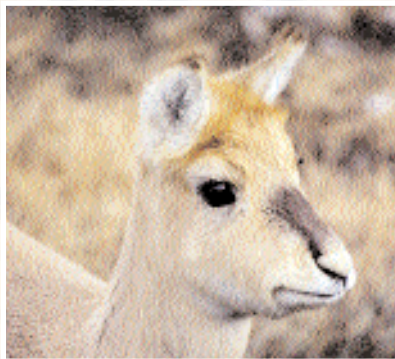


Anna Lushchekina receives prestigious award

On 2 May Anna Lushchekina received the prestigious Golden Ark award from His Royal Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. Together with four other nominated conservationists from all over the world, she received the award during a short ceremony at Palace Soestdijk. The Golden Ark award was established 32 years ago by the Prince himself, to acknowledge the special efforts of people in the conservation field.

Anna Lushchekina has been trained as an ecologist, specialised in steppe ecosystems and their large mammal fauna. From 1972 onwards she worked through the Severtzov Institute of Ecology and Evolution (Russian Academy of Sciences) on the biology and conservation of the steppe ecosystem, focusing on saiga antelope. In Mongolia she has been working on the biology and conservation of Mongolian saiga, wild camel and Mongolian gazelle.



Young Mongolian gazelle © Anna Lushchekina

Political instability

Since 1976 she has focused even more on conservation issues working for the Russian Committee for the UNESCO Program on Man and Biosphere (MAB). Her awareness of the importance of the steppe ecosystem, with its remarkable inhabitants, including indigenous people, made her one of the first to signal the alarming decline, that struck the steppe system (poaching, overgrazing), after the break down of the Soviet Union. In spite of the difficult circumstances at that time in Russia for science and conservation, Anna continued to act and urge that action be taken. It is to her great credit that through her longstanding efforts and endurance she succeeded in making a difference, in particular to the conservation issues of saiga and Mongolian gazelle;

species that used to roam over vast ranges of the steppes of Eurasia. Besides working on conservation in the field, she mobilised international attention for these threatened species.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) milestone

The very critical situation of the last remaining European population of saiga in the Republic of Kalmykia has stabilised and is slowly improving now because of Anna's efforts. She initiated anti-poaching control (poaching for horn became a major threat after Soviet times), a captive breeding and reintroduction programme and a lot of 'human dimensions' work (working with local people, government, school children). The local support for saiga conservation and restoration she helped to generate is essential for a sustainable recovery of the species. With support from the LHI, Anna organised the 'First international workshop on saiga con-

serva-tion' in May 2002 in the capital of Kalmykia, Elista, which was a significant milestone. The MoU agreed at this workshop has brought international organisations on board, with the Convention on Migratory Species taking the lead. It also led to the international acknowledgement of the critical status of Saiga; in

September 2002 it was included in IUCN's 'red list'.

Finally, The Large Herbivore Initiative congratulates Anna with this deserved acknowledgement of her work and hopes she can continue this good work in the future with the support of many!



Prince Bernhard congratulates Anna Lushchekina (background left Mr. Voortman, director WWF Netherlands, third from left Mr. Wijers, chairman advisory board WWF Neherlands) © Nadja van Leeuwen

Horses on the move in Latvia

After a successful introduction of 18 horses to the Lake Pape area in southwest Latvia in 1999, the offspring of these animals found a new home in the Nauksenu municipality in the far north of Latvia.

The population of Konik horses in the Lake Pape area had grown from 18 to 50 animals in five years time. However, it wasn't only the horses that felt comfortable in this landscape of lakes, meadows, dunes and bushes. Lake Pape attracted many tourists that wanted to experience this 'wilderness' with their own eyes. In fact, it became the

second most visited tourist destination in the Liepaja region where Lake Pape is situated. This success with the horses and for the local economy attracted the attention of other regions in Latvia. "The arrival of wild horse in the Nauksenu municipality will stimulate the municipality's development which will increase our popularity in Latvia and offers different nature tourism possibilities to local people", states Janis Zuments, the head of Nauksenu municipality council.

Five partners connected

The horses were released in a 50

ha area of abandoned agricultural land of the 'Muslakas' farm, creating a new land use. Ugis Rotbergs, WWF Latvia director, is satisfied with the cooperation between all partners involved: WWF, the Muslakas farm, the Nauksenu municipality, the Rujiena information and business centre and North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve. "I am glad that other regions of Latvia are adopting the successful experience of the Lake Pape project and hope that soon wild horses will become an important element of our nature, promoting conservation and tourism development in rural areas".



