

Status of Ungulates in Numrug Strictly Protected Area

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Numrug Strictly Protected Area (SPA) is a unique part of Mongolia's protected areas system. Located in Dornod Aimag at the easternmost edge of Mongolia, bordering China, it is considered to be part of the Eastern Steppe region. However, Nomrog SPA is quite different from the rest of the Eastern Steppe in topography, soils, vegetation, and wildlife. Nomrog SPA is the southern- and westernmost reach of the Great Khinghan Mountains (most of this range occurs in China), and it is also the only part of this mountain range that receives Protected Area status. Nomrog is one of the few places in Mongolia where one can find Manchurian moose (*Alces alces cameloides*) (Jia *et al.* 1994), and it is also suspected of harboring brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), lynx (*Felis lynx*), otter (*Lutra lutra*) and other Palearctic species normally associated with the northern taiga of Siberia. The area also has an unusual mix of Manchurian species, including a variety of birds such as the reed parrotbill (*Paradoxornis heudei*) and Mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*), some of which reach their western limits here and are found nowhere else in Mongolia (Shardarsuren 1997).

From 11 September until 18 September, 2002 we performed a survey of Nomrog SPA. The purpose of the survey was to collect baseline information on the habitat, conditions and populations of moose, red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), and roe deer (*Capreolus pygargus*) in the Strictly Protected Area. The status of these ungulates is relevant to the proposed de-gazetting of the northern part of the park and the possible construction of a road from Arxan, China through the Eastern Steppe region (TERA 2002, The Economist 2004).

We drove by jeep from Sumber to the Nomrog border post the afternoon of 11 September 2002 and camped (Camp 1; see Map) inside the Strictly

Protected Area within 5 km of the post headquarters (47°00' N, 119°22' E). On 12 September we moved to Camp 2 at Khanchandamm uul (46°59' N, 119°37' E), where we were to wait for horses to continue up the Nomrog River. The horses did not arrive as scheduled and we continued east offroad by jeep to Camp 3 northwest of Zaraa uul (46°54' N, 119°44' E) on 14 September. On 16 September we moved to Camp 4 west of Temee uul (46°48' N, 119°45' E). We left the park on 18 September, 2002.

There is surprisingly little wildlife in the region. The small forest patches, sheltered valleys, and wooded riparian zones are ideal edge habitat for the three large resident grazers and browsers in the park (moose, red deer and roe deer). Observations of old browsed tree and shrub tips, as well as the abundance of game trails, indicate that in recent years the populations of these animals were likely much higher than they are now. Despite the destruction of many birch forests by the fires in the fall of 1998, 1999, and 2000, there is an abundance of browse available. While wolves were seen and heard in the park, it is unlikely that the level of predation is high enough to have heavily impacted the populations of all three ungulates in the park. Therefore the probable cause for the lack of wildlife in the park is poaching by both Chinese and Mongolians.

Roe deer were the most abundant ungulate seen in the park. We observed a total of 27 of these animals (Olson *et al.* 2004). We also saw 11 moose (2 male, 4 female, 1 yearling, and 5 unidentified). Only 3 red deer were observed (3 males) and another was heard bugling near our Camp 4 during the night. Four wolves were observed feeding on a recent roe deer kill, and wolves also howled during the night near our Camp 3. We did not see any wild pig (*Sus scrofa*), although there was evidence of old rootings.