



PRAGUE ZOO

# WE HELP THEM TO SURVIVE

SPRING 2025



PRA HA  
PRA GUE  
PRA GA  
PRA G





On the day of publishing this brochure, it will be fifteen years since we launched our We Help Them to Survive collection fund. This, together with the money taken from each entry to Prague Zoo, which has risen from the original one Czech crown to eight crowns over the years, is the main source of funds for our zoo's activities in the field of biodiversity conservation, in particular our in situ projects.

Without doubt the best known of these is the Return of the Wild Horses. In the past, Prague Zoo played a leading role in saving the last wild horse—the Przewalski's horse—and so it was only logical that, since 2011, we have been extensively involved in efforts to return it to the wild. Following nine air transports that took Przewalski's horses to western Mongolia, we are now continuing these efforts in central Kazakhstan. At the same time, we are preparing a reintroduction project for eastern Mongolia.

Other initiatives that have received widespread recognition include the Wandering Bus—an educational and awareness-raising project that has been running in Cameroon for over twelve years—as well as our ongoing support for the conservation and research of gharials in India. Nevertheless, as you will see in the following pages, the list of projects in which we take part, or which we support to a greater or lesser extent, is impressively long.

None of this would be possible without the donations from the public and various companies to the aforementioned fund and without the eight-crown contribution that Prague City Council, our founding organisation, releases from each entry through the turnstile. Therefore, I would like to thank everyone who helps us in our efforts—be that by donations or simply by visiting our zoo.

Miroslav Bobek, Director of Prague Zoo

Since 2011, Prague Zoo, in cooperation with the Czech Army, has transported a total of 34 horses in nine flights to Gobi B



Photo: Miroslav Bobek



# RETURN OF THE WILD HORSES TO THE DZUNGARIAN GOBI

The Przewalski's horse (*Equus przewalskii*) is an iconic animal for Prague Zoo—and Prague Zoo is a key institution for this last species of wild horse. Prague Zoo began breeding Przewalski's horses in the 1930s and, together with the breeding programme in Munich, was a key player in the species' conservation after World War II. In 1959, a world conference focused on rescuing the Przewalski's horse was held at Prague Zoo (it was here that the horse's world studbook was entrusted to Prague), and later a Prague Zoo representative first voiced the idea of reintroducing the Przewalski's horse to its homeland.

The year 2011 marked a significant new chapter for Prague Zoo: it was then that the zoo organised its first air transport of Przewalski's horses from the Czech Republic to western Mongolia. In the following years, a total of nine such transports took place, all of them

An army CASA aircraft with Przewalski's horses on board  
lands on the unpaved airfield at Bulgan sum



Photo: Janošlav Šmek



Prague Zoo contributes, for example, to the purchase of hay for supplementary feeding of Przewalski's horses, which increases their chances of survival during harsh winters. Pictured is the administrative building in Takhin Tal, which serves as the base for rangers of the protected area

working closely with the Czech Army and using CASA military aircraft. A total of 34 horses were transported. The thirty mares that arrived this way to the Dzungarian Gobi have had more than eighty foals, as well as ten grandchildren and even the first great-grandchildren. In addition, a CASA aircraft was also used to make one transport within Mongolia.

At the same time, Prague Zoo also supported the Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area itself and the long-term sustainability of returning Przewalski's horses to the Dzungarian Gobi. Over the years, it has purchased several off-road vehicles and motorcycles, had a well sunk, rebuilt a hospital in a nearby village, funded the construction of posts for the rangers, supported research work, and so on.

Although there are significant losses of Przewalski's horses in the Gobi B over the harsh winters (the so-called "dzuds"), their numbers are still high enough that it is not necessary to think about further transports from Europe. Prague Zoo will continue to support the work of the Strictly Protected Area's staff, but, as concerns reintroducing horses, it has started to focus on other locations.

## PRZEWALSKI'S HORSES WILL HEAD EAST...

In 2019, Prague Zoo staff, together with their Mongolian colleagues, began seriously considering the idea of launching another reintroduction project for Przewalski's horses—this time to eastern Mongolia. That autumn, the first research expedition took place, and selected sites in eastern Mongolia were looked into.

The plan, which should contribute to strengthening the long-term sustainability of wild horse populations in Mongolia, was welcomed by local conservation authorities and the then Ministry of Environment and Tourism of Mongolia. The project is coordinated by Prague Zoo and involves professional institutions, especially universities, from both countries. We Help Them to Survive – Mongolia is a non-profit organisation set up to take care of actually running the project.

A view of the Valley of Monasteries landscape in eastern Mongolia, where the planned reintroduction of Przewalski's horses is to take place



Photo: Miroslav Bobek



Photo: Oliver Le Que

During his visit to Prague Zoo in March 2025, Mongolian President Ukhnaagiin Khürelsükh ceremonially named a Przewalski's horse foal. The two-week-old filly was given the name Dagina, meaning "Celestial Fairy". Should she one day be relocated to the Valley of Monasteries, her name would be changed to "Eastern Fairy"

Using remote sensing methods to assess satellite data, a broader region of eastern Mongolia, defined during a research expedition in autumn 2019, was given an initial evaluation. The assessment took in parameters such as vegetation cover and its quality, the availability of water resources, local climatic conditions, etc. Based on the results obtained, four sites were subsequently identified for on-site follow-up surveys.

The first of the field studies was carried out in 2021, focusing on the issue of tick-borne diseases in horses. The main part of the field research—an extensive feasibility study—began in May 2022 with an initial survey of the four preselected sites, aimed at prioritising them. Based on this, Prague Zoo staff undertook two further expeditions. The primary objective was to assess the areas' carrying capacities, including an evaluation of potential competition with herbivores already present. Following the second expedition, in January 2023, the Valley of Monasteries area was selected for the reintroduction of the horses.

The surveys of the selected site continue, while discussions are also taking place with the Mongolian Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (formerly the Ministry of Environment and Tourism), alongside planning for the construction of a new reintroduction centre, which is scheduled to begin in the coming months.

