

### Contents

**VOICE FROM THE WILD**  
(A letter from the editors)  

In our fourth issue of *Russian Conservation News*, we bring you important information about little-known regions in Russia which play a vital role in biodiversity conservation. We call your attention to two endangered ecosystems, the first of which is under immediate threat of destruction, following a political decision in May.

Currently, the boreal forests of northern Europe are threatened with extermination. The May 17, 1995 signing by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin of a Decree on the "development" of the border zone between Finland and Russia could have a disastrous impact on the remaining old growth spruce and pine forests in northern Russia. These forests have

**PROTECTED AREAS**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- A NATIONAL PARK FOR THE JEWISH AUTONOMOUS REGION: CONSERVING CULTURAL AND BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
- ENDANGERED ECOSYSTEMS: MEADOW STEPPE  
- AFTER THIRTY YEARS, AMUR REGION GETS A NEW ZAPODE VNIK  
- ANCIENT SITES GAIN NEW STATUS: UGRA NATIONAL PARK  
- CONSERVING CULTURE AND FORESTS IN THE RUSSIAN NORTH: KENO ZERSKI NATIONAL PARK  

**FOCUS: BOREAL FOREST UNDER THREAT**  

- PRIME MINISTER CHERNOMYRDIN SIGNS AWAY KARELIA’S FORESTS  
- THE GREEN BELT OF KARELIA: THE LAST STAND  
- THE RUSSIAN-FINNISH BORDER ZONE: PRESERVING VALUABLE WESTERN TAIGA  

**NEWS OF THE DAY**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- RUSSIAN CONGRESS PROTECTED AREAS ON NATURE CONSERVATION: AGONY OR PROMISE OF A DIALOGUE?  
- ECOFORUM’95  
- ECOFORUM’95 ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION GATHER IN KIEV FOR A SECOND “DISCOVERY OF AMERICA”  
- NEW BIOLOGICAL STATION ESTABLISHED IN THE ARCTIC: “WILLEM BARENTS” BIOLOGICAL STATION  

**CONSERVATION LEGISLATION**  

- A NEW LAW IS PASSED IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION “ON ANIMAL WORLD”  

**ENDANGERED SPECIES**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- ELUSIVE AND ENDANGERED: THE SNOW LEOPARD OF CENTRAL ASIA  
- FROM STEPPE TO STORE: THE TRADE IN SAIGA ANTELOPE HORN  
- NORTHERN SAKHALIN: UNIQUE ZONE OF BIODIVERSITY IN DANGER  
- NOT JUST A THISTLE...  
- THE STATUS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN TORTOISE (“TESTUDINO GREECA NIKOLSKII”) IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS  

**BULLETIN BOARD**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- CORRECTIONS FROM LAST ISSUE  
- KNOW YOUR METRICS  
- CONSERVATION CONTACTS  
- CONSERVATION LIBRARY  

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The Biodiversity Conservation Center of the Socio-Ecological Union is a Russian non-profit, non-governmental organization aiming to preserve the biological diversity of Eurasia. BCC’s programs help to conserve wilderness, endangered species and ecosystems, promote public environmental education, and assist other nature conservation groups to achieve these goals.

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**On the Cover:**  
Eagl-owl (*Bubo bubo*)  
Reprinted with permission from Kerzhenski Zapovedniki’s 1995 calendar

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conservation value not only inside the country, but also play a critical role as a corridor for species common to Finland, where intensive forestry and wetlands drainage has threatened their survival. (See focus article on the Green Belt of Karelia).

Another example of a fascinating and threatened ecosystem type in Russia is the steppe ecosystem. When it comes to biodiversity, the most often-cited example is the rain forests of central and South America. Although the overall diversity of plant species in those rain forests is higher, no where else are species so tightly “packed together” as in the steppe ecosystems of Central Russia. With intensive agricultural development throughout the fertile "black soil" region, few patches of steppe remain preserved. As support from the central government wanes, and privatization and poorly controlled development increases, areas that protect steppe, such as Tsentralno-Chernozemny, Khopersky, Zhigulevsky, and Privolzhskaya Lesostep Zapovedniki (nature reserves), Samarskaya Luka National Park and others are more threatened than ever. A recent conference in Tsentralno-Chernozemny Zapovednik highlighted the potential solutions to conserve the steppe (See article on Tsentralno-Chernozemny Zapovednik).

