

Recent Management and Conservation Initiatives for Mongolian Gazelle, Mongolian Saiga Antelope, and Gobi Bear

Peter Zahler

Wildlife Conservation Society, P.O. Box 485, Post Office 38, Ulaanbaatar 211238, Mongolia; e-mail: pzahler@wcs.org

Introduction

Three international workshops were recently held on threatened wildlife in Mongolia. Each workshop developed a series of international best-practice recommendations for management and conservation of these species. This paper reports on the rationales, results and recommendations of these workshops.

International Research Symposium/ Management Workshop on Conservation and Management of the Mongolian Gazelle

On October 25-27, 2004, a three-day "International Workshop on Conservation and Management of the Mongolian Gazelle" was held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Mongolian gazelles (*Procapra gutturosa*) are the last great migratory herd of ungulates in Asia, rivaling the Serengeti wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus*) and Alaskan caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) in their size and importance (Schaller 1998). They also form a critical part of the economy of steppe herders, and may provide a commercial opportunity for Mongolia if managed correctly (Zahler *et al.* 2004). Unfortunately, evidence suggests that Mongolian gazelles are decreasing in number from unsustainable hunting – in Kazakhstan, saiga antelope were reduced from over a million animals to below 40,000 in only ten years (Milner-Gulland *et al.* 2001, pers. comm.), and there is the possibility that Mongolian gazelles may be facing a similar decline.

The main goal of the workshop was to create recommendations that will ensure long-term sustainable gazelle management. A total of 22 international experts from the US, Japan, UK, Belgium, China, and Russia participated, along with Mongolian scientific colleagues. Talks were presented to an audience of roughly 140 people consisting of government officials, resource managers, protected areas staff, NGOs, local community members, and other relevant stakeholders. Topics included recent and on-going Mongolian gazelle research findings that are critical

to inform management decisions, including population size, trends, breeding biology, migration, and behavior. An expert-driven priority setting mapping exercise was held to identify historic and present distribution of gazelles and locate areas where more information is needed or conservation interventions are required. Presentations were also given on international best practice in grassland ecology, land use, modeling, and management to determine how Mongolia (and its neighbors) might proceed with economic opportunities while ensuring sustainability of this unique steppe grassland ecosystem. Four working groups developed recommendations on 1) development issues; 2) land use issues; 3) protected areas; and 4) transboundary opportunities with China and Russia, including the potential of creating one or more transboundary gazelle peace parks and the agreement on a draft MoU between China, Russia, and Mongolia.

Outputs were a set of recommendations that together have formed a formal *Mongolian Gazelle Management and Action Plan*. Further outputs include specific recommendations to the Mongolian, Chinese and Russian governments on international best-practice management of the gazelles; and a Memorandum of Understanding between Mongolia, China, and Russia outlining specific actions the three countries should take and methods of collaboration to ensure the conservation of the last of the great ungulate herds in Asia.

Conservation and Management of the Mongolian Saiga Antelope

On October 30, 2004, a workshop was held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on "Current Status, Problems, Conservation Needs, and Management of Mongolian Saiga." The Mongolian saiga (*Saiga tatarica mongolica*) is a critically endangered antelope and is an endemic subspecies to Mongolia. The saiga faces numerous threats that are causing a large-scale population decline (Milner-Gulland *et al.* 2001). Recent estimates suggest a drop from over 5,000 to less than 800 (an 85% decline) over the last five years, primarily caused by poaching, habitat loss due to livestock grazing, and