

RETURN OF THE WILD HORSES

2024



PRAGUE ZOO

Material for the press conferences in Astana on 29th February and Prague on 5th March 2024



The goal of the project is to create a viable population of Przewalski's horses in Kazakhstan, similarly to what has been achieved in Mongolia, where this photo was taken.

- ◀ The visuals of the “Return of the Wild Horses 2024” project are based on the concept that has proven to be successful during the transports of Przewalski's horses to Mongolia, which the Prague Zoo organized in cooperation with the Czech Army between 2011 and 2019. The author of the visuals for the year of 2024 is the Czech illustrator and natural scientist Jan Dungal. He captured a group of Przewalski's horses to symbolize the project's coveted result – a functioning population of Przewalski's horses in Altyn Dala. The background colour is based on the colours of the flag of Kazakhstan.



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Photo © Miroslav Bobek

Following a request from Kazakhstan, we started preparing the re-introduction of the Przewalski's horse to this Central Asian country in 2023. As the most suitable location was selected the Altyn Dala steppe area south of Kostanay, where efforts to restore the original steppe communities have been underway for a long time in cooperation with the relevant authorities of Kazakhstan and the non-profit organization ACBK. Our aim is to transport approximately 40 Przewalski's horses from Europe to this area over five years, which will form the basis of the reintroduced population. Their transport will be executed by the Prague Zoo in cooperation with the Czech Army and other partners. The first transport will take place this year in the first week of June.

PRZEWALSKI'S HORSE

The Przewalski's horse (*Equus przewalskii*) is the last wild horse on the planet. It was discovered for science by Russian geographer Nikolai Przewalski and described by Ivan Semyonovich Polyakov in 1881. Przewalski's horses reached Europe and North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries thanks to the transports of Carl Hagenbeck and Friedrich Falz-Fein. Eleven of these individuals became the founders of all current populations of the species (subsequently, one more mare was added to them).

Although the Przewalski's horse was originally distributed over a vast area of the steppes of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, by the time of its discovery by Przewalski it was already found only in a small part of western Mongolia. After Second World War, it started to become apparent that the horse would disappear from the wild. A world conference was therefore convened in Prague in 1959 to look for ways to save the species. At that time, Prague Zoo was also entrusted with the management of the International Studbook of the Przewalski's horse.



Photo © Miroslav Bobek

Between 2011 and 2019, 34 Przewalski's horses were transported by air from the Czech Republic to Mongolia. The same method of transport awaits horses heading to Kazakhstan this year.



Photo © Václav Šilha

Upon arrival, Przewalski's horses are first released into an acclimatization pen where they gradually get used to the local conditions.

The Przewalski's horse completely disappeared from the wild at the end of the 1960s, but at that time, there was already a steadily growing population in human care, which eventually – at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s – allowed the reintroduction of the species first to China and then to Mongolia. Prague Zoo also participated in this process, most notably with its nine transports of Przewalski's horses to western Mongolia between 2011 and 2019.

ALTYN DALA

The Altyn Dala (Golden Steppe) in central Kazakhstan covers an area of more than 7 000 km². It is a fertile steppe with a sufficient supply of water and a suitable terrain profile. The absence of domesticated animals is also an advantage. In addition to that, there is already basic infrastructure in place for the reintroduction project, which has been built in the past by the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (ADCI).

The ADCI was founded in 2006 by the non-profit Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) in cooperation with the government's Committee for Forestry and Wildlife and with the support of the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) and other partners. Among its achievements are not only the restoration of healthy populations of saiga antelopes or the reintroduction of kulan into the region, but also the introduction of a system of air and ground protection against poaching with the help of rangers. Under the supervision of Prague Zoo, ACBK built additional acclimatization pens for Przewalski's horses this year. The Alibi Reintroduction Centre will thus serve as a gateway for the Przewalski's horses to the Golden Steppe.

Photo © Miroslav Bobek





Inspection of a newly built acclimatization pen at the Alibi reintroduction centre.

Photo © Miroslav Bobek

The saiga antelope is a typical inhabitant of the Altyn Dala area.



To give the Przewalski's horses enough time to adapt to the new conditions, they are transported from Europe in late spring or early summer. This image is from the Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area.





THE RETURN OF WILD HORSES TO KAZAKHSTAN

The Przewalski's Horse was historically also found in Kazakhstan and its reintroduction to the steppes there has long been envisaged as part of the aim to reconstruct the original functional steppe ecosystems. In this context, Prague Zoo has been approached repeatedly and negotiations started in autumn 2022 have brought the implementation of a similar project much closer. On the occasion of the visit of the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Petr Fiala to Astana, the Director of Prague Zoo Miroslav Bobek

Photo of the “ Return of the Wild Horses” project team at the Alibi Reintroduction Centre in Alтын Dala taken during a research trip in spring 2023.



Photo © Miroslav Bobek

An army CASA aircraft takes off from the Prague-Kbely military airport. Two of these aircraft will also be used to transport Przewalski's horses to Kazakhstan.



