

The Browser

Twenty horses from Lauwersmeer (NL) to National Park Orlovskoje Polesie (RU) Konik horses introduced in Russia

In April ten Konik stallions and ten mares, donated by the Dutch Government (Forestry and Nature Management Service - SBB) will be transported to the National Park Orlovskoje Polesie in Russia, approximately 500 km south of Moscow. In this border area of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, an ecological network is developing with large core areas like Orlovskoje (770 km²), Ugra (986 km²) and Bryanskii Les (122 km²). In the future, the total protected area is aimed at covering at least 30.000 km².

WWF Russia, the Large Herbivore Initiative and WWF Denmark are working closely together with regional and local governments to realise this goal. This beautiful landscape, a mosaic of woodlands, steppe, heath, riverbasins and (former) agriculture lands, is already an important spot for Russian ecotourism, and international tourism will probably increase through better infrastructure.

All large mammals that originally lived in this region, like brown bear, wolf and moose are still around, with the exception of bison, wild cattle and wild horse.

In the past the Large Herbivore Initiative, in cooperation with WWF Russia, had already successfully re-introduced three groups of bison in Orlovskoje National Park. To complete the large mammal community and re-establish the role of extinct

wild herbivores in the ecosystem, primitive horses and cattle have to be re-introduced.

A little Konik history

Koniks are a primitive breed close to the tarpan, the wild European horse that went extinct around 1870. In Poland the Koniks were kept in a near wild condition. In 1981 the Netherlands imported the first horses, one stallion and two mares and foals, from Popielno, to be released to the wild in the nature restoration area of the Oostvaardersplassen. Nowadays, over half of the world population of Konik horses (currently 2.000) are living free in Dutch nature reserves.

The twenty Konik horses are already separated for quarantine and veterinary tests. Originally, the transport to Russia was



planned for Spring 2001, but due to the foot and mouth disease outbreak and the transport bans, this had to be postponed. Transport, by road and ferries through Helsinki, to Orel-Briansk, and introduction are now planned for April 2002. On 22 April the horses will be officially handed over by the Dutch Embassy to the Russian managers of the National Park.

Join the journey

A bus from the Dutch travel organisation Pelikaan Reizen will join this journey. Interested people, ecotourists and horse-lovers have a unique opportunity this way to watch this happening from close-by! Also, the trip can be followed on a daily basis on the internet: wnf.nl will publish the diary and images of Klaas Wiersma, a WWF employee and Konik horse expert, who will be on the bus.

One of the more than thousand free-ranging Konik horses in The Netherlands. These animals have proven to survive even the toughest winter conditions.
photo © Johan Bos / Argeloo&Bos

Tasteful and money-making artificial bison (part II)

In the first issue of *The Browser* a short note was presented on the use of the bison as a logo by companies. In particular Polish companies (beer, wodka, a bank), but also a Dutch company (glue) and a British institute used the bison to promote their products or activities. *The Browser* was sent to these companies and the following response was received from the Bank Pekoa SA in Warsaw, Poland.

Dear Mr. Baerselman,

(...) The bison was chosen by Bank Pekoa SA because of its beauty, but above all we were thinking about an animal that was associated with strength, power and Poland. (...) Thanks to this bison-brand we are well recognised between all European banks which are part of UniCredito Italiano Group. For us, choosing the bison as our bank's logo also offers a great possibility to

promote Polish bisons all over Europe. We actively take care about the environment and the animals. The protection of the natural environment is a very important value for Bank Pekoa SA. We always look for solutions, that guarantee respect for nature.

Yours sincerely,

Marta Konopačka
Public Relations Department Bank Pekoa SA



How to continue? Does this open up the potential for an actual involvement of or even a cooperation with the bank? The LHI, and all other conservation initiatives worldwide, will simply not be able to preserve global biodiversity on their own. Cooperation with 'unexpected' partners may be a part of the solution. It is therefore logic and crucial the LHI continues to seek for connections with partners, even if, or maybe even better, if these partners fall outside the well-known range of conservation organisations.