## ... AND WE ALREADY CARRY OUT TRANSPORTS TO KAZAKHSTAN

Historically, the Przewalski's horse was also found in Kazakhstan, and its reintroduction to the local steppes has long been considered. Prague Zoo has been repeatedly approached on this matter, and in autumn 2022, discussions began on how to realise this intention. On the occasion of the Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala's visit to Astana, the Director of Prague Zoo, Miroslav Bobek, signed a memorandum of cooperation on the return of Przewalski's horses to Kazakhstan. He did so with Nurlan Kylyshbayev, the then chairman of Kazakhstan's Forestry and Wildlife Committee, on 24 April 2023.

Immediately following this signing, a reconnaissance trip took place to assess the sites pre-selected for the reintroduction of Przewalski's horses. The final choice was made in favour of the Altyn Dala (Golden Steppe) region in central Kazakhstan, a fertile steppe covering an area of 7,000 km<sup>2</sup>, free of domestic animals, with an abundant water supply and a suitable terrain profile. Another advantage was the existing basic infrastructure, which had been built several years earlier with the aim of releasing Przewalski's horses; however, the project was abandoned due to the lack of legislative protection for the horses at the time, and the infrastructure was



Photo: Kristýna Čechlovská

Head keeper Jan Marek is inspecting the acclimatisation enclosure at Altyn Dala, where the horses would spend the initial period after their transport



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

The Return of the Wild Horses to Kazakhstan was a double operation in 2024: one CASA aircraft with three horses on board departed from Prague-Kbely airport, while the second, carrying four horses, took off from Berlin. Pictured are both aircraft after landing at Kazakhstan's Arkalyk

instead used for the reintroduction of Turkmenian kulans. Currently, however, the Przewalski's horse is listed in Kazakhstan's Red Book of Endangered Species, and nothing now stands in the way of its reintroduction.

After several months of intensive preparations—both in Kazakhstan and at breeding facilities across Europe—and following a devastating 100-year flood that damaged the reintroduction centre and acclimatisation enclosures just two months before the horses' planned arrival, the first Przewalski's horses were finally transported to the steppes of central Kazakhstan in June 2024. After an absence of hundreds of years, seven individuals returned to the land of their ancestors, where they will be joined in the coming years by others to form a viable population of the last surviving species of wild horse.

These first seven horses successfully made it through a much hotter summer than they had been accustomed to in Europe and, in excellent condition, also managed to withstand winter temperatures dropping as low as  $-30$  °C. All adapted easily to the local vegetation and even learned to wade into small pools and drink from them. Shortly after their release, the stallion Zorro made his first mating attempts with the mares.



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

From Arkalyk airport to the Alibi reintroduction centre, located eight hours' drive through challenging terrain, the Przewalski's horses travelled in transport crates on the beds of trucks. The final stretch of the journey led along well-worn tracks through the dusty steppe, where a grader had cleared the road a few days before the transport



Photo: Tomáš Hušek

On the way from the airport, the entire convoy, with accompanying vehicles including the police and a backup truck, had to pass through a section of the road damaged by the spring floods

On Tuesday evening, 4 June 2024, the three-year-old mare Zeta II was the first to touch the soils of Kazakhstan. Two days later, the horses from Berlin arrived at Alibi (one of them is pictured). Zeta's namesake became a legend in the Mongolian Gobi, where she survived the harshest winters and became the mother of many foals. Hopefully, Zeta II will follow in her footsteps

Photo: Václav Šilha



The three Prague horses—the stallion Zorro and mares Ypsilonka and Zeta II—after being released into the acclimatisation enclosure in Kazakhstan's Golden Steppe



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

# THE LAST REFUGE OF WILD CAMELS

It was only relatively recently that the wild camel (*Camelus ferus*) was genetically confirmed as a separate species. Approximately one million years of independent evolution separate it from the ancestors of the domestic Bactrian camel. Current estimates put its numbers at just 450 to 800 individuals living in the Great Gobi A Strictly Protected Area in south-west Mongolia. A further 600 or so occur in three areas of China. Besides habitat loss and poaching, the biggest problem is hybridisation with domestic Bactrian camels.

Gobi A is absolutely crucial for the species' survival. There, Prague Zoo works with The Wild Camel Protection Foundation to provide long-term expert assistance in managing the in-range breeding programme for wild camels and takes part in their monitoring and research. In April 2019, Prague Zoo signed an agreement to support the construction of security fencing at the wild camel breeding centre in Zakhyn Us area in Gobi A. At the time, this was the only breeding centre of its kind in the world, but it later became insufficient in terms of capacity. In April 2023, Prague Zoo provided funding for the construction of a new breeding

Transport of camels from the Zakhyn Us breeding centre to the new one at Toli Bulag in September 2024



Photo: David Broda



Photo: Kristýna Čechlovská

To the layperson, the wild camel may seem indistinguishable from the domestic Bactrian camel. With a bit of experience, however, it can be distinguished at a glance, having, for instance, smaller and more conical humps, while those of the Bactrian camel are larger and rounder

centre at the Toli Bulag site at the north-eastern edge of Gobi A. This, to date, the largest construction financed by Prague Zoo abroad, includes a 60-hectare enclosure, a shelter, watering facilities, a handling area, and, finally, staff facilities. The total cost amounted to USD 100,000, and the construction itself was carried out by the partner organisation The Wild Camel Protection Foundation – Mongolia. In September 2024, a successful transfer of seven camels from the original breeding centre to the newly built one took place, covering 328 km through the desert. The individual camels were selected for transport based on their genetic (non-)relatedness and their health status, to establish a new breeding group of this critically endangered species at Toli Bulag. The first calf was born here in spring 2025.

In past years, support has also been directed towards the management of the Great Gobi A Strictly Protected Area, for example by funding a communications network or providing rangers with motorcycles.

There are plans to create an insurance population of wild camels in European zoos, including Prague Zoo, in order to raise public awareness of their existence and generate funds for their conservation. In this regard, a memorandum has also been signed between Prague Zoo and the Mongolian Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, which, among other things, designates Prague Zoo as the main partner for the conservation of wild camels.



## WANDERING BUS

In January 2023, it was ten years since the Wandering Bus made its first journey. Prior to this project, the book *Gorilla Stories* and other educational materials were distributed to school children living around the Dja Biosphere Reserve in Cameroon and other areas where western lowland gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) live. The aim was to encourage African schoolchildren to see gorillas as fascinating living creatures and not simply pieces of meat on a plate. In other words, to counter illegal hunting. The Wandering Bus further develops this initial idea. Schoolchildren from around the Dja Reserve attend an awareness-raising programme and then go on a Wandering Bus journey lasting several days and taking them in the primate sanctuary in Mefou. There they also complete an educational programme—and, most importantly, they meet the gorillas face to face.



