



SCIENTIFIC MEETING

MONGOLIA: THE LAST REFUGE FOR CENTRAL ASIA'S LARGE MAMMALS

Tuesday 12 December 2006

The Meeting Rooms, The Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY

Chair: Tony Whitten, Senior Biodiversity Specialist at the World Bank

Wildlife in a land of rapid transition

Dr Jonathan Baillie, Research Fellow, Institute of Zoology, ZSL, London

Mongolia has experienced rapid social and economic change since the early 1990s when the socialist command economy collapsed. The sudden transition to a free market economy resulted in high unemployment and a breakdown of regulatory mechanisms governing wildlife protection and international trade. This led to a rapid growth in national and international wildlife trade and has caused unprecedented declines in Mongolian mammals. Here I present the findings of the first comprehensive Mongolian Red List of mammals. It highlights that 79 percent of large herbivores and 12 percent of carnivores in Mongolia are now threatened with extinction. The report identifies hunting for national and international trade as the dominant threat to most species, followed by climate change and habitat degradation. Species such as the red deer have declined by more than 92 per cent over the past 18 years. Others, such as the snow leopard, Bactrian camel, and saiga have been reduced to such small numbers that their future within Mongolia remains uncertain. These declines are not restricted to large mammals; even the Siberian marmot has declined by more than 75 per cent since the early 1990s. Fortunately, the declines due to overexploitation can still be reversed through effective legislation and enforcement as well as education, empowering local communities to manage resources and providing alternative sources of income.

Securing the future of Mongolia's wildlife

Jargal Jamsramjav, Director, Steppe Forward Programme, National University of Mongolia

The Steppe Forward Programme (SFP) is administered by the Zoological Society of London and based at the National University of Mongolia. SFP aims to train Mongolians in conservation design, ecological and conservation survey techniques and data analysis. In the last 3 years SFP has trained nearly 200 students, 70 percent of which have gone on to work in the conservation field. SFP is implementing conservation planning and priority setting, such as assessing species extinction risk and producing action plans of threatened species of mammals and fish of Mongolia. SFP's community-based conservation project is assisting in conserving the Gobi desert ecosystem through forming nomadic herder community livelihood initiatives in Little Gobi Strictly Protected Area (LGSPA) and its surrounding buffer zone area, and establishing long-term wildlife monitoring and management through training herders in ecological census techniques and sustainable

natural resource use. The project is assisting conservation efforts by working with nomadic herding communities who are of critical importance in the future of the Gobi desert ecosystem. Training these nomadic herders in ecology, conservation and natural resource use is an important approach to ecosystem management in Mongolia. Using this approach, the project aims to help herding families establish sustainable use of natural resources, improve their livelihoods, and also conserve rare species of the Gobi Desert.

The return of Przewalski's horse to the wild

Dr Sarah R. B. King, Association Takh, Station Biologique du la Tour de Valat

Przewalski's horse (*Equus ferus przewalskii*) is phenotypically and genetically different from the domestic horse, and has never been domesticated. Horses similar to Przewalski's probably once roamed throughout Eurasia before their range was reduced to central Asia. Przewalski's horse was brought to the attention of western science when Colonel Nikolai Przewalski was given the skin of a wild horse on the Mongolian-Chinese border in 1878. Zoological collections in Europe and America then desired specimens, which led to a total of 47 animals being brought into captivity of which only 12 bred. As the horse became extinct in the wild in 1969 these are the ancestors of all Przewalski's horses alive today. By the 1990s the population of captive horses had risen to 1,500 and reintroduction to the wild in Mongolia was considered possible. To date there are three reintroduction sites in three different areas of Mongolia: desert in the south-west, steppe in the centre and semi-desert in the west. There is now a total population of about 300 free-living Przewalski's horses. These animals are reproducing in the wild and surviving wolf predation and the harsh climate of Mongolia. Gradually more is becoming known about the ecology of this species, but more research is needed, and there is a particular need for a management plan for the growing population. Although it is just over 10 years since Przewalski's horse was reintroduced into the wild it may be on its way to being a rare thing in conservation: a successful reintroduction.