We also continue to provide you with background information on the endangered and threatened species of plants and animals of North Eurasia. The article by the experts of "Ibiris" Ecolub features a secluded and magnificent predator of Central Asia - the snow leopard, now an object of international illegal trade.

We hope that you are enjoying your summer in some wild and beautiful places. We continue receiving your letters, and appreciate your genuine interest in conservation news from Russia. After spending busy weeks at the office producing our newsletter, we long to leave Moscow and visit some of the great wilderness areas of Russia, some of which are described in this issue. Our common goal is to ensure that there are still some places like this around!

A NATIONAL PARK FOR THE JEWISH AUTONOMOUS REGION: CONSERVING CULTURAL AND BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

by Nikolai Sukhomlinov

Editor's note:
The Jewish Autonomous Region was organized in 1934 in Khabarovsk Krai, at the border of China. It covers 36 sq. km along the Amur River. Although originally it was Stalin’s plan to concentrate Jewish citizens in the region, today Russians and Ukrainians form the main part of its population. Most of the communities are situated along the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

The present environmental situation in the Jewish Autonomous Region is alarming — most of the forests have been logged, frequent fires have degraded unlogged ecosystems, and many species listed in the Red Data Books of rare and endangered species of Russia and the International Conservation Union (IUCN) are threatened. Among these species are the White-naped Crane (Grus vipio), Hooded Crane (Grus monachus), Black Stork (Ciconia nigra), Oriental Stork (Ciconia boyciana), Blakiston's Fish-owl (Ketupa blakistoni), and many others. Game animals have also declined rapidly and steadily, a visible result of poaching.

The gloomy reality of the region’s tremendous degradation requires urgent action, particularly because the Jewish Autonomous Region is situated at the border of four biogeographical provinces. Many species live at the edge of their ranges here, and increasing human disturbance makes these ecosystems especially vulnerable and needy of protection.

The Institute of Comprehensive Analysis of Regional Problems of the Far Eastern branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences has recently identified the most important territories to preserve — those territories representing special features of the area and forming its ecological framework, a network of intact natural communities.

These territories are not only important for preserving endemic species and species listed in the Red Book, but are also important for supporting an ecological balance benefiting local land users. For example, the large agricultural fields situated in the watersheds of the Pompeev Ridge rely on the preservation of a forested upper watershed to regulate flooding and crop destruction.

Currently, protected areas of the Jewish Autonomous Republic are represented by five special purpose nature preserves, totaling an area of 2,500 square km. These individual Zakazniki are not effective because in practice they exist only in paper. A decision was made to create a new Nature Reserve at the place of one of the Zakazniki. The Nature Reserve will not be representative of the region, will not include the habitat of many rare species, and will occupy areas which are not of high importance to the support of an environmental balance.

Taking into consideration a number of specific factors, the Institute of Comprehensive Analysis believes that the first step in forming a protected area system should be the organization of a National Park. The Institute’s research shows that an area of 3,000 square km (8% of the region) needs to be protected. It is likely that future research will demonstrate a necessity to increase that amount. This proposal is opposed by different leaders at all levels of government, although the “inconveniences” they foresee would be hardly noticeable in the regional economy. No one in the administration can justify their opposition to the designation of 8% of the area with protected status.

In fact, some economic activities in the area could be combined with the preservation regime, so prohibiting
them entirely would be unjustified.
Of all economic interests, including forestry and hunting, only the large timber enterprise should be immediately removed from the area of the proposed National Park. The region's forests are depleted, the timber company does not have any perspective, and to sacrifice the most ecologically valuable forests to prolong the agony of the company is at the minimum very short-sighted.

Some non-timber forest uses could be permitted, for example, the collection of pine nuts by a specialized seed-harvesting company minimally harms the environment, and could easily occur within the management regime of the National Park. Even hunting could be allowed in some parts of the National Park, particularly because legal hunters would be economically interested in protecting the area from poachers, and in keeping some areas closed for hunting to enable populations to reproduce.

Because most individual activities (hunting, fishing, gathering) could be included in the National Park's regulations, economic impacts on the local community will also be minimized. The only serious obstacle to protecting the local economy is logging for local purposes. It would be impossible to prohibit logging in the near future, but the amount of timber cut annually for this purpose is small and appropriate logging could be addressed within the management plan of the National Park. At the same time the demand for local timber may be decreased by enhancing local economic alternatives.