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

A new Wandering Bus has been operating in Cameroon since 2018. The original vehicle, which covered tens of thousands of kilometres across challenging terrain between 2013 and 2018, is now parked in front of the Prague Zoo's new gorilla house called the Dja Reserve

However, gorillas are not the only topic of the Wandering Bus. It also aims to raise awareness about other groups of animals, for example, pangolins, and nature conservation in general. Gradually, its travels have expanded to include a stop at the village of Kabilone II, where Manfred Epanda Aimé, one of Prague Zoo's long-time collaborators, has built a base that has accommodation, a model plantation operating on agroforestry principles, and a nature trail through the rainforest. Here, the children also receive an educational programme. Apart from this, Prague Zoo supports a conservation and education programme directly in Kabilone II, which involves local people.

In 2023, another stop was added to the Wandering Bus route: an experimental farm for breeding palm weevils (a species of snout beetle) near Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé. Weevil larvae are a local delicacy and also hold a potential as a sustainable source of livelihood, offering an alternative to the problematic bushmeat. At the same time, farming them is significantly more environmentally friendly than harvesting them from the wild.



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

At the school in the Cameroonian town of Somalomo, on the edge of the Dja Biosphere Reserve, children received a new educational booklet from Prague Zoo titled *The Little Gorilla*. The teacher immediately incorporated it into the lessons, while representatives of Prague Zoo introduced the methodology for working with the individual tasks

It is very encouraging that, based on the results of the Wandering Bus project, Prague Zoo was approached by the Dja Biosphere Reserve's management to prepare a comprehensive proposal of educational activities for the entire reserve. In 2024, Prague Zoo published *The Little Gorilla*, a kind of nature conservation "textbook" tailored specifically to local children. In cooperation with Prague Zoo, the local pastor, Ekoalea, translates the educational materials into the local Badwe'e dialect, enabling them to reach even more children while also supporting local culture.

Currently, the construction of an education centre and accommodation facility is also being planned in Mefou, with the aim of expanding the site's outreach capacity.

# SUPPORT FOR PROTECTED AREAS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

The most important area of Prague Zoo's work in Central Africa is the Dja Biosphere Reserve in Cameroon. That is where the Wandering Bus runs from and where material support has been flowing in to. At the start, ten or more years ago, this support consisted mostly of the bare essentials for its rangers: boots, tents, backpacks and so on. Gradually, it was expanded: in 2021, for example, Prague Zoo funded the production and placement of 96 signs marking the boundaries of the reserve to increase the local population's awareness of the existence of a restricted zone and, as a result, to make it easier to protect the area, which is affected by poaching and illegal logging.

Prague Zoo also used its funds to purchase computers and an all-terrain vehicle, a Toyota Hilux, for the rangers ("eco-guards"), which makes it easier for them to patrol the roads leading out of the reserve and to crackdown on poachers or bushmeat traders. All vehicles that the zoo has ever provided abroad have always been marked with at least the logos of Prague Zoo and the City of Prague, but this Hilux is an exception. It must not attract attention or be easily identifiable, so

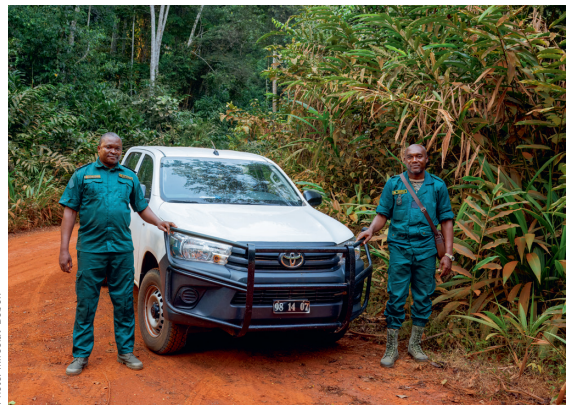
Photo: Miroslav Babek



Thanks to Prague Zoo's financial support, 96 signs mark the boundaries of the Dja Biosphere Reserve

On an anti-poaching patrol near the borders of the Dja Reserve in Cameroon. Pictured are conservator (reserve director) Bertrand Endezoomou and the commander of the northern eco-guard unit, Dirol Yemdji Lontchi, posing with the Toyota Hilux they received thanks to the eight-crown contribution from each entry to Prague Zoo

Photo: Miroslav Babek



that poachers are not warned in advance. Interventions against poachers should also not be associated with foreigners, as this could create unnecessary hostility towards the eco-guards and conservationists in general.

In recent years, Prague Zoo has also been involved in the Ngoyla Reserve, which is also located in Cameroon and lies on the migration corridor of animals going from the Dja region deeper into Central Africa. We have provided financial support for the environmental education with a focus on the youth living near the reserve's borders, a development effort that the reserve's management is actively pursuing.

Activities aimed at protecting the critically endangered eastern lowland gorilla (*Gorilla beringei graueri*) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have had to be temporarily suspended due to ongoing unrest in the region.

The design for the new education centre and accommodation facility in Mefou was created by architect Professor Zdeněk Fránek

Visualisation: Fránek Architects





## GHARIALS ON THE CHAMBAL

Morphologically and evolutionarily, gharials (*Gavialis gangeticus*) are exceptional crocodylians endemic to the Indian subcontinent. Back in the 1940s, there were as many as 10,000 adults living in the large river basins. Today, their total number is estimated at less than 1,000 adults. The main threats they face are not only river pollution, dam building and overfishing, but also illegal sand mining, which destroys the places where gharials can lay their eggs.

