

# The Przewalski Horse Newsletter

JANUARY 2007

## ENCOUNTERS WITH THE TAKHI OF HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK

We visit Hustai National Park in the autumn of 2006. There is a mild frost during the nights. Sitting in our ger around the crisping stove we enjoy breakfast. In a few moments we will be touring the Park. The sky is bright blue, the steppe has already a brownish tinge and the steppe marmots or tarbagans are getting ready for a long season of hibernation. After having seen us only a few of them take the effort to utter high-pitched warning whistles. Then their well-fed bodies disappear underground, only to return when the long winter will be over.

After some moments we see some dark spots moving forward against the high rocks in the Bayangiin Valley. The field glasses are being passed on. It is a small group of stallions. Bachelor stallions can mostly be found in the proximity of the stream in the Bayangiin Valley. Here they will have the best opportunity to meet harems.

As the jeep jolts into the path that will lead us to Mount Hustai, we suddenly come upon our first harem

group. At some distance from his mares Hangai gazes upon us. He must have observed us long before we even set eyes upon him and his family. His harem is the largest in the Park and consists of nine mares, one yearling and six foals. Later on Uschu, the biologist who leads the Przewalski research, tells us that there are nineteen harems at the moment. Only six of these, namely Bernard's, Tamir's, Tom's, Temuujin and Hangai's, consist of more than ten individuals including their offspring. There is a tendency towards smaller harems of only four

to eight horses. This year there are three stallions that even have only a single mare in their harems.

Due to the accrual of wild born bachelor stallions (39) the social pressure on the harem groups has intensified. Only the fittest among the harem stallions are able to defend a multitude of mares and foals against aspiring bachelors. Hangai is one of them. He also successfully manages to keep his offspring safe from the fangs of wolves: with the exception of one foal all other six newly borns are still alive and well. The first year of its life is the most critical for a foal. Presently there are 186 Przewalski horses in Hustai National Park. In 2006 a total of fifty-

*Hangai with his harem*



Meet the Przewalski Horse on the internet: <http://www.treemail.nl/takh>

three foals were born. Sadly only twenty-one of them remained. The staff estimates that more than 35% of them was directly killed by wolves or did perish due to injuries inflicted by wolves. However, the staff has beco-

*There is a tendency towards smaller harems of only four to eight horses.*

me more conservative in its estimations, because it is often impossible to deduct the cause of death from a partly devoured carcass.

However, size of the group does not tell everything when it comes to an effective defense against wolves. In 2006 foals born into the harems of respectively Belorus, Uluree,

Terguun, Munkh-Arivjikh, Bambar, Nica and Selenge had an eighty-five to a hundred per cent chance to survive, while these groups merely consist of two to six adults.

On a daily basis the bachelor stal-

lions cover large distances. Most of the time they are moving about in small groups lingering at favourite watering places and foraging areas in the nearness of the harem groups. Usually this is in the western or central sections of the National Park.

The home range of Tom and his harem is situated in the Ust Valley.

Here in the eastern part of Hustai the harem leader has till now nothing to fear from rivals. However, it would be very desirable if the bachelors discover Tom's. At the moment he has three two-year-olds, one yearling and four foals. It is to be expected that in the course of next year the two-year-olds will disperse from the family group. Then they will try to join peers. Mr Toghtoghsuren, the supervisor of the rangers, told us that he had seen some bachelor stallions in the vicinity of the Ust Valley. A hopeful development, which might enhance the opportunity of a rencontre between Tom's and the bachelors, offering the dispersing youngsters to team up with them.

## WILDLIFE RESEARCH IN HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK

Most who come to Hustai National Park will come to see the Przewalski horses, but there is more interesting animal life to discover. Two hundred and eight species of vertebrates have already been counted. These include: 43 mammals, 148 birds, 3 reptiles and 15 different fishes.

In each season monthly wild counts are being performed by Hustai's wildlife biologist and the park rangers; in summer even twice monthly. These counts mainly focus on species such as the Mongolian red deer or maral, steppe marmots or tarbagans, Mongolian gazelles, Argali sheep and wolves. Mongolian experts from outside and students take care of the other species.