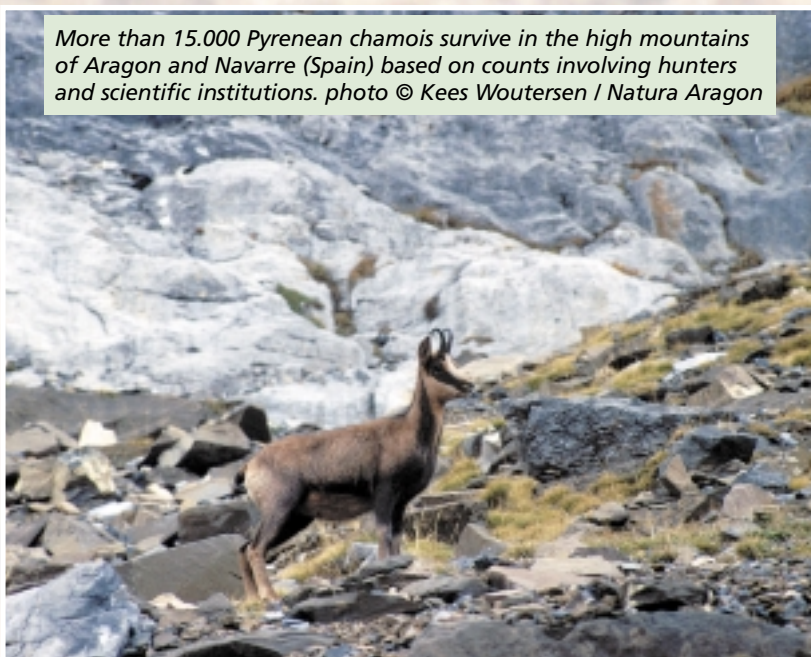
CONNECTION

Calendar

- 6th Core group meeting Large Herbivore Initiative, 23 - 27 March 2002, 'Gut Sunder', Hannover, Germany
- Workshop on re-introduction of moose and European bison in Germany, 9 April 2002, 'Gut Sunder', Hannover, Germany
- 5th Baltic theriological conference, 16 - 19 April 2002, Lithuania
- Transport of 20 Konik horses from The Netherlands to Russia, 17 - 22 April 2002
- Int. meeting on saiga conservation, 5 - 10 May 2002, Elista, Russia
- Int. workshop on Mongolian gazelle (dzeren), 3 - 10 June 2002, Dauria, Russia
- 3rd World conference on mountain ungulates, 10 - 15 June 2002, Zaragoza, Spain
- 3rd European conference on restoration ecology, 25 - 31 August 2002, Budapest, Hungary
- Polish annual theriological conference, 19 - 20 September 2002, Kraków, Poland
- 4th Int. wild boar symposium, 19 - 22 September 2002, Lousa, Portugal
- 4th Mediterranean mouflon symposium, 10 - 12 October 2002, Nuoro (Sardinia), Italy

COMMUNI-ACTION

More than 15.000 Pyrenean chamois survive in the high mountains of Aragon and Navarre (Spain) based on counts involving hunters and scientific institutions. photo © Kees Woutersen / Natura Aragon



Convincing facts change attitude of hunters in Spain

A key-group in wildlife conservation are hunters. Just as with every important group, they need a tailor-made treatment to involve them in the plea for conservation. Juan Herrero, Spanish LHI core group member, reports on his work with hunters for two regional administrations.

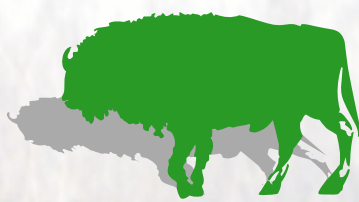
Factual information proved to be a crucial element in convincing the hunters that scientific sound data form the basis for good management. In the past, management was 'traditional' and based on parameters that were difficult to measure, such as experience and common sense. A constant flow of information,

through meetings, reports and booklets on wild boar, roe deer and Pyrenean chamois, finally resulted in the acceptance that censusing populations formed the first step to the management of these species. Now, the situation has completely changed. Hunters are arguing on trends or roe deer densities while only three years ago they didn't even know what it was. Juan's communication skills and constant effort to keep his target groups informed also resulted in a course on chamois management in 2001 for the regional administration, scientific institutes, the university and the hunting federation. It was the first time such course in such setting was held in Spain.