Working in cooperation with the Gharial Conservation Alliance, Prague Zoo has long been involved in protecting the most important population of gharials living on the Chambal River. In recent years, conventional and satellite telemetry has been used to collect not only valuable data on the spatiotemporal use of their habitat, but also important and hitherto

Gharials are the most water-bound of all crocodylians. Their narrow, pincer-like jaws are adapted to catching fish, which form the main component of their diet



Photo: Miroslav Bobek



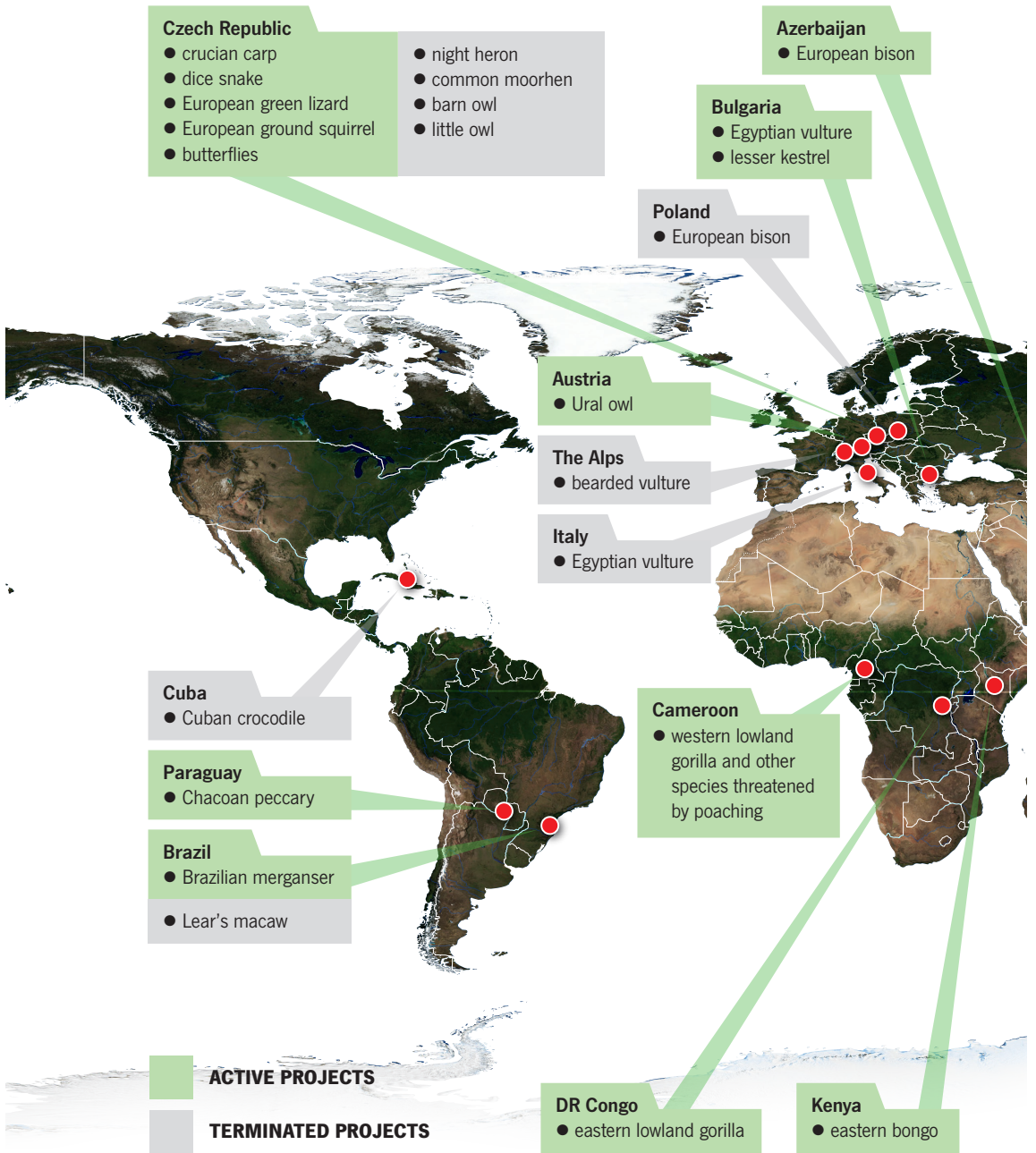
Photo: Klára Bobková

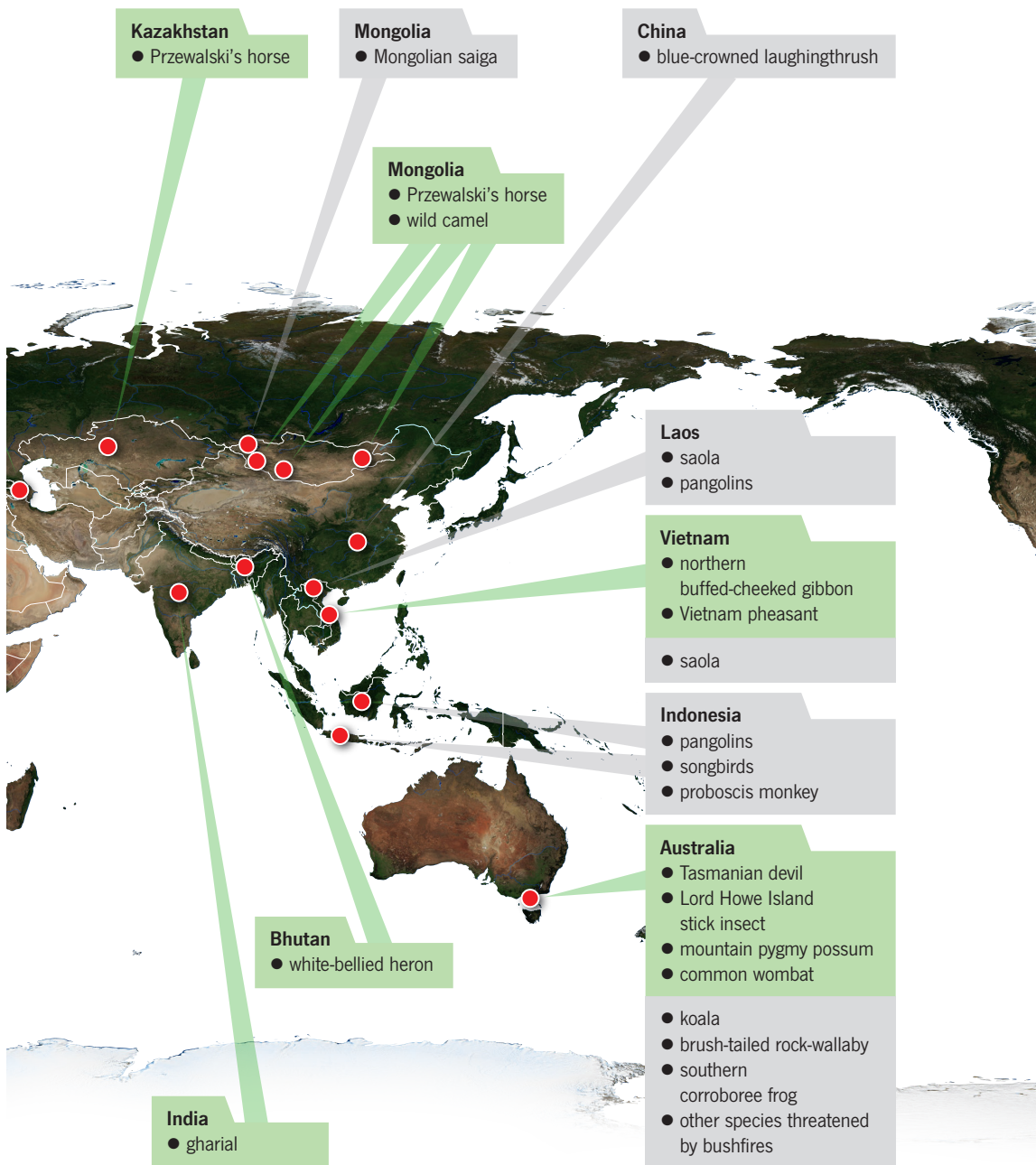
Tagging a gharial with a transmitter

unknown information about their life and reproduction. Support from Prague Zoo has also enabled a research into the specific underwater sounds produced by adult male gharials during the breeding season, whose production likely involves the cartilaginous protrusion on the adult male gharial's nose, known as the ghara. Current activities also involve educational and conservation work with local communities, schools, and local government authorities, including conservation organisations.

Between 2017 and 2020, a 425 km stretch of the Chambal River was monitored annually, as it has roughly 80 % of the total population of gharials on it. In 2021, despite the difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, gharial population monitoring continued, albeit in a more limited manner, and educational programmes targeting local communities were carried out.

In 2022, monitoring was resumed to the previous extent. During the most recent survey in 2024, the population was estimated at 1,734 individuals, including juveniles, and 436 nests were identified.





## HELPING EGYPTIAN VULTURES

To a greater or lesser degree, vultures are endangered on every continent where they live. Of the European species, the most endangered is the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). Prague Zoo has been focusing on its conservation and return to the Bulgarian mountains for over a decade. Its main partner is the non-profit organisation Green Balkans.

In 2013, thanks to Prague Zoo's support, three aviaries were built in the rescue and breeding centre in Stara Zagora. They are used both to rehabilitate injured or otherwise disabled individuals from the wild, and for breeding purposes, with the offspring being

An Egyptian vulture and Eurasian griffon vultures  
in the "vulture restaurant" in the Rhodopes, Bulgaria



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

released back into the wild. In September 2016, Prague Zoo also funded the construction of a “vulture restaurant” near the village of Partizani in central Bulgaria; one of the main problems vultures face is a lack of food that is not contaminated with foreign substances. Subsequently, an all-terrain vehicle was purchased for the organisation’s needs. Egyptian vultures’ nests are mostly built in rock formations and are 1 to 1.5 kilometres apart as the crow flies, however, in the Stara Planina Mountains, this relatively short distance means detours of up to tens of kilometres in mountainous terrain.

First and foremost, however, is the fact that since 2015, Prague Zoo has provided Bulgaria with eleven vultures from its own breeding programme and has also transported or organised the transport for many others. So far (2018–2024), 32 vultures have been released in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. Some of these individuals have already returned to Bulgaria from their wintering grounds, which is considered a great success in conservation circles.