When visiting Hustai National Park the chance to spot some red deer is very high. In the rest of the country the marals have become a rarity. From 1990 onward they are intensi-

vely being poached. When we first came to Mongolia in 1990 experts told us that there were over 100,000 red deer. According to the most recent surveys that number has shrunk to a mere 5000! In 2005 there were 384 of them counted in Hustai National Park. In 1996 and 2002 respectively even 437 and 454. In 1993 only 54. Evidentially the variability in numbers demonstrates that protective measures are making sense.

Since a couple of years the Ministry of Nature and Environment is claiming a number of marals from Hustai; officially for reintroduitory

purposes in other areas, but in reality the animals will end up in commercial deer farms where they are being kept under the most miserable conditions. For huge sums of money the antlers are sold to traders from China. The park staff vehemently continued to express their protest.

Wild boar and Siberian roe deer are rather rare in Hustai Nuruu. Only 12 roe deer were counted in 2005.

Another hoofed animal that is intensively being hunted is the Mongolian

*The maral population in Hustai is important for the conservation of the species in Mongolia. Photo P. Wit*



gazelle. Each year they move in hundreds from the east of the country to the south and vice versa. A march of many miles. A very hazardous pass-through is the Chinese border where many will meet an untimely death through the bullet. In Central Mongolia their numbers are much smaller. They had very much to suffer from the extension of the Transsiberian Railroad in the 1950s, which ran right through their migration route.

When the first Przewalski horses arrived in 1992 they had already totally disappeared from the Hustai Nuruu area. However, the Mongolian gazelles appear to have rediscovered the area, in particular since the extension of the Park towards the Tuul Valley. Sometimes their numbers rise up to more than 400.

The extreme drought of 2002 caused

a migration from the South to the North of Mongolia. A group of over 70 gazelles seems to have found a permanent abode inside the Park.

*However, the Mongolian gazelles appear to have rediscovered the area.*

The majestic Argali sheep only use Hustai for a brief stopover on their way to the North. Last summer twelve of these imposing wild sheep were counted.

The mountain steppe is a paradise for rodents. There is a great variation in hamsters, mice and ground squirrels. Numbering an ample 20,000 the Siberian marmot or tarbagan seems also to have found a safe haven within the boundaries of the National Park. Outside in the

buffer zone they have become rather scarce. They are very much sought after for their juicy meat and shiny pelage. Tarbagans are very

susceptible to weather conditions. In the dry summer of 2002 many perished, which as a consequence led to a diminution in the number of raptor bird and steppe eagle observations. It also meant that domestic sheep and horses had more to fear from wolves for whom marmots are a main source of nutrition. These are the dynamics of an ecosystem; since the tarbagan population has restored itself to its old level the pressure on livestock has diminished.

## HERDSMAN GROUPS AROUND HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK IN PROGRESS

It's the beginning of October; a clear blue sky. Bandi and Uuld will take us around some herdsman groups in the buffer zone that surrounds Hustai National Park.

Mr Uuld leads the buffer zone project financed by the Dutch Government. Thanks to the mild weather we can leave our cardigans

### ***Livestock quality promotion and new sources of income***

Our first stop is the herdsman group that lets its animals graze near the river outside Hustai National Park. We are greeted by the herdsman Nyam, who invites us into his ger. Just before entering we see a black stork on his wings heading for the river: a marvellous sight.

*Thanks to a loan from the buffer zone project they could by some new yearling cattle to enhance the livestock quality.*

in the ger. As we pass Mount Altan and drive into the Tuul Valley we see a silvery ribbon winding its way through the valley: the river Tuul. Suddenly we see six Mongolian gazelles. Initially they are motionless, but as soon as the jeep halts they run away.