The Konik horses of Lake Pape receive a lot of media attention © Joep v/d Vlasakker

COMMUNI-ACTION

Russian literature unveiled

LHI core group member Leonid Baskin, in cooperation with K. Danell, has completed his impressive work on the ungulates of Eurasia. 'Ecology of Ungulates, a handbook of species in eastern Europe and northern and central Asia' is truly impressive work compiling the Russian literature on this group of animals of the last 100 years. The book provides detailed descriptions of 26 ungulate species focusing on quantitative data and summary descriptions on the ecology of the species.

The Browser spoke to Mireille de Heer, Senior Researcher Biodiversity at the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in

Leonid Baskin under Russian winter conditions © Joachim Druke



Cambridge (UK). "The book gives us direct access to important information that remained hidden since it was published in the Russian language. Some data go back to the beginning of the twentieth century! Now we gain insight in population dynamics and, for instance, on the influence of the changes in the political system. It turned out that during communist times a wealth of information was collected and populations of many species recovered. The book provides a good reference on how wildlife in undisturbed - military and other forbidden - areas has survived."

What more do you want?

The book is easy to read and has

nice drawings of the animals involved and, more importantly, distribution maps, tables, and figures summarising feeding habits, habitat preferences etc. Now that this information has been made accessible, new questions will arise. Mireille de Heer: "As with any new publication, new questions arise. For instance, I have studied the information on reindeer and we do not know if the locations described in the book are the only ones where reindeer can be found. Is reindeer also present in other, seemingly suitable locations of which no data are available? We would now like to discuss these issues with the Russian scientists and that is, in combination with the information provided, a major step forward in the study and conservation of these animals."

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CONNECTION

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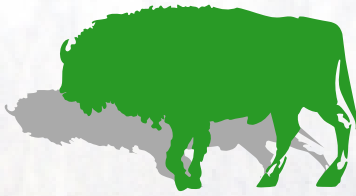
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THE OTHER SIDE [Full Name: Agnieszka Olszanska] [Birth Place: Kedzierzyn - Kozle, Poland] [Birth Date: 101.04.1975]

Herbivore meets carnivore

In this issue of the Browser we introduce you to the coordinator of the Large Carnivore Initiative Europe. A woman in a (nearly exclusively) man's world. Does gender play a role in conservation? Hmm, intriguing question. Read and find out!



Large carnivore Agnieszka Olszanska and large herbivore Fred Baerselman © Constantinos

Academy of Sciences in Krakow, being responsible for education activities. In 2000 I started my Ph.D. in the Institute of Nature Conservation of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where I also work since 2001. I'm carrying out research project on ecology and genetics of the wild cat in Poland.

As a student I was engaged with some more 'environmentalist' NGO work, such as co-operating with the Environmental Education Station in Bielsko-Biala. Also, for three years I have been working in the Programme Office of the Cracow Film Festival, which is an international festival for short documentary and animation films.

The Browser: What are the positive and what the negative sides of your job as coordinator of the Large Carnivore Initiative? Do the carnivore-men fully accept a young woman like yourself as coordinator?

"My 'adventure' with the LCIE started in 2001, when I was helping the organisation of the LCIE Plenary Network Meeting in Rytko (Poland). I became a LCIE coordinator in Autumn 2002, what was

very surprising and even more challenging for me. At the beginning I was quiet terrified, as LCIE is a group of very professional, experienced and respected large carnivore experts, with a quiet long, successful history of activities and I've been a young and almost inexperienced person. Since the very beginning of this work, all of the LCIE people, especially the Core Group members, were very helpful, kind and supporting me in this not easy task, which makes my job truly pleasant and enjoyable. Especially that I have a rare chance to work in the domain I really like, with people I like and respect. I only hope that the LCIE members are satisfied with my work!"

The Browser: What is your favourite carnivore and what is your favourite herbivore, and why?

"What I really like in nature is the miraculous diversity, unpredictability and that it surprises us constantly, even if we think we finally know. I don't think I have ever had any 'favourite' animals (or maybe I had, when I was a small girl, loving dolphins, wolves and bears). But, to answer this question, I like cats, because, as Rudyard Kipling wrote, 'The wildest of all the wild animals was the cat. He walked by himself, and all places were alike to him.'"

The Browser: Is there enough appreciation from the public for Large Carnivores and what message would you tell the world con-

cerning Large Carnivores?

"I am not the person to pass messages to the world, I wouldn't dare. I also understand that large carnivores are not the most important issue in the multitude of the world's problems that we are all facing nowadays. Yet, public acceptance for the coexistence of large carnivores with people is one of the four objectives of LCIE. Since its beginning LCIE is carrying on groundbreaking work and projects on public attitudes towards carnivores and human dimensions of carnivore management. We keep trying to sharpen public awareness on large carnivore issues through research, publications and diverse education activities. We also try to provide the public with the best available scientific expertise based on research and experience, trying to change some still existing 'myths' and 'beliefs'."