Prague Zoo’s in situ conservation efforts for vultures are, however, not limited to Bulgaria. Initiatives to strengthen local populations have also focused on Apulia in Italy, and in the future, Prague Zoo plans to support vulture populations in Sicily and in Andalusia, Spain.

Historically, Prague Zoo has reared the most Egyptian vulture chicks in Europe and manages the European Studbook and the EAZA Ex situ Programme (EEP) for them. Since 2000, when the first Egyptian vulture was reared at Prague Zoo, a total of 39 chicks have hatched, 33 of which have been successfully reared.

In 2022, five Egyptian vultures from Lebanon and one Egyptian vulture from Syria arrived at Prague Zoo. Four of these vultures had been shot during their regular migration route, and it was the first time this species had been transported to the EU from outside Europe. All six of the “Middle Eastern” vultures were successfully rescued and are now living in zoological gardens in Austria, France, and at Prague Zoo.



Photo: Oliver Le Que

A lesser kestrel at Prague Zoo

## THE RETURN OF THE LESSER KESTREL TO BULGARIA

At first glance, the lesser kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) resembles the common kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), but it is a different species whose breeding grounds are located in southern Europe and Asia. In Bulgaria, where it was once widespread, the lesser kestrel disappeared completely around a quarter of a century ago. In 2013, a project was launched to bring this small bird of prey back into the wild. Prague Zoo joined the effort and has so far provided twelve lesser kestrels from its own breeding. The organisation Green Balkans, with which Prague Zoo has long cooperated, has also installed 138 artificial nest boxes across Bulgaria. The total population of lesser kestrels is now estimated at more than 40 breeding pairs.

# SAVE THE CRUCIAN CARP!

In the Czech Republic, the crucian carp (*Carassius carassius*), once a common fish in pools, ponds, and the lower reaches of rivers, is now threatened with extinction. The main causes are the loss of suitable aquatic habitats and competition from the invasive Prussian carp (*Carassius gibelio*). Prague Zoo, in cooperation with the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS), the Czech University of Life Sciences, and the Czech Angler's Union, has been involved in efforts to rescue it and return it to the wild.

The idea to help save the crucian carp appeared in 2020, when Prague Zoo was seeking a meaningful use of the former millrace in the lower part of the zoo. The first crucian carp were obtained thanks to experts from the Biological Centre of the CAS and the Czech Angler's Union. Additional individuals were acquired with the help of the public, which also assists in identifying suitable sites for their future reintroduction. To learn more, visit [zachrankarase.cz](http://zachrankarase.cz).

Crucian carp have begun to be reintroduced from several reservoirs on Prague Zoo's grounds into other bodies of water. The first site selected was a pond called U Kamenného stolu, located in Prague-Vinoř. In November 2022, it was stocked with fish of pure Elbe River lineage.