After having made ourselves comfortable we are offered some milk tea, borzog (paste of wheat fried in mutton fat) and arul (hard dried cheese). Last year this herdsman group was formed by six related families, Nyam tells us. The families help each other out with most of the recurring tasks

such as pasturing and shearing sheep and goats. Thanks to intense collaboration with the buffer zone project and Hustai National Park the families now form a tight unity. Thanks to a loan from the buffer zone project they could by some new yearling cattle to enhance the livestock quality. They also achieved to enlarge the collective dairy produce, which they were able to sell much more efficiently thanks to

*Herdsman Nyam tells his story*



mutual collaboration. Their supply consists of arul, sour cream, butter, fermented horse milk or airag, yogurt and milk vodka. In this manner they earned an extra eighty dollars. Nyam enthusiastically tells about the different courses organised by the buffer zone project in which the members participate. They learn how to solve conflicts, organise discussions and mutual consultations on essential matters. They also followed a course in ger-tourism. Last year they were able to welcome thirty foreign guests into two specially built tourist gers. The revenues are being deposited into their group fund from which the loans are being paid back to the buffer zone fund and which also offers the opportunity for extra expenditures. In this way one family was able to send their son to Ulaanbaatar for higher education.

**Improved control over the water sources**

In order to prevent the herdsmen from bringing their animals into Hustai National Park a number of water sources were built outside the Park. Unfortunately the herdsmen considered themselves not responsible for the maintenance of the sources. They neglected the arrangement with the park staff. As a consequence of this livestock was fouling and trampling the natural sources and the fenced artificial ones were destroyed together with the pum-

ping system. This problem has been elaborately discussed in the Buffer Zone Council. The Council consists of representatives from all stakeholders that have an interest in the bufferzone area, like the herdsmen collectives, small entrepreneurs, women and local authorities. At the moment there are some twentyfive herdsmen collectives active. They all

*A strong fence now prevents livestock from fouling the source.*

are aware of the necessity of good management of the water sources and the steppe as a whole: their future existence depends on it. With unconcealed pride Nyam mentions the involvement of his group in the protection of one of the sources. A strong fence now prevents livestock from fouling the source.

**Steppe control**

While heading for the water source we notice that there is more grass in the valley and that there are also fewer gers to be seen. Uuld says that the Buffer Zone Council in consultation with the local authorities had decided to close part of the Tuul Valley for pasturing livestock. In this way the steppe gets the chance to restore itself somewhat from overgrazing. The observance of this provision is being controlled by local

*Protection of a water source in the Tuul valley*



environment inspectors with assistance from Hustai's protection staff. The local herdsmen are going along with this measure, but not the passing migrant herdsmen from western Mongolia on their way to Ulaanbaatar. Fortunately the last two years have seen lesser migrant activity in the Tuul Valley.

**The socio-economic situation of people living around Hustai National Park**

The buffer zone around Hustai National Park measures some 350,000 ha. It has a population of 6500 people of which 65% is still under 30. These young people will determine the future of the area. Proper education chances and employment opportunities are therefore of the utmost importance. A difficult objective. Livestock husbandry is still the main source of income on the steppe. The carrying capacity of the area can not keep up with the total amount of livestock. It leads to overgrazing and loss in livestock quality. Due to their bad physical condition many animals perished during the extremely severe winter of 2001-2002. Many families lost even all their livestock. To escape from their misery most people were forced to leave the steppe for the city.

It is quite a job to save enough livestock through the long winter or dry summer. To be able to cover the daily expenses of subsistence a herdsman family needs some 300 to 400 head of cattle. Unfortunately about 60% of the families in the buffer zone has only 200 head of cattle. This means poverty. The time is ripe for more mutual consultation and collaboration. The joining of forces in a herdsman collective opens new perspectives.

### **Greenhouses in the steppe; a new view**

After having said goodbye to Nyam we leave the water source in the Tuul Valley behind and prolonge our

*Greenhouse built with financial assistance of the Buffer zone project*



trip in northern direction. It is a very odd experience to suddenly see a greenhouse beside the asphalt road leading to Argalant. We stop and a sturdy fifty-something bow-legged man approaches us. He is called Baatar and his and seven other families form the Byazkhan collective. His children are guarding the livestock. Together with the others he had the opportunity to follow a greenery course. Thanks to a financial injection by the Buffer Zone Project they were able to buy a watering system and build a greenhouse. This year Bataar managed to crop 900 kilos of cucumber. Hustai Nuruu bought 200 kilos. He is very happy with the 700 dollar profit the group has made. Thanks to a low-rent from the project they were able to plant 600 fruit trees. In the coming year Byazkhan hopes to extend their produce with potatoes, onions, garlic

and cabbages. Baatar has two daughters who study agriculture at the university in Ulaanbaatar. Although this can lead to an assured future for them, we are having our doubts of the future loyalty of this innovative family toward the group. Will they continue to share their profits?

