



The Browser

Species Action Plan for European bison

On 2 December the LHI coordinator, Fred Baerselman, made a presentation to the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention at the Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg. The subject was the Species Action Plan (SAP) for European Bison. This (draft) SAP has been prepared by an expert team of the IUCN Bison Specialist Group (BSG), headed by the Polish professor Zdzislaw Pucek (Mammal Research Institute, Bialowieza), who was later replaced by Dr. Wanda Olech (Warsaw Agricultural University).

The work for the SAP, as proposed by the IUCN, was commissioned by the LHI almost 4 years ago. The SAP should provide an overarching strategy for the protection and restoration of European bison, all over its (original) range. Finally, in spring 2002 most of the information

had been collected and a final workshop to prepare the manuscript took place in Bialowieza, Poland, with almost all experts present, including the LHI core group members Linas Balciuskas (Lithuania) and Kajetan Perzanowski (Poland).

Covering all aspects

The SAP is the first report ever to summarise the knowledge on status, threats and opportunities, to support the conservation and restoration of this charismatic European large mammal species. A large number of recommendations address the scientific management - both genetic and ecological - of the species, the necessary international organisation, continuation of captive breeding programmes and specific actions in the field. Both for the current and potential (!) range states it is considered essential to expand bison habitats, create new reintroduction sites and free ranging populations, assure maximum available genetic diversity in all herds and connect existing populations, also cross border. The first comments from the present range states (Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Ukraine) have been prudent, but positive in general.

Endorsement

It is planned, that the Bern Convention will oversee the political and practical implementation of the plan. The report will be formally presented to the Council of Europe / Bern Convention for endorsement in its meeting in December 2003.



Bison in The Netherlands photo © Klaas Wiersma



Bison in Russia photo © WWF Russia / Vladimir Filonov

CONNECTION

'Wild' horses find new home in Lippeaue, Germany

Last autumn five Konik horses were transported from the Lauwersmeer in The Netherlands to the Lippeaue area in Northrhine-Westphalia, Germany.

Three horses, the stallion 'Dokkum' and two mares, 'Nes' and a nameless animal, were released in the 'Hellinghauser Mersch' near the town of Lippstadt. They have to share their new surroundings with a herd of 'wild' cattle. The other two mares Morra and Dissel, found a new home in the 'Disselmersch' near Lippborg. The journey of the animals went

smoothly, including embarking in Holland. Surprisingly, the transaction included five animals, but within three months mare Morra gave birth to a male foal called Drago, an unexpected bonus. The introduction was a cooperation between the Dutch State Department for Forestry (SBB), the ABU conservation group in Northrhine-Westphalia and the LHI (see www.abu-naturschutz.de/koniks (in German)). And the nameless mare is still waiting for a suitable name, please send your suggestion to koniks@abu-naturschutz.de.



The release of a Konik horse photo © Margret Bunzel-Drüke

COMMUNI-ACTION

Broad media attention for released bison in Russia

Last November eight European bison were transported from a zoo in Switzerland to Prioksko-Terrasny nature reserve just outside Moscow to be released in the wild. Dutch truck driver Ben Buse went with a specially built truck (four compartments to diminish stress for the animals) to Switzerland to pick up the bison and to take them further by ferry to Russia.

Apparently, the bison were so comfortable in the truck, that 'Wurella', a medium sized bison, refused to leave her 'hotel on wheels' after arrival in Prioksko-Terrasny. It took over an hour before



she finally entered her new home. 'Bison in a truck' naturally attract a lot of attention, even the captain of the ferry was impressed by the powerful beasts. The press also showed interest in the transportation of the animals. A reporter of Readers Digest accompanied Ben Buse and the bison all the way from Switzerland to Russia to write a story that will be published in May. WWF Russia and WWF Switzerland used the journey as a great media-opportunity. TV- and newspaper reporters were able to witness the release of the bison

The release of a European bison photo © WWF Russia / Katya Pal

themselves. All this resulted in positive coverage in the printed media in Russia: The Moscow Times, Den and Vechernyaya Moskva; and Switzerland: Tages-Anzeiger, Landbote, Berner Zeitung, Bund, Zürcher Oberländer, St. Galler Tagblatt and Mittelland-Zeitung. Reports were broadcasted on various channels on radio and TV: one of Switzerland's most popular TV stations (TeleZüri) covered the boarding of the bison. WWF also asked the public for a donation for the bison, and this fundraising appeal resulted in positive response. Hopefully all this attention will help to ensure the future of the bison in Russia.

