population changes due to a change in the abundance of vegetation?; or if the wolves numbers change

PRZEWALSKI HORSES RELEASED IN KHOMIIN TAL, WESTERN MONGOLIA

On September 12th 2004 it finally happened: the first twelve Przewalski horses from Villaret, South of France, arrived safely at Khomiin Tal. With keen interest the many invitees, local herdsman and representatives of the media witnessed how the transport crates were transferred by hand from the airplane onto the lorries. Mongolian

women sprinkled fermented mare milk, airag, over the crates. This was the moment that the initiator of this third reintroduction project, Ms Claudia Feh, had waited for so long. In 1992 she started to breed Przewalski horses in the 300 ha large semireserve Villaret in the Cevennes. The zoos gave her five stallions and the same number of