

## **Reintroduction of kulan to the central steppes of Kazakhstan**

**For the first time in more than a century kulan – or Asiatic wild ass – are now roaming the central steppes of Kazakhstan. On 24<sup>th</sup> October 2017, a first group of nine animals was released into an acclimatisation enclosure on the edge of the Altyn Dala protected area in central Kazakhstan. The animals had been transported 1200 km by helicopter from Altyn Emel National Park in the southeast of the country. They will be released in early spring. This is the first step in a multi-year project that aims to restore the full range of large herbivores to this unique area of steppe habitat.**

Kulan once ranged across the Middle East and Central Asia – from the Mediterranean to the east of Mongolia. During the last two centuries, their range has been dramatically reduced to less than 3% of their former range. Although the species is doing relatively well in Mongolia, the Central Asian subspecies is classified as Endangered and only persists in small isolated populations in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The current project aims to move 30-40 kulan from Altyn Emel to the central steppes during the next 3-4 years. “The initial translocation of nine animals this year was a pilot project to test the methodology and logistics of animal capture, handling, transport and release,” says John Linnell, senior research scientist from NINA, who co-coordinated the translocation. “The approach using a corral to capture animals, chemical immobilisation for handling, a helicopter for transport, and a large acclimatisation enclosure at the release site worked rather well. For future years we will do a bit of fine-tuning,” Steffen Zuther, project leader of the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative and main implementation partner in Kazakhstan, points out.

Various circumstances have created a unique opportunity to conserve the species in Kazakhstan:

- The ongoing social and economic changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union have created a vast area of available habitat in the central part of the country which is currently home to the world’s second largest population of saiga antelope. This area is subject to the “Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative”
- The population of kulan in Altyn Emel National Park has grown to such an extent that the park now has a surplus of animals that can be used to found additional populations
- Funding became available from the Fondation Segré and Nuremberg Zoo.

The project is coordinated by the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) and implemented with the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) in partnership with the Committee of Forestry and Wildlife (CFW) of the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan, the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB), Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) and Nuremberg Zoo within the framework of the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (ADCI). Technical veterinary assistance was provided by the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Austrian Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology. Further details of the project can be found at <http://www.nina.no/english/Research/KULANSTEP>

**Background information on project and partners, and contacts for media inquiries:**

More information, including the detailed feasibility study, can be found at <http://www.nina.no/english/Research/KULANSTEP>

**Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA)** Link: <https://www.nina.no>

NINA is Norway's largest applied ecology institute with over 240 employees. In addition to conducting research, NINA runs projects related to species and habitat restoration, conflict reduction, sustainable use, environmental impact assessment and protected area management. Large mammals are one of the institute's core areas of expertise and the institute is involved in projects relevant for wildlife conservation in many countries in Europe, Africa and Asia, as well as the Arctic and Antarctic.

Contact: Petra Kaczensky / [Petra.Kaczensky@nina.no](mailto:Petra.Kaczensky@nina.no) / +47 92232560

John Linnell / [John.Linnell@nina.no](mailto:John.Linnell@nina.no) / +47 90012533

**Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK)** Link: <http://www.acbk.kz/en/>

ACBK is a national NGO in Kazakhstan, working since 2004 for the conservation of nature in the country. It has been the implementing organization of the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (ADCI) from the very beginning in 2006. ACBK has extensive experience in project management and implementation, and good relations with the relevant governmental agencies in Kazakhstan. It works on a number of species of birds, mammals and plants. ACBK is the key implementing partner for this kulan project in Kazakhstan.

Contact: Albert R. Salemgareev / [albert.salemgareev@acbk.kz](mailto:albert.salemgareev@acbk.kz) / +7 701 2213317

Steffen Zuther / [steffen.zuther@acbk.kz](mailto:steffen.zuther@acbk.kz) / +7 701 5435743/+49 1573 7428385

**Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB)** Link: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/>

The RSPB has been supporting conservation in Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – since 2004 and is a founder member of the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (ADCI). Amongst many joint activities with ACBK, the RSPB has facilitated the development of site management plans for several protected areas nationally, and has proposed a mechanism for collaborative management of the 1.8 million ha ecological corridor that links the two major protected areas within the ADCI.

Contact: Stephanie Ward / [Stephanie.ward@rspb.org.uk](mailto:Stephanie.ward@rspb.org.uk) / +44 (0)7802292719

**Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS)** Link: <https://fzs.org/en/projects/kasachstan/>

The Frankfurt Zoological Society is an international NGO and project partner, co-funds the project, and co-leads the technical implementation. FZS has a long-track record of reintroduction projects in Africa and Europe and is one of the partners of the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative.

Contact: Dagmar Andres-Brümmer / [andres-bruemmer@zgf.de](mailto:andres-bruemmer@zgf.de) / +49 69 94 34 46 11

**Nuremberg Zoo** Link: <http://tiergarten.nuernberg.de/en/home.html>

Nuremberg zoo is a refuge for endangered species and takes part in European Endangered Species Programs (EEP) with more than 30 species. The zoo is also active in the conservation of animals and their natural habitats in situ and was instrumental in establishing the field station and acclimatization facilities for the planned kulan reintroduction and will further co-fund the project.

Contact: Dr. Nicola Mögel / [Nicola.moegel@stadt.nuernberg.de](mailto:Nicola.moegel@stadt.nuernberg.de) / +49-911-5454801