Calendar

- First International Meeting on the Pyrenean Chamois, 12 - 14 March 2003, Jaca, Spain, contact Juan Herrero, egasl@arrakis.es
- 4th Kleve meeting, Germany. Discussion on ecological corridors and ecosystems in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium (on invitation), 9 - 10 April 2003, contact Hans Kampf, hans@kampf.nl
- LHI Core Group meeting, 12 - 16 April 2003, Slovakia

The Browser

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THE OTHER SIDE [Full Name: Alistair Bath] [Birth Place: Birmingham, England] [Birthdate: 18.08.1962]

The human dimension

Alistair Bath is a familiar face amongst the herbivore specialists. But what do we actually know about him? Certainly, he travels a lot. As an inhabitant of Canada he has probably visited more European countries than any of the LHI members.



Alistair Bath

The Browser: What is your job?
"I am associate professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland in the Department of Geography in St. John's, Canada. I am responsible for part of the natural resource management programme, advanced resource analysis, parks planning and management, human dimensions in wildlife management, public involvement, facilitation and conflict resolution, and part of the

biology course, conservation biology.

Despite being involved in this human-environment theme for approximately 15 years in North America, I began doing research in human dimensions in large mammals in Europe in 1997. This has been a very rewarding experience and wonderful opportunity and privilege to be in the same room with experts from across Europe working toward conservation. All of these studies have focused upon understanding the people component of the resource management equation."

The Browser: Why are human dimensions important for nature conservation?

"Human dimensions focuses on understanding people's attitudes, beliefs, expectations, behavioral intention and actual behaviour regarding fish and wildlife activities. Many of the complex issues we face today are surrounded by human values, economic issues, attitudes and misperceptions; often wildlife issues are more socio-political in nature than biological. Human dimensions is important because we as wildlife and nature managers really do not manage the wildlife or the nature, we really manage people and thus we must learn more about what people think about an issue and how they may behave. It is public acceptance or tolerance that will be the key to

successful conservation. This requires listening. We are born with two ears and one mouth so we should be listening at least twice as much as talking to interest groups and the various publics."

The Browser: From a human dimensions point of view, in relation to nature conservation, what would you like LHI people to incorporate in their daily work?

"I believe the LHI is fortunate in that it has many of the top experts working for the initiative and sharing their experiences and making a conservation difference. I encourage all of the members to continue to listen to various interest groups and to learn from local people regarding conservation issues. The older lady in the small rural village may not have a PhD and may not have done an intensive scientific study lasting five years for a university degree, but she has 70 years of data that can teach us an awful lot if we are willing to listen and learn. I encourage all LHI members to not guess at what they think the public wants or will accept, but to engage the researchers in proactive human dimensions research and approaches to quantify those beliefs and attitudes."

The Browser: What do you like most about your job and what least?

"This is an easy question for me. I enjoy being in the field working with people and listening and learning from all the various interest groups. It is especially rewarding to help a group of diverse interests

reach a common vision, goal and set of objectives and see them actively working together toward solutions rather than complaining about the problems.

Regarding the latter part of your question, I do a fair bit of traveling with my work and that takes me away from my family. I miss my son, Joshua, five years old and Maria, ten years old, and my very supportive wife, Colette, (won't tell her age!). I remember when Maria asked a few years ago why all the people couldn't come to me to have the meeting rather than me flying to them.

The Browser: What would be your favorite destination for a holiday: wilderness or the city, and why?

"The ideal vacation for me is to go backpacking in a wilderness setting or camping with my family where we can set up a tent, hike and go for a swim and hopefully see lots of wildlife. Gros Morne National Park, a beautiful UNESCO World Heritage Site on the west coast of the island of Newfoundland, and Terra Nova National Park in eastern Newfoundland are two of our favorite camping and hiking spots. For me personally, there are three experiences that I would rank as three of the best recreational experiences of my life: camping and sleeping outside in Sarek National Park, Sweden with some of the LCIE core group; hiking in the Caucasus, Russia with some of the LHI core group; horseback riding in the Carpathian Mountains, Romania with my friends, Christoph and Barbara Promberger. The spectacular scenery and the great people have made these experiences some of the most enjoyable for me so far."

