

# Saiga Antelope

## *Securing the future for an ancient species in decline*

Saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica* and *Saiga borealis*)\* were once abundant, roaming alongside mammoths and saber-toothed tigers over vast landscapes spanning from the British Isles to Alaska. Surviving harsh and changing environmental conditions for millions of years, saiga populations are in significant decline due to increased poaching for meat, poaching of males for their horns, and natural threats such as disease and environmental change.

Saiga are large migratory herbivores, and only exist in five remaining populations in the dry steppe grasslands and semi-arid deserts of Central Asia. The largest population exists in Kazakhstan, with smaller populations in Russia, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia. In the early 1990s, scientists estimated there were about 1,000,000 saiga. In 2003, that number decreased to about 30,000. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies saiga as Critically Endangered and approximates there are around 124,000 remaining in the wild. At the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Flora and Fauna, CoP18), the U.S. co-sponsored a proposal with Mongolia to transfer saiga from Appendix II to Appendix I. Although the transfer was not adopted, the Parties did adopt a zero export quota for wild specimens traded for commercial purposes.

In addition to playing an important ecological role, saiga have cultural and historical significance for the people of Central Asia as a symbol of the traditional nomadic lifestyle.

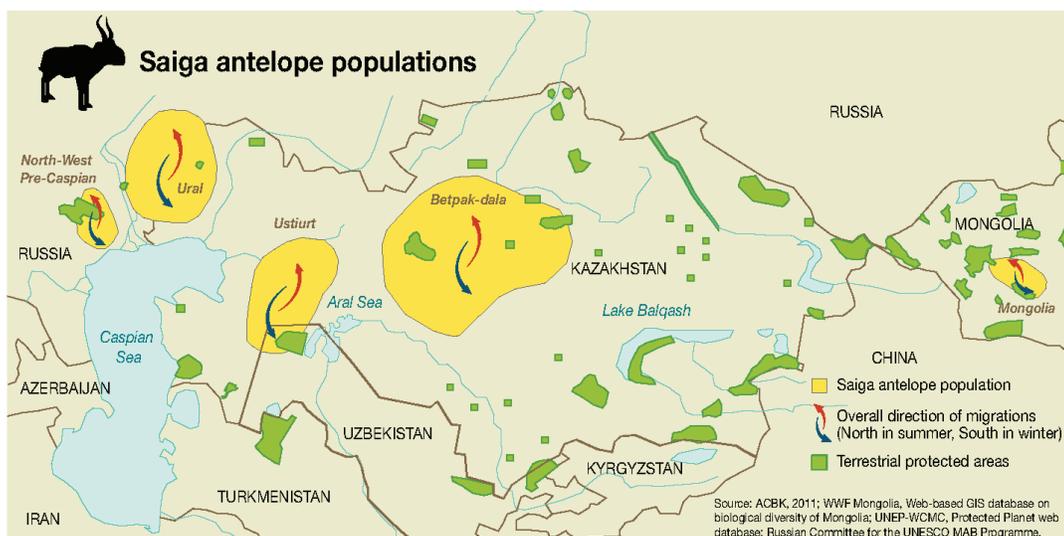


*Saiga antelope visiting an artesian reservoir.*

Andrey Giljov, Creative Commons

### Quick Facts

- **Species range:** Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russian Federation, and Uzbekistan
- **IUCN population estimate:** 123,450 - 124,200 (populations experience extreme fluctuations, field partners estimate that there were 334,400 in Kazakhstan alone in 2019)
- **IUCN Classification:** Critically Endangered
- **CITES Listing:** Appendix II (zero quota for wild specimens traded for commercial purposes)
- **Key threats:** Poaching and illegal trade, habitat fragmentation, disease, droughts, temperature extremes