Another problem the new National Park could address is environmental education, which is completely lacking in the region and is necessary in order to overcome the colonial way of thinking that characterizes the region's settlers and has deep psychological roots. This mentality is prolonged by the development of extractive industries which do not promote integrated use of the resources, and lead to quick depletion of the resources and development of new lands. This economy creates a colonial psychology — the feeling that everything is temporary — which is reflected by a very low level of cultural adaptation, and a weak connection with nature. Since the process of colonization still continues, the National Park could play a significant role in the socio-ecological adaptation of the local people. Most of whom are the first generation of settlers from the Far East.

And finally, the creation of a National Park could also promote the integration of recreation into the region's economy. Properly organized, the National Park could promote tourism, which is one of the most profitable and quickly repaid objects for investment. Currently, the area's recreational resources are poorly used, due to inaccessibility, underdeveloped infrastructure, insects, and huge seasonal temperature fluctuations. At the same time, the diversity of the region's landscape, the mountains with many caves, and the region's geological peculiarities may be very attractive to recreationists. The region also has historical cultural points of interest, as archeologists have discovered many Siberian settlements of different times and cultures, including signs of each major event in Russia's colonization of the Far East.

Despite the proposed National Park's importance as a last sanctuary of biological diversity and its potential for recreation, officials remain opposed to its creation. Today federal protected areas are subject to federal regulations and funding. Proposals for creation of a new protected area should come from subjects of the Federation — in the Jewish Autonomous Republic this would be the head of the Oblast government. People who make decisions at the Oblast level have informal relationships with the heads of raions (or districts, a smaller administrative and political unit), who have informal relationships with heads of enterprises, who see the new National Park as an estrangement of territories and a new regulating body. Political instability and the psychology of provisional government also play their role.

It seems peculiar, but in order to overcome the negative sociopsychological phenomena which prevent creation of the new National Park a number of special long term measures should be undertaken, one of which is the creation of a new National Park.

Nikolai Sukhomininov is a researcher in the Institute of Comprehensive Analyse of Regional Problems of the Far Eastern branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences.
ENDANGERED ECOSYSTEMS: MEADOW STEPPES

from the editors

Created in 1935, Tsentralno-Chernozemny Zapovednik is one of Russia’s oldest nature reserves. The reserve was designated to conserve the last patches of virgin chernozem (the thick fertile soils predominately spanning southern Russia) and last remnants of the unique meadow steppes of Central Russia. Distinguished for its achievements in research of steppe ecosystems, this Zapovednik now plays a key role in preserving one of the most endangered ecosystems of the world. Its greatest achievement is the conservation of unique meadow steppe lands amidst a highly populated and industrialized region.

The meadow steppes still surviving in the preserve are among the most diverse temperate plant communities in the world. Of all the plant communities existing in the former Soviet Union, meadow steppes of Tsentralno-Chernozemny Zapovednik have the highest species richness (number of plant species per square meter). On a single square meter of the steppe here up to 80 (!) species of higher plants can be found. For comparison, not more than 30 to 40 species are found on one square meter of a diverse meadow in temperate zone either in Russia, or in North America. It means that steppe communities here reached the highest differentiation of ecological niches ever described. Although overall diversity of plant species in Brazilian rain forests is undoubtedly greater, there species are not so tightly “packed together” as here.

The most common grasses here are meadow brome (Bromopsis riparia), fescue (Festuca valesiaca), and beautiful feathergrass (Stipa pennata). During the year the predominant colors in the steppe change 8 times. Early in the spring they are rich yellow with flowers of spring adonis (Adonis vernalis), with sparks of deep purple of rock lily (Pulsatilla patens). At the beginning of summer the intense blue flowers of meadow sage (Salvia pratensis) and drooping wild sage cover all the steppe. Over 1,060 vascular plants native to the area occur in the Zapovednik. Some of them are not found in any other preserve in Russia, e.g., white-stem milk vetch (Astragalus albicaulis), hairy flax (Linum hirsutum) and rock jasmine (Androscace kosopoljanskii). Eleven species of plants growing here are listed in the Red Data Book of Russia, e.g., Russian frilliant (Fritillaria ruthenica), thin-leaved peony (Paeonia tenuifolia) and dark-winged orchis (Orchis ustulata).