The crucian carp has two forms. In small, oxygen-poor forest pools, it survives as a tiny, slender fish with a black spot in front of its tail fin. Pictured here is a deep-bodied form from larger ponds inhabited by pike

Photo: Rostislav Štefánek





Photo: Miroslav Bobek

Small crucian carp before being released into the pond U Kamenného stolu in Prague's Vinoř district

In 2023, the release of crucian carp into a revitalised pond in Přerov nad Labem marked not only a ceremonial introduction of the project to the wider public, but also its transition from a pilot phase to a fully-fledged programme. In cooperation with the Association of Local Authorities and Prague anglers, additional water bodies suitable for the crucian carp's reintroduction were identified. In 2023, dozens of sites were assessed, and in 2024, crucian carp were released into more than ten further ponds.

Currently, the fish are kept across three categories of water bodies. The first consists of reservoirs owned by Prague Zoo in Troja and Dolní Dobřejov, which serve as a stock of genetically tested fish (pure crucian carp, not hybrids with Prussian carp) from various river basins in Bohemia. In the second category, these fish are bred—typically in rainwater settling tanks, retention reservoirs, or full-scale ponds owned by the City of Prague or the Regional Board of the City of Prague of the Czech Anglers' Union. From there, the bred fish are released into the third category of water bodies. These are mostly municipal ponds where the crucian carp is the target species and the fish become the property of the pond's owner or manager. In most cases, an agreement is in place that allows the fish to be used for further distribution if needed.

Examples of municipalities involved in the conservation programme include Kamýk nad Vltavou, Všesulov, Přerov nad Labem and Albrechtice nad Vltavou. As of 31 December 2024, the crucian carp had been introduced into twenty-five ponds, where tens of thousands of individuals now form a sustainable genetic base for future reintroduction efforts.

# HELPING WHITE-BELLIED HERON CONSERVATION

The white-bellied heron (*Ardea insignis*) is critically endangered, with woefully few individuals remaining in the wild. The total population is estimated at fewer than 60, with fewer than 30 individuals living in the Kingdom of Bhutan. Prague Zoo has joined efforts to save the species. It has trained Bhutanese colleagues, taken part in preparing a project of a breeding facility in the Changche Tsirang District, and is providing expert guidance on breeding and veterinary medicine. The zoo also provides veterinary materials and supplies for rearing white-bellied herons, and one of its veterinarians has carried out procedures directly in place.

An adult white-bellied heron hunting in a river



Photo: Royal Society for the Protection of the Nature, Bhutan

# THE RETURN OF AN EXTINCT BEAUTY

The Vietnam pheasant (also called Edwards's pheasant; *Lophura edwardsi*), endemic to Vietnam, is considered the most endangered pheasant species in the world. It has not been spotted in the wild since 2000, and no evidence of its presence has been found despite extensive surveys, so the species was reclassified in 2024 from the IUCN Red List category "Critically Endangered" to a new category "Critically Endangered—Possibly Extinct in the Wild". The ex situ population, maintained in the framework of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) and the World Pheasant Association (WPA), numbers over 1,000 individuals, giving hope for the species' eventual reintroduction to its native range.

Prague Zoo has been breeding the Vietnam pheasant continuously since 1949, with a total of 187 chicks of this species hatched to date. Since 2012, the zoo has managed the studbook for the species and subsequently took on the coordination of its EAZA Ex situ Programme (EEP). In 2015, Prague Zoo also carried out the transport of four Vietnam pheasants from European breeding facilities to Vietnam to be paired with the last remaining male from the wild, whose genetic value was extremely high. Furthermore, in 2023, the zoo organised and carried out the transport of three pairs of these pheasants to Taipei Zoo to establish a back-up population there.

A total of 187 chicks of this unique pheasant have hatched at Prague Zoo to date



Photo: Václav Šilha

The Vietnam Pheasant Recovery Team, which includes a representative from Prague Zoo, is the leading team in the conservation of the Vietnam pheasant. In collaboration with IUCN-SSC, they developed a conservation action plan. In 2018, a detailed project was created for the construction of a conservation centre in Vietnam, with a concept for the possible reintroduction of captive-bred individuals into the wild.

Prague Zoo supports the Vietnamese organisation Viet Nature, which has acquired land for the construction of a breeding centre in the Le Thuy area of central Vietnam, near one of the last known locations of the Vietnam

pheasant in the wild. The zoo has decided to co-finance the construction of this breeding centre to help secure a more sustainable future for this unique species and eventually return it to the wild. With the support of Prague Zoo, the first block of breeding aviaries and an education centre have already been built, where awareness programs for local residents will take place. The goal is to keep 50 pairs of pheasants here, with the second generation being released into suitable locations within the surrounding reserve. The entire conservation project (Vietnam Pheasant Recovery Project) aims not only to build and operate the breeding centre but also to protect identified reintroduction sites (with local community rangers and monitoring using camera traps) and to raise awareness among the local population.

This year, the first selected pairs of pheasants are expected to be transported from Europe to the breeding centre, marking a milestone in the entire project. At the same time, a genetic screening of the pheasant population in Europe is being carried out to ensure a stock free of hybrid individuals.



A special issue of Gazella, Prague Zoo's journal containing original research papers, is entirely dedicated to Vietnam pheasants



## NORTHERN BUFFED-CHEEKED GIBBON CONSERVATION IN VIETNAM

The northern buffed-cheeked gibbon (*Nomascus annamensis*) lives in the rainforests of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and, unfortunately, is also an endangered species. Their decline in the wild is mainly due to habitat degradation along with illegal hunting. For the successful conservation of northern buffed-cheeked gibbons, it is necessary to strengthen law enforcement, environmental awareness, and scientific knowledge about this species, which has hardly been studied at all. Prague Zoo financially supports these activities in Vietnam, where roughly 80 % of all the remaining individuals are found.

## THE ONLY MERGANSER SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR

The Brazilian merganser (*Mergus octo-setaceus*) is the only surviving species of merganser in the southern hemisphere. There are only about 250 individuals left in the wild; in the 1940s and 1950s, the species was even considered extinct. In 2006, the Action Plan for the Conservation of the Brazilian Merganser was established in collaboration with the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA), the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio), and Zooparque Itatiba—the only institution breeding the species in captivity until Prague Zoo joined it in 2023. Thanks to Prague Zoo's support, Zooparque Itatiba was able to purchase crucial equipment, such as a backup generator to ensure uninterrupted power supply (especially for hatcheries), a new filtration system for the ponds in the seventeen breeding aviaries, and telemetry equipment for tracking birds in the wild. Prague Zoo is also contributing financially to the preliminary survey and assessment of prospective sites for the planned reintroduction.