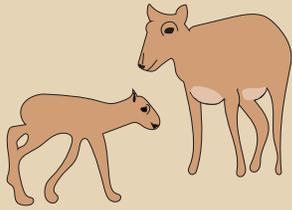
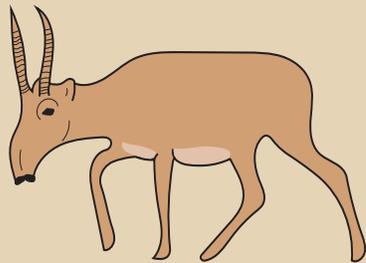
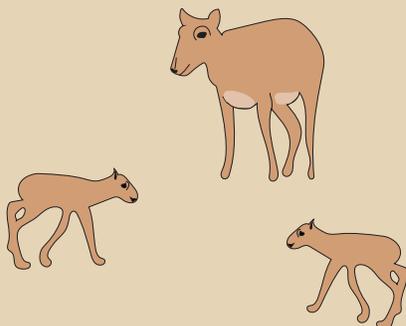
### *Saiga antelope populations.*

Reference: Kurvits, T., Nellemann, C., Alftan, B., Kühl, A., Prokosch, P., Virtue, M., Skaalvik, J. F. (eds). 2011. Living Planet: Connected Planet – Preventing the End of the World's Wildlife Migrations through Ecological Networks. A Rapid Response Assessment. United Nations Environment Programme, GRID-Arendal.

\*CITES taxonomy recognizes two saiga species - *Saiga tatarica* and *Saiga borealis*. However, IUCN recognizes *Saiga tatarica* as the only species in the genus *Saiga* (with two recognized subspecies: *Saiga tatarica tatarica* and *Saiga tatarica mongolica*).

# Two Decades of Stepping Up for Saiga

Timely action with short and long-term impacts are needed to address poaching and illegal trade of saiga so that the threats are not further exacerbated. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has provided financial and technical assistance for saiga conservation since 2000, and continues to support partners working for the survival of this unique animal throughout its range.

<p><b>2000 - 2001:</b> Awarded \$10,485 to Chernye Zemli Nature Reserve, Russia to strengthen law enforcement</p>	<p><b>2000</b></p>	
<p><b>2002:</b> Contributed \$10,000 for the Saiga Range States Workshop in Russia</p>	<p><b>2001</b></p>	<p><b>2002:</b> USFWS staff participated in a CITES capacity building workshop in Kazakhstan</p>
	<p><b>2002</b></p>	
<p><b>2011 - 2012:</b> Awarded \$135,000 to the Saiga Conservation Alliance to support conservation in Russia and Mongolia and facilitate dialogue between the two countries in addition to improved protection efforts in China</p>	<p><b>2005</b></p>	<p><b>2005:</b> Awarded \$23,400 to Chernye Zemli Nature Reserve to provide rangers with radio units and field gear, post Reserve border signs, and partially fund construction of the Kalmykia Visitor Center</p>
<p><b>2015:</b> Significant die-off event in Kazakhstan due to a wide-spread bacterial infection</p>	<p><b>2011</b></p>	
<p><b>2017:</b> Supported by USFWS, the Director of the National Wildlife Health Center of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) traveled to Mongolia to attend a conference on the 2017 saiga die-off event in Mongolia which led to the creation of a national strategic plan to address future outbreaks</p>	<p><b>2012</b></p>	<p><b>2016 - 2021:</b> Awarded \$444,094 to Flora and Fauna International (FFI) for training and use of sniffer dogs and for strengthening capacity and collaboration to combat trafficking of saiga horn in Kazakhstan</p>
<p><b>2019:</b> USFWS staff traveled to saiga habitat of the Ustyurt Plateau in Kazakhstan for a site visit and to meet with partners and discuss project progress and challenges</p>	<p><b>2015</b></p>	<p><b>2017:</b> USFWS staffer spent two months at U.S. Embassy in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia building relationships with governmental and non-governmental organizations regarding the saiga population and response to the recent die-off event</p>
<p><b>2019:</b> CITES CoP18: Species proposal co-sponsored by the U.S. and Mongolia; resulted in saiga remaining in Appendix II of CITES with a zero quota for wild specimens traded for commercial purposes</p>	<p><b>2016</b></p>	
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