However, at the moment there is much mutual contact and cooperation. Even the old people are engaged.

Later in the afternoon we visit another greenhouse near Bayanhangai. The initiator is a widow, who has taken the care of six orphans. She also did a greenery course. She grows cucumbers and potatoes, which are easily sold to the villagers. It has strengthened her self-esteem and she is happy to be able to feed her children.

### **Fast food, the Mongolian way**

One of the scarce asphalt roads in Mongolia leads from Ulaanbaatar to the historical capital Kharkhorum. The road is situated north of the Park and runs through the buffer

children while at work in the guanz.

In the days that follow we visit a couple of other initiatives supported by the buffer zone project, such as a new stable complex for cattle, the renewal of the Bayanhangai community centre, renovation of the kitchen in the dormitory building for schoolgoing herdsman's children and the fitness centre for old age people.

Everywhere we go we meet people who are eager to express their gratitude toward Hustai National Park for its involvement. It is quite a joyful experience to see that local authorities and the herdsman community have been able to develop a lot of successful activities in close collaboration with the National Park's staff and the team of the buffer zone project. The future looks bright again.

That has not been the case for many years. The initial euphoria after the break away from communism in 1990 soon was replaced by depression, effected by the transittion from a planned economy to a free market system. The empoverished state

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zone. Many tourists are passing through. A typical phenomenon of the last years is the sudden boom in small roadside restaurants. These so-called guanz offer many fatherless families the chance to earn an income. The restaurants also are good for the local economy: they buy vegetables, dairy products and meat from the herdsman groups. With help of the buffer zone project a day care centre was built where the mothers can safely leave their

was unable to pay the education system and health care. State pensions became too small to cover the daily expenses. Unemployment figures rose to a high level of unacceptancy.

It is really grand to see how the park staff supported by the Netherlands not only has been able to protect a beautiful nature area and its ecosystem, but also delivers a positive contribution toward the development of the buffer zone.

## THE FOUNDATION AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK

Since the reintroduction project for Przewalski horses was completed, the Foundation has received many questions from our subscribers about the nature of the contacts between the Foundation and Hustai National Park. They also want to know what their contributions are spent on nowadays.

First a bit of history. In 1990 the Foundation (FRPH) and the Mongolian Association for Nature Conservation and Environment (MACNE) agreed upon a reintroduction programme for Przewalski horses in the Hustai Nuruu reserve. In the period 1992-2000 the Foundation would ship a total of 84 horses that were chosen from her semi-reserves to Mongolia. These operations (shipments, construction of acclimatisation areas and the necessary staff trainings) could be endowed through sponsors and for a considerable part from the contributions by loyal subscribers.

In 1993 MACNE gained credit by their successful efforts to get Hustai Nuruu officially recognized as a protected area in Mongolia. The government made the Association accountable for the management of the reserve. In 1997 the 50,000 ha large area was

revalued to the status of National Park. On top of this all UNESCO proclaimed Hustai National Park a 'Men & Biosphere Reserve' in 2002.

The Foundation wrote a project proposal for the recovery and protection of the biological diversity in the Hustai Nuruu mountain forest steppe reserve. This had a duration of 10 years: 1993-2003. The project was financed by the Ministry of International Co-operation in the Netherlands and the Foundation was vested with the final responsibility. In these ten years the infrastructure of the Park took shape and special-

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lists from the Netherlands arrived to train MACNE's staff. Besides that, a number of initiatives were started to compensate the local people for the loss of pastureland. The costs of the reintroduction project for the Przewalski horses were excluded from this subsidy.