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

Since 2023, Brazilian mergansers have also been living at Prague Zoo—the only place outside their homeland where they are kept—and they have already successfully reproduced here

## CHACOAN PECCARY CONSERVATION

The Chacoan peccary (*Catagonus wagneri*) is an endangered even-toed ungulate endemic to the arid Chaco region of western Paraguay, south-eastern Bolivia and northern Argentina. Prague Zoo has been breeding the Chacoan peccary since 2016, and that same year saw it begin its support for the Chaco Center for Conservation and Research (CCCI), a Paraguayan NGO that aims to protect this rare species by managing an in range backup population, providing environmental education to the public, and, more recently, beginning to plan for its reintroduction.

## A FOREST FOR BEAUTIFUL ANTELOPES

Eastern bongo (also called mountain bongo; *Tragelaphus eurycerus isaaci*) is the rarest of all forest-dwelling antelope species. As a result of habitat loss, poaching and disease, its populations are declining dramatically—currently fewer than 40 individuals remain, making them one of the most endangered large mammals in the world. Prague Zoo has therefore decided to support a reinforcement programme for them in Kenya. This support primarily focuses on reforestation efforts—planting forest species to create the essential habitat for these antelopes, which are closely tied to the forest environment.

Since 2024, Prague Zoo has also been funding research and monitoring of these beautiful animals in the Mawingu Mountain Bongo Sanctuary. These activities aim to raise awareness of the species, optimise the reinforcement programme, and educate local communities.

Camera traps are a big help when monitoring bongos in the reserves



## HELP FOR AUSTRALIA



The first Australian project that Prague Zoo became involved in was the conservation of Tasmanian devils (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) on Maria Island, off the coast of Tasmania. In addition, it raises funds to support the development of a vaccine against the facial cancer that is decimating Tasmanian devil populations in the wild, and carries out further activities aimed at protecting this unique species.

In response to the devastating fires of 2019 and 2020, Prague Zoo announced a collection that raised an incredible CZK 23 million (more than EUR 920,000). The zoo has joined in to help the animals directly affected by the fires. First and foremost, however, it has been working to protect other endangered species whose situation was worsened by the fires. These include the southern corroboree frog (*Pseudophryne corroboree*) and the mountain pygmy possum (*Burramys parvus*). The QR code will take you to Prague Zoo's website with further details.

Working with Zoos Victoria, Prague Zoo also takes part in a project to save the unique and critically endangered Lord Howe Island stick insect (*Dryococelus australis*), which was long considered extinct. Following its rediscovery on Ball's Pyramid in the Tasman Sea,



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

A pair of southern corroboree frogs; image from Kosciuszko National Park



Photo: Petr Hemenčík

The Ball's Pyramid exhibit at Prague Zoo is currently the only place on the European continent where you can see the unique Lord Howe Island stick insects

a conservation programme to save the planet's largest flightless insect was launched in 2003. In addition to conservation breeding, the project also includes genetic research, which has been financially supported by Prague Zoo for many years. In 2024, the first eggs of this rare stick insect arrived at the zoo and another important backup colony was established. The first nymph hatched on 7 October 2024, soon followed by others. You can see them in Prague Zoo's new exhibit, Ball's Pyramid, located in the lower part of the zoo grounds.



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

## DICE SNAKES IN THE ZOO GROUNDS



Photo: Mikuláš Veleňský

The dice snake (*Natrix tessellata*) is one of the rarest reptiles found in the Czech Republic and is protected as a critically endangered species. The population in Troja—the district where Prague Zoo is located—is among the most numerous. Prague Zoo conducted research on this population and manages extensive wintering grounds in the rocky outcrops along the Zakázanka path.

Twice a year, around a thousand critically endangered dice snakes migrate through the zoo grounds

## THREEFOLD INCREASE IN EUROPEAN GREEN LIZARDS

The European green lizard (*Lacerta viridis*) is a critically endangered species in the Czech Republic. Its distribution is restricted to small, isolated local populations living beyond the northern limit of the species' continuous range. This is also true for the European green lizard population at Prague Zoo, whose extinction was prevented by restoring the local rocky outcrop. In 2015, the population's status was assessed, and a set of measures to stabilise and strengthen it was proposed. Thanks to these conservation efforts, by 2022 the number of European green lizards within the zoo grounds had tripled.



Photo: Petr Hamerník

At Prague Zoo, European green lizards can often be seen basking on the wall by the pond near the chairlift

# RENEWING THE GROUND SQUIRREL POPULATION

Habitat loss, the disappearance of pastureland, changes in grassland management, and culling have led to a dramatic decline in the number of European ground squirrels (*Spermophilus citellus*) over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prague Zoo has joined the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic (AOPK ČR) in a conservation programme aimed at saving the species. In 2006, an enclosure was built in the steppe area of Prague Zoo, on a site where wild ground squirrels had still lived in the 1960s. More than 20 individuals were subsequently released into the enclosure. Thanks to successful breeding, a stable colony had been established by 2010.

Today, the ground squirrels no longer inhabit only the enclosure and its immediate surroundings—they can also be spotted in the African ungulate enclosure, in off-exhibit areas near the hay barn at “Bosna”, and even along the Vltava River, in the gardens of the Czech University of Life Sciences, despite the threats posed by weather, domestic cats, foxes, and the like.

In 2024, the reintroduction of the European ground squirrel also began in the enclosure at Prague’s Dívčí Hrad, where Przewalski’s horses live.