Photo © Petr Hamemik



signed a memorandum of cooperation on the return of the Przewalski's horses to Kazakhstan on 24th April 2023 with Nurlan Kylyshbayev, the then Chairman of the Kazakhstan Committee for Forestry and Wildlife.

This signing was immediately followed by an exploration trip to assess the sites pre-selected for the reintroduction of Przewalski's horses. The aforementioned Altyn Dala area proved to be very suitable.

The aim is to transport about 40 Przewalski's horses from Europe to the area over course of five years, which will form the basis of the reintroduced population. Their transport will be executed by Prague Zoo in cooperation with the Czech Army and other partners (see below).

The first transport of the Przewalski's horses from Europe to Altyn Dala will take place on 3rd and 4th June 2024. Three stallions and five mares will be transported from Prague



Map showing the routes of the two CASA aircraft from Prague and Berlin to Arkalyk, including two stopovers.

and Berlin by two CASA C-295M aircraft of the Czech Army. Four horses will be transported by one aircraft from the Prague-Kbely military airport, the remaining four will take off from Berlin by Tierpark Berlin.

Both aircraft will take off at noon on Monday 3rd June 2024. They will fly to Arkalyk Airport with stopovers in Istanbul and Baku. Landing at Arkalyk is scheduled for the morning of Tuesday 4th June, with the horses being released into the acclimatisation pen in Alibi after their ground transport the same afternoon.

INSTITUTIONS AND ENTITIES COOPERATING IN THE PROJECT



The Committee for Forestry and Wildlife is a state department under the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Its task is to manage and protect nature and specially protected areas. It was its appeal to Prague Zoo in autumn 2022 that initiated the launch of the project to reintroduce Przewalski's horses to Kazakhstan.

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Prague Zoo maintains the International Studbook of the Przewalski's horse as well as its EEP (EAZA Ex situ programme = European Breeding Programme). After the Second World War it played a major role in the rescue of the Przewalski's horse. Later on, it brought up the idea of reintroducing the horse, in which it subsequently got involved. Prague Zoo's nine transports of Przewalski's horses from Europe to western Mongolia were very important and it is now preparing a reintroduction project for eastern Mongolia in addition to preparing transports of Przewalski's horses to Kazakhstan.

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The Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) is a national public association aimed at biodiversity conservation and public awareness. The Return of the Wild Horses project is, in a broader perspective, part of its long-term efforts to reconstruct the country's native steppe communities. ACBK is behind the construction of the necessary infrastructure in the Altyn Dala State Nature Reserve. This has been used in the past for the reintroduction of kulan in cooperation with the Frankfurt Zoological Society.

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BERLIN
WORLD
WILD

Tierpark Berlin has been involved in the breeding, management and reintroduction of various animal species and has also worked together to protect the Przewalski's horse in the past. As part of the Return of the Wild Horses project, it is providing horses from its own breeding facilities, bringing in candidates from other European institutions and will be directly involved in their transport to Kazakhstan.

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FRANKFURT
ZOOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

The Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) is an international organisation coordinating conservation projects for endangered species and ecosystems in 18 countries. In Kazakhstan, it is involved in the conservation of the saiga antelope and kulan. In 2006, it co-founded the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (ADCI).

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Nuremberg Zoo (Tiergarten Nürnberg) is a public, non-profit zoological garden focusing on ex situ conservation of endangered species and in situ conservation of endangered animals in cooperation with partners in their countries of origin. In the past it has been involved in the reintroduction of Przewalski's horses to Central Asia.

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Hortobágy National Park has been involved in the reintroduction of Przewalski's horses in the past, including in cooperation with Prague Zoo. Its territory is currently home to the largest population of Przewalski's horses outside their original habitat. Selected horses from this park will also be candidates for transport to Kazakhstan.

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24. ZÁKLADNÁ VOJENSKÁ LETIŠŤA
PRAHA KBELY

The Air Force of the Army of the Czech Republic, specifically the 24th Transport Air Force Base based at the Prague-Kbely Airport, is transporting the horses to Kazakhstan. They have also cooperated with Prague Zoo in the past having executed nine transports of Przewalski's horses to western Mongolia between 2011 and 2019.



The climate in the Prague Zoo's breeding and acclimatization facility in Dolní Dobřejov, which earned the nickname "Czech Siberia" for the whole area, is an ideal preparation for Przewalski's horses before they travel to the land of their ancestors.

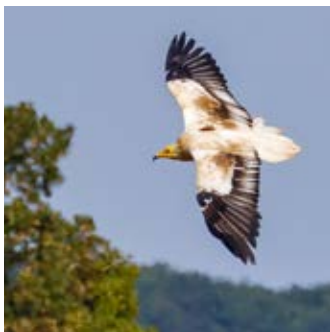
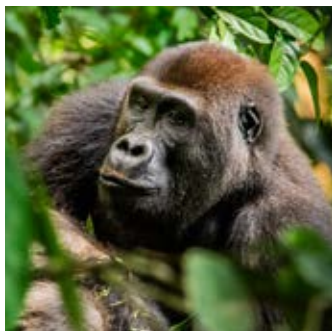
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