*October 2006: Mr Enkhbold chaired over the board meeting of the Hustai National Park Trust*

In 2003 the independent Hustai National Park Trust was founded. The Board meets under the chairmanship of Mr Enkhbold who currently holds the post of minister of Foreign Affairs. The three founder organisations, FRPH, MACNE and the Buffer Zone Council (BZC) are qualified to delegate representatives from within their midsts to the trust's board of executives. At present these are respectively: the former co-ordinator of the Biodiversity Project Mr Piet Wit (FRPH), the sitting president of MACNE Mr Chultemnamdag and the mayor of Argalant (BZC). According to Mongolian law it is forbidden for governmental organisations, such as ministries, to have representatives seated on boards of independent

organisations. Therefore, the delegation that was initially appointed by the Ministry of Nature and Environment was obliged to retire from the board of the trust. Currently the Ministry is reflecting on appointing a go-between, who will join the board's meetings as an observer. This situation has led to a vacancy in the Board, which still has to be filled.

The Buffer Zone Project, formerly a responsibility of the FRPH, falls directly under the Hustai National Park Trust. Since 2004 the project has been financially backed up by the Dutch government.

The Foundation supports the Park through an annual endowment for Przewalski horse research and the protection of the Park. This contribution is essential for the sustainability of Hustai National Park.



## DISSOLUTION OF STIFTUNG URWILDPFERD

On January 21st the final board meeting of the Foundation's German sister organisation "Stiftung Urwildpferd" was held in the natural history museum in Lüneburg. The well known German cinematographer and conservationist pur sang Henry Makowski looked back on the sixteen years of its existence.

In 1989 the troublesome quest of many years was rewarded with the discovery of the "Tinner-Staverder-

*Inge Bouman presents Henry Makowski with a bronze of two prancing Przewalski horses*



Dose" nature area in Sprakel close to the Dutch border. A perfect spot to set up a Przewalski horse semi-reserve. Henry Makowski had to employ his powers of persuasion, stamina and

*The Dutch Foundation owes a lot to Henry Makowski.*

craftiness to get a lease for this area. Thanks to the effort of caretaker Mr Jochen Hauke, he himself a passionate horse lover, the fencing of this 67 ha large terrain could be realised in very short time. In 1990 a first group of Przewalski horses was released into the Sprakel semi-reserve. Sadly, Jochen Hauke did pass away last year, but we will forever remember him with respect.

Since a sufficient number of Przewalski horses has been brought to Hustai National Park and the breeding programme in the semi-reserves has ended, there seems no reason to continue the activities of our

German sister. The chairman of the Foundation Inge Bouman offered a vote of thanks to all members of the "Stiftung", but especially to Henry Makowski. The Dutch Foundation owes a lot to Henry Makowski. In 1985 he was able to arrange a mee-

ting for us with an important soviet scientist Professor Dr Vladimir Sokolov, member of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the former USSR. A year later the Professor and Henry Makowski came to visit the Dutch semireserves. This marked the beginning of a long collaboration with the Russians, who did organise a number of scientific expeditions in Soviet Central Asia and Mongolia in search of suitable areas for the reintroduction of Przewalski horses. We are very grateful for what Henry has been able to achieve on behalf of the preservation of the Przewalski horses.

## NEWS ABOUT THE GUARD DOG PROJECT

The Guard Dog Project that was mentioned in our previous newsletter is well underway. The intention is to revive the old custom of using the characteristic four-eyed Mongolian dog (gartz) for the protection of sheep against wolves. The Hustai staff runs the breeding programme in consultation with the herdsman community and is financed by WWF-Netherlands.

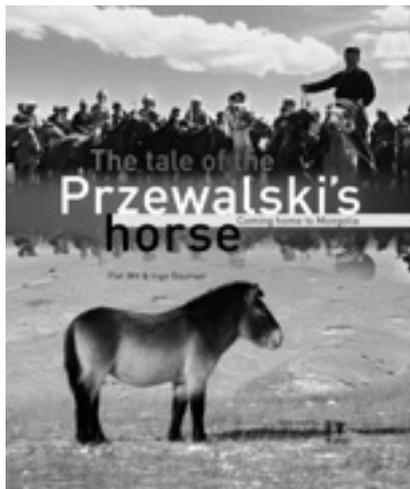
The chief of the rangers, Toghtogsuren, proudly told us that in the meantime more than 30 pups have found their way to the herdsman. Under the supervision of an

experienced Mongolian dog trainer the herdsman continue the dogs' training in the field. The dogs are growing up among the sheep. They learn not to rouse the flock and only

to target their aggression at attacking wolves.