The Browser is distributed amongst the members of the Large Herbivore Initiative (LHI) and related persons and organizations.

This newsletter and the LHI-brochure are available upon request, both printed and digital (pdf).

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LARGE HERBIVORE **LHI** INITIATIVE

The Browser

THE OTHER SIDE [Full Name: Margret Bunzel-Drüke] [Birth Place: Soest, Germany] [Birthdate: 03.09.1956]

From toads to 'wild' cattle

The environment she works in looks like a naturalists dream. Her office is situated in a typical rural German village, a cristal clear stream passes by and owls and martens are her natural neighbours. Margret Bunzel-Drüke must be a privileged person. The Browser went to Germany to see if this dream is reality and how she got into the conservation business.

Margret in full swing. photo © Joachim Drüke



The Browser: How does an average day in your life look like?

"This is hard to answer, because working for an NGO like the ABU means a lot of variation. During spring or early summer, a typical day may be like this: I get up early and start mapping bird territories around sunrise in the 'Klostermersch' reserve. This is a nature development area where one of our herds of Heck cattle live. Arriving at the office before noon, I work on the yearly reports we have to do or maybe analyse some data of an electrofishing survey. In the afternoon I may have to represent the ABU (and hopefully the interests of nature) in an official discussion about some projects like perimeter roads, sewage plants or wind turbines. If I'm more lucky, it is a meeting of the group planning the restoration of yet another stretch of the Lippe river and floodplain. After my official hours end, it is time for some field work in the kingfisher population study that my husband, some friends and me started 27 years ago."

The Browser: If it was entirely up to you, what would an average day in your life look like?

"I really don't know, because I like to do a lot of things. My work is alright, maybe I should

just wish for a little more time for nature photography and research and less administration work."

The Browser: What is your first memory of yourself with respect to nature or biology?

"On one of our family's frequent visits to my uncle Otto's farm in Opmünden, I must have been four or five years old, I heard an intermittent sound like a very distant bell coming from somewhere in the farmyard. My uncle explained that it was the call of a little toad. When I asked to see the animal I was told that it was sitting in some crack in the wall or deep in the ground and could not be found. Left alone during the afternoon, it took me some time to locate the place

where the call came from – a medium large heap of paving-stones. I removed the rubble one stone at a time and nearly under the last stone there was my treasure: a golden-eyed midwife toad carrying yellow eggs on its hind legs. I felt like I had discovered a new continent."

The Browser: In ten years time, regarding nature conservation, "I would be very happy, when..."

... we have several really large reserves all over Europe where all the surviving species of large herbivores live together under near-natural conditions and go about their business shaping the landscape."

The Browser: Do you feel that women have equal opportunities in Germany in the field of nature conservation as men?

"Ten years ago I was not so sure, but today I think the opportunities in this particular field of work are nearly equal."



Thanks to the efforts of ABU and Margret, 'wild' cattle appeared in various reserves in North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany. photo © Margret Bunzel-Drüke

Bison on the move in Poland (part II)

On 6 December 2001, four European bison (three bulls and one cow) have been brought from Denmark and Sweden (Ebeltoft ZOO, Boras ZOO and Stockholm ZOO) to improve the gene pool of the free ranging herd in Bieszczady Mountains, Poland.

Animals for introduction were selected on their genetic basis (pedigree book). The bison were placed in an acclimatisation enclosure at Komancza Forest District. The release is planned for late spring 2002. Animals will be fitted with radio-collars to facilitate the assessment of introduction success and their movements with the wild herd.



