

Workshop to Discuss the Future of the Takhi (*Equus ferus przewalskii*) in Mongolia: A Report

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From 2-4 July 2008, scientists involved in the reintroduction of takhi (*Equus ferus przewalskii*) to Mongolia met at the Institute of Biology of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences in Ulaanbaatar to discuss issues related to the successful return of this species to the wild.

Takhi (Przewalski's horses, Asian wild horses) are the closest living relatives of domestic horses (*Equus caballus*), but considered a separate species, due to a difference in chromosome number and the fact that they have never been domesticated. Takhi became extinct in the wild as a result of competition with livestock, hunting, and a series of severe winters. The last wild takhi was sighted in Mongolia in 1969 and the species survived only in captivity. Since that time the captive population of takhi in zoos increased to the point that animals were available for reintroduction, and restoration of the species to Mongolia began in 1992. Because of the success of the Mongolian reintroduction initiatives, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has downlisted the takhi from Extinct in the Wild to Critically Endangered. This achievement is encouraging, but there is still a long way to go before the species can be downlisted to Endangered. The purpose of this workshop was to reach a consensus on challenges faced by the reintroduction projects in Mongolia and discuss the future direction of efforts to conserve takhi in the wild.

The workshop was hosted by the Institute of Biology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences. Members of the IUCN Equid Specialist Group and participants from the three current reintroduction projects were in attendance. P. Moehlman and L. Boyd represented the IUCN/SSC Equid Specialist Group, and P. Moehlman, as Chair of the Equid Specialist Group, moderated the discussion. Representing Association TAKH were C. Feh, S. King, B. Munkhtuya, T. Samdanjigmed, and Ts. Sukhbold. Representing Hustai National Park (HNP) were N. Bandi, T. Batbaatar, Ts.

Dashpurev, T. Munkhbat, D. Nandintsetseg, and D. Usukhjargal. Representing the International Takhi Group (ITG) and the Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area (SPA) were N. Enkhsaikhan, O. Ganbaatar, and P. Kaczensky. Ts. Janchiv represented the Institute of Biology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences.

The first day of the workshop began with a warm welcome by Ts. Janchiv. Participants then introduced themselves. Each of the three reintroduction sites was described, including the number and composition of staff directly involved with the takhi. A discussion of observation and data collection methodology followed. Ensuing from this discussion it was recommended that

- A standard necropsy protocol should be used, modeled on one developed by ITG.
- The Dashboard computer program used by HNP for data collection might be useful for the other sites as well, and perhaps HNP could organize a training workshop on the program's use.
- Takhi fecal samples should be collected for DNA analysis in order to confirm identity and parentage, and detect introgression of hybrids with domestic horses.
- Annual reports should be made available as pdf files on the web site of each group to facilitate exchange of information.

The focus of Thursday was to enumerate and discuss problems facing the reintroductions. Issues relating to **domestic horses**, **local people**, **habitat**, the **takhi** themselves, and **cooperation** were brought forth. On the last day of the workshop, participants refined this list for presentation to invited officials and scientists. Most agreed that **domestic horses** presented the greatest problem for takhi reintroductions, through the threats of hybridization, disease transmission, and social disturbance. Domestic horses may also be a positive or negative factor with regard to predation: either bearing the brunt thus sparing takhi, or educating predators with the search image, hunting skills,