Tsentralno-Chernozemny consists of several units in Kursk and Belgorod Regions, occupying a total area of 5044 hectares of unique northern meadow steppe, mixed broadleaf forests, and some wetlands. This year, the reserve was expanded by 300 hectares and there are plans to add another four separate units with a total area of 1800 ha. This is a biosphere reserve designated under the UNESCO program “Man and Biosphere.”

This Zapovednik has played a significant role in research and academia: 40 doctoral and 180 Master’s dissertations have been defended using the Zapovednik as a base, 14 volumes of scientific works conducted at the Zapovednik have been published, and more than ten scientific conferences have been held; participated in the two large international projects for satellite environmental monitoring (NASA, USA).

The Zapovednik is in great need of financial support for its research division. With a scientific staff of 17 (out of 65 total employees), the Zapovednik had only $36,000 a year in 1994, $24,000 of which came from the federal government budget) for operations, maintenance, protection, and research.

WHY SAVE THE STEPPE???

by Nikolai Maleshin

The fate of the steppe (like the prairie of the Great Plains of America) is a dramatic one. This is the first case of a natural zone that has been virtually wiped out in its entirety. At the expense of steppe ecosystems, human society has resolved and continues to resolve its most essential problems, most important of which is obtaining food resources. About ten thousand years ago the human population of ten million people, mostly hunter-gatherers (thriving on fruits, berries, roots, game, fish, etc.) came up against the unpleasant fact: the abundance of shelf products in the unfailing “biosphere supermarket” became insufficient to cover the total annual demand by people. Having understood that the biosphere is not a bottomless barrel, ancient peoples had to invent agricultural systems, using grasslands (i.e., steppes) as a model. Wild steppe ecosystems had the thickest and most fertile soils on the planet. This wonderful “vegetable garden” provided nutrients for the “pet” project of human agriculture. Thanks to the steppe, man avoided starvation and overcame the first crisis in cohabitation of society and the biosphere. Operation “steppe agriculture”, put to an end in the 1960s, allowed humans to increase their representation on the planet to four billion.

Today almost all the virgin steppes (and their analogs in the New World, prairies) have been converted to intensive agriculture. In Russia, for instance, we can find only a few fragments of undisturbed steppe, still surviving in isolated patches in individual Zapovedniki throughout this zone. Steppe remnants are usually located where the landscape geology made farming “inconvenient” for human settlements. Today scientists at Tsentralno-Chernozemny...
Protected Areas

Zapovednik try to find answers to the following important questions, using the steppes in Zapovednik as a baseline study area: What kind of consequence will destruction of steppes have for conservation of diverse steppe landscapes and for genetic diversity? Do we have sufficient genetic resources to restore the steppe? Can we limit ourselves to restoration or conservation of fragments of steppe like rare museum pieces or should we strive to conserve entire landscapes and ecosystems? These complex questions should be the subject of an international dialogue among conservationists and scientists from Russia, the USA, Ukraine, Canada, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and others.

Participants in the recent conference in Tsentralno-Chernozemny Zapovednik called the attention to those for whom conservation of steppe of Eurasia and North America is an important issue to the fact that in the system of National Parks and nature reserves of the world steppe/prairie ecosystems and the diversity they encompass are the least represented. The fate of these protected wilderness areas in the state of a growing environmental crisis is becoming problematic, and the possibilities to preserve biological diversity of the steppe may be gone in the next decade.

Participants of the May conference issued a series of recommended measures for improving conservation of steppe ecosystems throughout the world. They included:

- creation of a system of protected areas in steppe zones;
- creation of non-governmental organizations, such as the International Steppe League for the coordination of all scientific and applied work;
- complete inventory of lands reserved for the creation of new protected areas, including those lands on former military bases in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine;
- expansion of existing Zapovedniki (Tsentralno-Chernozemny, Ukrainian Steppe, Black Sea, Askania Nova, Galichya Gora, Provolskayga Lesostep, Orenburgski, Altaiiski, Daurski, Khinganski, and others);
- implementation of a land use regime that would maintain steppe ecosystems to as close as possible a natural state;
- active development of methods to restore steppe on disturbed area using experience already developed by Zapovednik, which have a large selection of genetically diverse plant material.