European bison in Bieszczady Mountains, Poland. photo © Kajetan Perzanowski

Herbivores and farmers competing for land

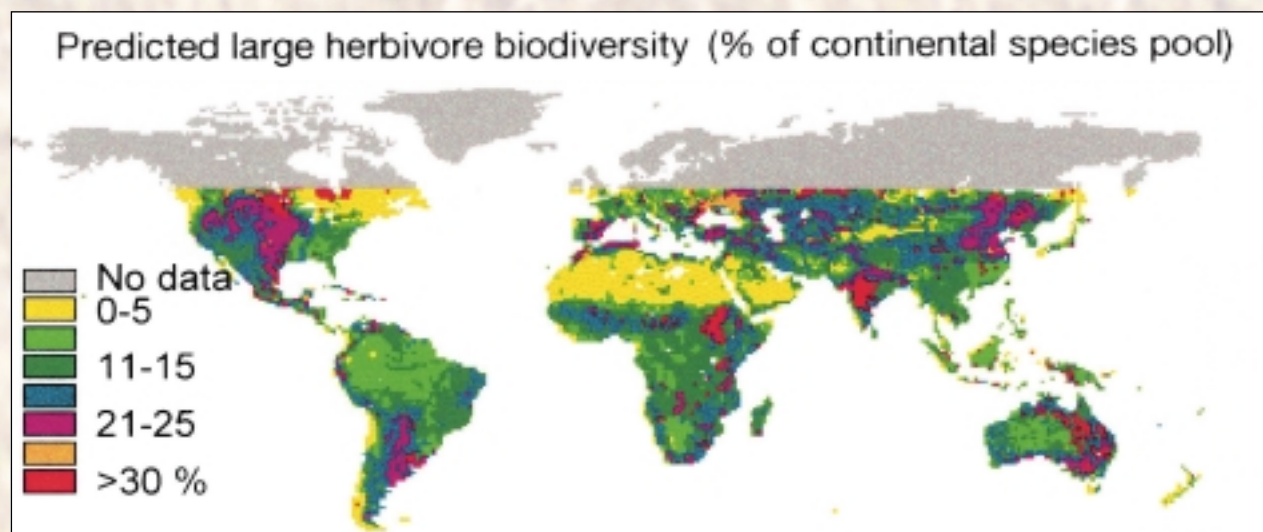


Figure reprinted by permission from Nature (415: 901-904), copyright (2002) Macmillan Publishers Ltd. Global environmental controls of diversity in large herbivores; H. Olf, M. E. Ritchie, H. H. T. Prins.

The authors investigated how the diversity of large herbivores changes across gradients of global precipitation and soil fertility.

They showed that more plant-available moisture reduces the nutrient content of plants but increases productivity, whereas more plant-available nutrients increase both of these factors. Because larger herbivore species tolerate lower plant nutrient content but require greater plant abundance, the highest potential herbivore diversity should occur in locations with intermediate moisture and high nutrients. These areas are dry enough to yield high quality

plants and support smaller herbivores, but productive enough to support larger herbivores. These predictions fit with observed patterns of body size and diversity for large mammalian herbivores in North America, Africa and Australia, and yield a global map of regions with potentially high herbivore diversity. Thus, gradients of precipitation, temperature and soil fertility might explain the global distribution of large herbivore diversity and help to identify crucial areas for conservation and restoration.

For example, the prime regions for large herbivore diversity can host potentially more than 25%

of the species in a continental species pool, but comprise only about 5% of the investigated land of the world. Fewer than 2% of the prime regions for large herbivore diversity overlap with regions designated as 'general purpose' biodiversity hotspots. Current land-use practices suggest that more than half of the area of prime regions has been already converted to agriculture and lost its herbivore diversity. Another 25% of these prime regions may be converted to agriculture in the next 25 year. Thus, by 2025 less than 1.2% of the earth's surface might remain to support uniquely diverse, grazing ecosystems.

LIFE STOCK

EDITORIAL

Positive response

We have had a positive response to the first issue of The Browser. Both issues will also be put on the WWF-intranet to communicate to an even broader audience on large herbivore conservation needs and what the LHI network is doing about it. Inevitably, large herbivore news is a mixture of successes and set-backs. Lets keep the successes in mind and change the set-backs into challenges. Strengthening of cooperation with LCIE and PAN parks, focussing more on the priority WWF ecoregions can open up possibilities for stronger conservation efforts. The successes, like for Mongolian saiga, Mongolian gazelle and European bison, indicate that we are making a difference. So thank you all in and outside the LHI network for that!

Fred Baerselman

The Browser

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