EDITORIAL

The coordinators desk

As most of the LHI network partners and many of our readers will be aware, the organisation of the LHI is going through major changes. After being founded by WWF in 1998, the LHI has for the past 5 years been 'under the wings' of WWF. As a network organisation, being very different from usual WWF structures, we held a special position, being able to operate in a more independent way, with high mandate and short lines of communication. This has worked out in a positive way; and in part explains why LHI has been quite successful in supporting and / or initiating field projects all over the Eurasian range.

During last year it has become clear, that - both for reasons of independency and funding- the organisational structure of LHI and the relationship with WWF, will have to be changed. So, with preparations already started with the evaluation of the programme in 2001, we are now aiming for a new independent 'foundation', WWF being one of the founders, to be operational by summer this year. Of course this is a major challenge to all of us involved with LHI. A small team, supported by LHI core group and network members is preparing a 'business' plan, project portfolio, marketing and fundraising strategy, judicial status, etc., etc.

We are very grateful to all of you helping in this 'quest', especially also for the support given by WWF/NL in this operation. They have granted us basic core funding for the next three years! With help of you all, we expect to come out stronger in support of nature conservation and restoration of large herbivores and their habitats and in participation of people all over the Eurasian continent.

Fred Baerselman

LIFE STOCK

The search for the last gazelles in Turkey

Large Herbivore Initiative member Ö. Emre Can of WWF Turkey (formerly the Turkish Society for the Conservation of Nature) and his team, Yildiray Lise and Murat Tuna, have conducted a field survey to reveal the presence and distribution of the Goitred gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa* in Southeast Anatolia. The study was done within the framework of the Southeast Anatolia Biodiversity Research Project, in an area of nearly 75,000 km². The project team first conducted a questionnaire targeting all local communities.

Gazelle distribution has been known to be limited to Southeast



Goitred gazelle in Turkey photo © WWF Turkey / Ö. Emre Can

habitats to agricultural lands. Today a captive gazelle population of 850-900 individuals is kept in the Ceylanpinar breeding station of the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture.

History and anecdotes

The historical distribution of the gazelle was confined to the region bordering Syria where the Ceylanpinar breeding station is located. The project team worked in cooperation with the Turkish Army and had access to remote areas in Turkey to gather

historical data on gazelle distribution. Potential sites for a future reintroduction programme were documented. Although the field team found several individuals kept by a local villager who claimed to catch the gazelles from the wild in Akçakale, this is regarded highly unlikely. The field team is now looking for funds in order to conduct an intensive field survey in the region. We invite organizations and scientists to join us in our efforts for the Goitred gazelle in Turkey. For information, contact Ö. Emre Can, ecan@wwf.org.tr.

Dead, but still wild

In a ditch around agricultural land, a hole in the ice was 'filled' with a wild horse. Dead in the muddy water. It could be a story of some 500 years ago. When bowmen were employed by European cities to hunt the herds of the European wild horses - tarpans - damaging croplands.

But this is the 21st century and the agricultural land is abandoned. The weakened Konik stallion made a choice to cross the ditch. What

happened there beside the Baltic Sea in the Southwestern corner of Latvia, on the shore of Lake Pape?

Thin ice

Nearly 50 Konik horses roam the area, having no worries about being a keystone species or linking economic potential, true wilderness and eco-tourism. Seven years ago a Konik mare gave birth to her first foal. The foal, a stallion, was small compared to other foals. Still, after seven years

it obtained the major position within the harem last summer, leaving two other stallions 'behind'. But competition takes energy. Last December he fell through the ice for the first time but managed to get out. A few weeks later it happened again. But this time with fatal consequences, despite the help of a veterinarian. The corpse was left to the crows, magpies, ravens, foxes, bacteria and moulds. The dead horse was transformed into another form of wilderness.



A raven near the unfortunate Konik horse photo © Andris Klepers