

Management of Mongolian Gazelles as a Sustainable Resource

Peter Zahler¹, Kirk Olson², Ganzorig Khuukhenbaatar³, Boldbaatar Byamba³, George Schaller⁴, Gordon Grigg⁵, Tony Pople⁵, Nicole Payne⁶, Matt Draisma⁷, Paul Hopwood⁸, Daria Odonkhoo⁹

¹Wildlife Conservation Society, P.O. Box 485, Ulaanbaatar 211238, Mongolia, e-mail: pzahler@wcs.org

²University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts, 01002, USA, e-mail: kolson@wcs.org

³State Specialized Inspection Agency, Ulaanbaatar 211238, Mongolia

⁴Wildlife Conservation Society, 2300 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, NY, 01460, USA

⁵Ecology Centre, School of Life Sciences, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 4072, Australia

⁶New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 2111 Dubbo, NSW 2830, Australia e-mail: nicole.payne@npws.nsw.gov.au

⁷83 Stoddart's Road, Warragul, Victoria, 3820, Australia

⁸Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia

⁹Faculty of Biology, National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar 210646, Mongolia

Abstract

An international workshop on gazelle harvesting and management was held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia in October, 2003. The major output from this workshop was the general agreement that no commercial hunt can be recommended at this time. This is because of the high level of poaching that is appearing to be having a negative impact on gazelle numbers. Best estimates put the existing gazelle population at about one million and decreasing. Models have suggested that this population could sustain an annual 6% commercial offtake. However, it is estimated that the illegal offtake may be near or exceed 10% annually. If so, this would explain why the population of gazelles is decreasing even without a legal commercial hunt. While there are adequate laws to deal with poaching, there is extremely poor enforcement due to a lack of funding, equipment, and will. We recommend against a commercial harvest until poaching is controlled and there is a sound monitoring system in place, and until monitoring shows gazelle populations to be stable or increasing.

Key words: Mongolian gazelle, *Procapra gutturosa*, commercial harvest, Mongolia

Introduction

The Mongolian eastern steppe is the world's largest intact grassland, with one of the world's last great migratory wonders, the Mongolian gazelle (*Procapra gutturosa*), along with numerous endangered species and a traditional nomadic lifestyle rich in Mongolian culture (MNE, 1996; Schaller, 1998). These communities historically engaged in low-impact nomadic herding. Recently this sustainable pattern has been disrupted. The deterioration of livestock production systems has increased herder poverty while rising unemployment has helped to increase poaching.

Historic and recent gazelle commercial and subsistence hunting programs have suffered because neither government nor local residents saw full economic benefits with meat being poorly handled and sold at below-market prices.

Meanwhile, it is estimated that poachers have continued to illegally slaughter more than 100,000 gazelles each year (Reading *et al.*, 1998), threatening the steppe ecosystem and traditional culture. Poorly planned development projects major roads and railroad fencing also threaten to disrupt the migratory movements of gazelles, impeding their ability to reach summer birthing grounds and winter pastures. Since gazelles play a pivotal role in structuring the steppe's ecological landscape, ensuring their survival is a requirement for maintaining steppe biodiversity, ecological processes, and traditional culture.

In order to focus attention on and develop specific solutions to these problems, a two-day stakeholder workshop on Mongolian gazelle management was held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on October 16-17, 2003. This workshop focused on the ecological, economic, and legislative issues