Nikolai Maleshin is the Director of Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Zapovednik

AFTER THIRTY YEARS, AMUR REGION GETS A NEW ZAPOVEDNIK

by Dr. Yuri A. Darman

Amur Region is located in the Amur Basin of the middle and upper reaches of the Amur River. The region has a total area of 36.4 million hectares, with a population of 1.2 million. The majority of cities and towns are situated in the south of the region, in the fertile lands of the Zeya-Bureinskii Valley. The north of the region is taiga—endless, boundless taiga. But even here, humans have managed to damage nature with massive forest clearcuts, mineral extraction, and dumping of tailings. Preservation of untouched forests is becoming all the more difficult, as former mechanisms of control and enforcement are lost and have yet to be replaced by new ones. With the current transition to private ownership of property, if these remaining bits of wilderness are not soon put into conservation, we will be faced with the task of buying such lands from business interests back in order to preserve them.

Given this situation, the task of creating protected areas in Russia is now critically important. Unfortunately, the two Zapovedniki in Amur Region (Khinganski and Zeya) were created in 1963, and in these past 30 years, no new Zapovedniki have been designated! The area of the existing Zapovedniki totals 197,000 hectares - 0.5% of the entire territory of the region, instead of the recommended three percent. Because governmental nature protection agencies have virtually estranged themselves from this question, the Amur branch of the SocioEcological Union (SEU), Russia’s largest non-governmental environmental organization, have taken upon themselves the challenge of protected areas creation. The first task we assigned ourselves was the creation of Norski Zapovednik. Financial assistance for the project has been provided from the World Wild Fund for Nature, through the Khabarovsk Wildlife Fund and support has been provided from John Seed (Rain Forest Information Center), Bill Pfeiffer (Sacred Earth Network) and Sergey Smirenkski (Amur Program of SEU).

The selected territory for the new Zapovednik is the most appropriate area for the region’s first Zapovednik protecting larch-peatmoss bogs. The
Protected Areas

basin-like form of the inter-stream area between the Nora and Selemdja River create an unusual natural zone with unique fauna life. Here one can find these larch-peatmoss bog forests with expansive wetlands and thermokarst lakes, typical for the Amur region. Mesophytic meadows occur along the flood plains of the Selemdja and Nora Rivers. This region is the northern border of the range of many plants and animals of Manchurian and Daurski (biogeographic regions) origin.

All together, the flora of Norski Zapovednik consists of 472 species of higher vascular plants (about 30% of the list of flora of Amur Region). Twelve species of rare and endangered plants represent the special value of the region, among them: large-flowered ladies'-slipper (Cypripedium macranthum) and spotted ladies'-slipper (C. guttatum), smooth-leaved flag (Iris laevigata) and sword-like flag (I. ensata), caltrop (Trapa natans), obovate peony (Paeonia obovata), Asian adlumia (Adlumia asiatica), Bush’s lily (Lilium buschianum) and Pennsylvanian lily (L. pennisylvanicum), Chinese chizandra (Schizandra chinesis), lesser spatterdock (Nuphar pumila).

In terms of zoology, the region is located at the crossways of four historic biogeographic regions: Far Eastern, Okhotsk-Kamchatka, PriAmur and Mongolian Daurski. The list of vertebrate animals exceeds 300 species. The avifauna here is more representative of PriAmur and Okhotsk-Kamchatska types, while mammals more closely reflect Far Eastern zones, and to a lesser extent PriAmur. Especially important are the wetlands areas between the Nora and Selemdja Rivers - habitat for 15 bird species in the Russian Red Data Book of Rare and Endangered Species. Nesting species, include one pair of Japanese Cranes (Grus japonensis) and 8 pairs of Hooded Cranes (Grus monachus), 12 nests of Oriental Storks (Ciconia boyciana) and 3 active nests of Black Storks (C. nigra), 2 nest of White-tailed Eagle (Haliaeetus albicilla) and no less than 4 pairs of Osprey (Pandion haliaetus). The presence of Golden Eagle (Aquila chrysaetus), Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus), Spotted Eagle (Aquila clanga) is also likely here. There are many birds whose nesting density is higher (at least 150 birds) in this area than any other areas in Amur Region, such as Whooper Swan (Cygnus cygnus).

Falcon (Falco peregrinus), Spotted Eagle (Aquila clanga) is also likely here. There are many birds whose nesting density is higher (at least 150 birds) in this area than any other areas in Amur Region, such as Whooper Swan (Cygnus cygnus).

in the fall feeding on berries and head for their dens in the more northern section of the Zapovednik.

Thus, the inter-stream zone between the Nora and Selemdja, soon to be preserved in the Zapovednik encompass both typical natural communities, characteristic for a particular ecological-landscape type, and a unique world of flora and fauna.