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

The European ground squirrel in the zoo grounds

## SUITABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR BUTTERFLIES IN THE ZOO GROUNDS

For many years, Prague Zoo has been working to create suitable conditions for the return of butterflies to its grounds. This effort is supported by regular tree thinning (typically in areas such as the Zakázanka path, which runs through the natural monument Skály v zooloické zahradě—“Rocks in the zoo”) and sheep grazing (at the location of the significant landscape feature Sklenářka). The zoo’s gardeners also use seed mixtures rich in herbs when establishing wildflower meadows, and they plant nectar-rich plants in the beds, which attract pollinators. For the green roof of the Dja Reserve gorilla house, grand stonecrop was selected to meet the needs of the rare chequered blue (*Scolitantides orion*), a species whose populations are endangered and declining in the Czech Republic. Prague Zoo also supports the breeding and repatriation of another threatened butterfly, the critically endangered eastern baton blue (*Pseudophilotes vicrama*), which has become extinct in many parts of Czechia. The release of eastern baton blue caterpillars takes place in the summer months and is followed by thorough monitoring.



Photo: Miroslav Bobek

One of the captive-reared eastern baton blue caterpillars released on the zoo’s grounds



Photo: Marek Vojtěšek

The eastern baton blue requires rocky, dry habitats with sparse vegetation and numerous thyme cushions. We have managed to restore such places at Sklenářka through tree thinning and extensive grazing

## HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT US?

We are grateful for any support that helps us in our endeavours to protect endangered species. You can help us simply by visiting our zoo—8 CZK from each entry goes to in situ projects. Additionally, you can purchase merchandise intended to support these activities or make a direct contribution to our collection account We Help Them to Survive (IBAN: CZ24 0100 0000 4368 0466 0247, SWIFT code: KOMBCZPPXXX.). Another option, if you have a Czech SIM card in your mobile phone, is to send a donation SMS in the form of **DMS OHROZENEDRUHY 30** (or **60** or **90** or **190**, depending on the amount in CZK you wish to contribute) to **87 777**. Finally, you can take part in the programmes prepared by our keepers: the proceeds from their sales go to the We Help Them to Survive fundraising account. We are able to provide these programmes in English as well—simply arrange a private session by emailing [denisa.matuskova@zoopraha.cz](mailto:denisa.matuskova@zoopraha.cz).



QR payment

### A VISIT WITH THE GORILLAS

A behind-the-scenes tour of the gorilla breeding facility in the Dja Reserve will answer questions about the history of gorilla breeding at Prague Zoo, the social structure of the groups kept here, gorilla communication, or their physical strength. The programme lasts 90 minutes and is led by experienced zookeepers and a guide.

Photo: Miroslav Bobek





Photo: Miroslav Bobek

## MEET THE LORD HOWE ISLAND STICK INSECTS

A visit to the breeding facility of these incredibly rare phasmids, which were considered extinct for decades until a small colony was discovered on the remote sea stack of Ball's Pyramid. During the programme, participants will have the opportunity to see these fascinating creatures up close, accompanied by a keeper, and learn many interesting facts about these "tree lobsters".



Photo: Tereza Mrhallova

## MEETING THE DEVILS

Under the guidance of a keeper, participants in this programme will learn a lot of unique interesting facts not only about Tasmanian devils, but also about the other inhabitants of Darwin Crater. In addition to an expert talk, the programme includes a commented feeding session of the devils and eastern grey kangaroos.



Photo: Olivier le Que

## ZOOKEEPER FOR HALF A DAY IN DARWIN CRATER

The participant prepares food for kangaroos, echidnas or long-nosed potoroos and has a go at feeding them. Together with an experienced keeper, the participant can then watch how the devils are fed and assist when weighing the animals or giving them veterinary training.

## **BREAKFAST WITH THE PANGOLINS**

A unique look into the Indonesian Jungle house at a time when the pangolins have daylight in their nocturnal exhibit. They are also fed during the programme.

Photo: Petr Hamernik



## **LEAP AT THE ANTELOPES**

This one-hour programme features an expert talk by an experienced keeper, covering fascinating topics such as hippo breeding, the diet of gazelles, and an introduction to eastern bongos, a species threatened with extinction in the wild. The session also includes a short tour of the breeding facilities, which visitors do not otherwise have the chance to see.

Photo: Miroslav Bobek



## **FACE TO FACE WITH A PREDATOR**

This exclusive programme offers a rare opportunity to visit areas of the zoo that are usually off-limits to the public: a breeding facility specially adapted for two purebred female Cuban crocodiles, Kalypso and Sappho. The visit is accompanied by an expert talk and concludes with feeding these fearsome creatures—some of the most endangered crocodylians in the world.

Photo: Petr Hamernik



A family group of gorillas in the wild of Central Africa. The goal of our in situ projects is to ensure that endangered species, like these gorillas, can live in their natural habitat without the threats posed by humans

Photo: Mircea Popescu



Authors: Miroslav Bobek, Malvína Kahleová, Kristýna Čechlovská, Pavel Brandl, Ivan Rehák, Antonín Vaidl, Jaroslav Šimek, Filip Mašek, Helena Petáková, Lenka Janochová

Photographs: Miroslav Bobek, Klára Bobková, David Broda, Kristýna Čechlovská, Petr Hamerník, Tomáš Hulík, Oliver Le Que, Tereza Mrhálková, David Rauch, Václav Šilha, Jaroslav Šimek, Rostislav Štefánek, Mikuláš Velenský, Marek Vojtišek, Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy archive, Fránek Architects archive, Royal Society for the Protection of the Nature Bhútán archive

Translation: Richard Withers  
Copy editing: Paul Margulies  
Design and typesetting: Marek Václavík

Published by © Zoologická zahrada hl. m. Prahy, 2025  
U Trojského zámku 120/3, 171 00 Praha 7

[www.zoopraha.cz/en/insitu](http://www.zoopraha.cz/en/insitu)  
[www.facebook.com/pomahamejimpazit](https://www.facebook.com/pomahamejimpazit)

978-80-88426-42-4

Back cover photo:  
The Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area now hosts the third generation of Przewalski's horses reintroduced into the wild in Mongolia—an extraordinary achievement to which Prague Zoo has greatly contributed

Photo: Miroslav Bobek

# WE HELP THEM TO SURVIVE

## YOU TOO CAN SUPPORT ENDANGERED SPECIES

- By visiting the zoo: 8 CZK from every entry goes towards our conservation programmes.
- By buying “We Help Them to Survive” souvenirs at the zoo or in our online shop.
- By donating using the touch screens in the zoo’s grounds.
- By transferring any amount you wish to the We Help Them to Survive collection account: **IBAN: CZ24 0100 0000 4368 0466 0247, SWIFT code: KOMBCZPPXXX.**