The Browser: What would be your ultimate goal for LC conservation?

"To maintain and restore, in coexistence with people, viable populations of large carnivores as an integral part of ecosystems and landscapes across Europe - this is the message LCIE tries to promote, since its beginning. This coexistence of people and large carnivores is an ultimate goal of people concerned with the conservation of large carnivores.

As a proverb says 'We didn't inherit the world from our parents; we borrowed it from our children', so I would be happy if due to my modest contribution to nature conservation, my future children could have this rare chance and pleasure to see a lynx, wolf or bear in the wild".

EDITORIAL

The coordinators desk

The Browser you are reading right now, is the last one to be produced under the flag of the Large Herbivore Initiative. However, no reason to be sad or even nostalgic about that! The Browser will continue and grow as the printed and electronic newsletter of the new independent Large Herbivore Foundation (LHF), operational by 1 September of this year.

A small 'conversion' team has worked hard, supported by LHI core group members and WWF staff, to make a smooth transition possible. Numerous meetings, workshops, contacts with judicial advisors, possible partners, founders, funders, supporters, etc. have been very time and effort consuming over the last half year. Sometimes we felt despair creeping up, also because we feared some neglect of the contacts and projects in the field, because of the preoccupation with all the paper work. Sorry for any inconvenience this all caused sometimes for all of you out there, but it was an unavoidable part of the process.

But...hurrah, we are nearly there! The judicial organization of the foundation, including statutes, board, advisory committee, ambassadors, etc. is taking shape, functions and persons are ready to be in place, communications and fund-raising materials are almost ready, and an official launch is under preparation. The best, however, may be, that even before we have officially started to communicate and promote the LHF, we have made many positive contacts and encountered so much support already, that the future looks bright, to continue and enhance the support for the large herbivores, their habitats and the people involved all over Eurasia.

I hope we can give a new and strong impulse to the important conservation work we have embarked on together. In the next issue of the Browser you will read all about it. On behalf of the 'conversion' team, I would like to thank all of you who contributed in one way or other to the transition process. As coordinator I feel very much obliged to you all and in particular to the team for the successful operation.

Fred Baerselman

LIFE STOCK

Seminar on steppe grassland conservation

Between 15 and 23 June, a field seminar on steppe grassland conservation was organised by the Russian NGO 'Open Country'. Twenty-two participants from Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, England, The Netherlands, Austria, Canada and the USA experienced how grasslands in the Galichya Gora Nature Reserve, 450 km south of Moskou, are managed.

Galichya Gora Nature Reserve and its surroundings used to be covered with extensive forests. Despite its present openness the area is still referred to as 'forest steppes'. Nowadays trees are hard to find, mainly occurring on the poor sandy soils as a result of forestry practices. Due to agricul-

tural activities vast areas have been opened in historic times resulting in the present day steppes'.

'Herd management'

At this moment the management of these grasslands depends on wandering herds of mainly cattle and some sheep. Herds often consist of tens of animals creating a clear grazing pressure on the area. However, very little is known about the influence of these grazing cattle herds in maintaining the ecosystem. The river valleys comprise a very specific element in these plains. The, sometimes steep, slopes of the river beds are overgrown with bushes and scrub, and offer food and shelter for other communities

of plant and animal species.

Future studies should reveal the potential benefits of large herbivores such as Konik horses and 'wild' cattle. A potential not only

in ecological terms, but also social-economical (high quality meat production and tourism).

Cattle guarded by horses, Bykova Sheya, Russia © Hans Kampf



Big bison roam freely in Poland © Kajetan Perzanowski

A first year in freedom

In June 2002 four European bison were released in southeast Poland. As a proof of the success of this reintroduction Kajetan Perzanowski reports.

"Our introduced bison successfully went through their first winter in freedom. They have been accepted by the wild herd and now are roaming in the company of wild bison in the most remote parts of

the forest. The collared animals have split and joined different bison groups, enabling us to monitor the movements and habitat preferences of the majority of the western Bieszczady herd. It turned out that the home-range of the animals (65) covered 172 km², though most of them were concentrated in smaller areas. A future bison introduction in bordering Slovakia should allow Polish and Slovak bison to meet."

From Poland to Ukraine

The next stage of the project should provide more clarity on the legal situation of these bison, including what to do in case of damage to crops or forestry practices. Kajetan, ambitious as always, finally visited a Romanian site in the Carpathians to study the potential of a reintroduction to create a meta-population in the border-area with Ukraine.