*The two one year old dogs of this herdsman are learning to defend a flock of sheep*





## BOOK ABOUT THE REINTRODUCTION OF THE PRZEWALSKI HORSE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUSTAI NATIONAL PARK

"The tale of the Przewalski's horse, home coming to Mongolia" is out. Textual and pictorial information are equally distributed over its 252 pages. The latter in the form of beautiful sketches and colour photographs. The authors are Piet Wit and Inge Bouman.

Piet Wit guides the reader on a trip through Hustai National Park. He vividly describes the scenery and the various ecosystems and points out the wonderful diversity in fauna and flora. This all against the background of the culture of Mongolia and its people's consciousness of their natural environment. The author gives special attention to the development of park management and the so-called ecosystem approach. This against the background of the political and social events since Mongolia's breakaway from communism in 1990. The life style and customs of the local herdsmen and the development of the buffer zone area are getting an ample chance in these chapters. Inge Bouman tells the history of the Przewalski horses in freedom and captivity. It is a colourful account of the difficulties that the Foundation had to overcome in order to achieve her goal: the return of the truly wild horse to its natural habitat in Mongolia. The heart-warming welcome in Mongolia, the attachment of its people to their takhi and the good collabora-

tion with the Foundation's counterpart MACNE underlie the eventual success of this ambitious effort. Approach and results of the reintroduction process are being described at length together with the behaviour, habitat use and spatial distribution of Hustai's free roaming Przewalski horses. All is based upon the research by the Mongolian staff. The American professor in behaviour ecology Lee Boyd and the British Ph.D. student Sarah King wrote a special article on the behaviour of the free roaming

takhi. The inclusion of the filmer Micaela van Rijckevorsel's "The Takh, back in Mongolia" as dvd adds extra value to this already valuable publication. Via a menu of preferences the viewer can choose the commentary and subtitle language (Dutch and English). The realisation of this book has not been possible without the generous financial support of: Stichting DOEN, Stichting Bouwstenen voor de Dierenbescherming, the Netherlands Foundation for International Nature Protection (Van Tienhoven Stichting), M.A.O.C. Gravin van Bylandt Stichting, Netherlands Committee for IUCN, Stichting J.C. Van der Hucht Fonds, K.F. Hein Stichting and the Foundation for the Preservation and Protection of the Przewalski Horse. These contributions made it possible to ship 700 copies to Hustai National Park. The proceeds will help to cover the maintenance costs. The publisher KNNV (Utrecht) has ordered an extra 1000 copies from the printer's for the international distribution. KNNV will ask € 49.50.

**Subscribers will get the opportunity to order the book directly from the Foundation at a price of €39.50 (excluding packaging and posting). The dvd "The Takh, back in Mongolia" can also be ordered separately at the price of €14.75 (excluding p&p).**

## THE STALLIONS AT THE GOUDPLAAT

The stallions are well adjusted to the conditions of the reduced living space at the Goudplaat. They went through a rather cold spring. Caretaker Wim de Kok had often to supply them with extra food in March with its regular frost and scanty grass. At that time the stallions did fight a lot. Usch and Burchanbileg were ousted into the most southern part of the peninsula. The most nutritious terrain was taken by the stronger group of Ireg, Amarchan and Almas. During the summer all of them brotherly rejoined. However, Ireg had to yield up his leadership position to the younger Almas. The high temperatures, which endured until late autumn, offered the vegetation ample chance to recover. The stallions are in close range of one another, but they are often engaged in fights. In the wild an adult stallion without mares can withdraw himself from the group of other bachelor stallions if he wants to, but that is impossible in captivity.

### Colophon

"Przewalski-Horse" is a joint issue of the Foundation for the Preservation and Protection of the Przewalski Horse and the Foundation Reserves Przewalski Horse.  
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