As of today all of the necessary negotiations have been conducted with land users, and various agencies. One of the serious problems faced during this process was the question of gold deposits and decorative stones located within the territory planned for the Zapovednik.

However, the Division of Natural Resources Use of the Amur Region administration and the Amur Committee on Geology and Land Use pointed to a necessity of an integrated approach to nature conservation and reserved a section of this land for use by future generations.

Finally, on June 16, 1995, the Selemdja district administration officially passed an agreement on the organization of Norski Zapovednik, designating a total area of 211,168 ha. Now this decision should be confirmed at the level of Amur Regional Administration and the Russian Federation. We believe that by 1996, on the map of Russia will appear a new Zapovednik, serving the goal of conserving the earth’s biological diversity.

The creation alone of the nature reserve is a small step; now, helping to strengthen it is the next task. Due to Russia’s complex economic situation, the Ministry of Environmental Protection can allocate only a minimal amount of funding needed for Norski Zapovednik. Equipment for protection and law enforcement, buildings for work space and living quarters are all items needed from the start of the new Zapovednik. We have submitted a proposal to the World Wild Fund for Nature, and we will hope to receive a positive response. In any case, Norski Zapovednik will welcome any assistance from our foreign colleagues!

Dr. Yuri Darman is the Director of the Amur branch of SocioEcological Union.
ANCIENT SITES GAIN NEW STATUS: UGRA NATIONAL PARK

by Yuli Dobrushin

The landscape surrounding Moscow is an area with a long and diverse history rich in scenic natural beauty. Many such areas in European Russia should be protected for future generations. One of these is the proposed Ugra National Park in the Kaluga Region (Oblast), the designation process for which is progressing at a rapid pace.

The proposed park is located approximately 200-250 km southwest of Moscow, between the two largest tributaries of Oka river, the Ugra and Zhizdra. Many key turning points in Russian history have left either physical or spiritual marks on the area. It is primarily because of this rich historical and cultural value that this region is being planned as a National Park.

It should come as no surprise that the area proposed for the “Ugra” National Park is saturated with history. The physical evidence of its history can be seen in the form of many memorial sites; archaeological finds, architectural monuments, old villages, monasteries, churches, and other traces of ancient activities. It is important that the landscapes where the Russian nation was formed is preserved as a reminder of past events.

Some examples of the region’s historical importance include an original Slavic settlement dating back to the 8th and 9th centuries, where many archaeological monuments may still be seen; the devastating invasion by the Mongols in the 13th century, marked by the heroic defense of Kozelsk and the final liberation of Russia in 1480 (known throughout Russia as “the stand at the Ugra River”), the age-old dispute with the Polish and Lithuanian states over bordering principalities; the Times of Trouble in the beginning of the 17th century; the crushing defeat of Napoleon’s army in 1812; and many bloody battles in the Second World War. A large and unique forested area of broadleaf trees (the so-called “Abatis line”, maintained as a defense against invading nomads) is still preserved near Kozelsk. The monastery, “Optina Pustyn”, has long been one of the spiritual centers in Russia. And finally, many prominent writers and philosophers of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Leontiev, and Soloviev, often visited this region in search of inspiration for their writing.

The level of biodiversity in the proposed park is relatively high for the Central Russian region. The waters of the Ugra and Zhizdra Rivers are considered to be of high quality or only slightly polluted, a rare situation in this region for such large rivers. These rivers still contain populations of Russian Sturgeon (Acipenser ruthenus, L.) and Sculpin (Cottus gobio, L.), both listed in the Russian Red Data Book of Rare and Endangered Species. There is also great biological variety in the river valleys, where many species rare for the region occur. These include the Russian Desman (Desmana moschata, L.), Giant Noctule (Nyctalus lasiopeterus Sch.), Otter (Lutra lutra, L.), Beaver (Castor fiber, L.), White Stork (Ciconia ciconia, L.), Gray or Common Crane (Grus grus, L.), and other rare animals.

The proposed park will encompass many types of plant communities, such as bogs, south taiga spruce forest, European broadleaf forests, and steppes. Because of the historical, cultural, and environmental uniqueness of the area, and because of the picturesque landscapes of middle Russia, there is reason to believe that the park will attract a lot of tourists from Russia and other countries. Already the number of individual tourists has steadily grown each year. It will therefore be necessary to organize the least ecologically harmful eco-tourism, designed to educate the public as well as preserve the land.

The formation of a National Park on lands traditionally used for economic development can often create many problems. As a result of the integrated valuation of the territory by several research institutes and planning organizations, the size of the proposed park was reduced to 100 ha, a third of the original size recommended. Only fifty percent of this territory is owned by the government. The remaining lands are owned by collective agricultural enterprises, private farmers, and local administrations (municipal property). Under such conditions it is only possible to organize a European-style National Park, with a considerable part of the land remaining as property of the original owner. To effectively manage and protect Ugra National Park, land use restrictions should be placed on a large amount of land that is in the hands of privatized collective farms or other enterprises. This area, encompassing forested areas, bogs, and lakes in the valleys as well as the most valuable natural monuments, is about 8,000 ha.

Because the government currently does not have the necessary funds to buy these lands, persuasion, publicity in the mass media, and direct administrative pressure are being used to obtain the landowners consent to place these lands under a nature protection regime.

In addition to land users, very often, regional administrations are opposed to creating a National Park. They are concerned about losing the traditional forms of regional income such as timber cutting and processing, raw materials extraction, and other economic activities, in exchange for the uncertain future income to be generated by tourism.

Despite great difficulty, progress is being made due to the dedicated efforts of environmentalists from Moscow and Kaluga, and support of the Russian Forest Service. And near the end of July the topic will be discussed in a meeting of the legislature of Kaluga Region. In the meantime the struggle for the “Ugra” National Park continues!

Yuli V. Dobrushin is a chief engineer at the Rosgiproles planning institute of the Russian Forest Service. He has worked on the formation of Samarskaya Luka, Kurshskaya Kosa, Pribaikalski, Russki Sever, Chavash Varmane, Paemayarve, and Ugra National Parks.
One of the greatest challenges facing protected areas managers of Russia is community relations. Many protected areas managers must find ways of resolving conflicts with communities on whom new limitations of land use rights have been placed and subsequently need to re-orient their economic activities. In Russia, the borders of many National Parks are drawn to incorporate agricultural lands, without removing these lands from the previous owners (state agencies) that manage them. Although, according to law, such land owners should observe certain environmental regulations when a park is designated, there are no mechanisms for the park to enforce such regulations, or to punish violators.

Opinions vary about what level of interaction the park should have with these land owners. Several consider that without authority to manage land use on such territories, the park should be completely independent of its neighbors. The absence of a clear policy from the central government (i.e., the Federal Forest Service, which is responsible for National Parks management) on how park administrations can interact with surrounding landusers means that each individual must invent innovative, ad hoc solutions to a given problem. The Director of Kenozerski National Park, Elena Shatkovskaya, is finding her own way of solving such questions.

Kenozerski National Park, one of Russia's youngest National Parks, was created in December, 1991 to preserve important natural and cultural resources in Archangelsk Region (in northwestern Russia). In addition to preserving large tracts of virgin boreal forest, within the park's 139,200 hectares lies a treasure trove of religious and architectural edifices, testimony to the rich culture and long traditions of the people of the region. The park preserves about one hundred 17th and 18th Century wooden constructions: churches, chapels, 26 outdoor crosses, sacred groves, and 39 archaeological sites. Frescoes, icons, and iconostases, and art "endemic" to the Russian north enrich these monuments. Of special interest are two wooden enclosures from the 17th Century — two of the only remaining three in the Russian north. Currently an international school for architects is being planned on the base of the National Park. This year, the first students will come from Germany.

Such monuments were left by eastern Slavic and Scandinavian peoples who settled along the lakes in this northern region and have resided here since the 16th century. As Director Shatkovskaya has said, the park is a sort of "reservoir of Slavic culture", a repository of resources found in number and scale no where else. Untouched by war, ethnic or religious conflicts, and little demographic change, these communities have preserved many traditions and ways of life. Throughout the centuries, they have also preserved their traditions of land use, characterized by careful and sustainable use of the natural resources around them. Today, these traditions continue, through daily activities closely connected with nature: recently, residents of one village helped to plant a modern "sacred grove". The many historic monuments are still in constant use, unlike many sites that would have been long ago closed off as museums.

When Kenozerski National Park was created, developed land was included along with virgin forests and cultural monuments. Almost 13,000 hectares of agricultural lands and 46 villages, with a total population of 2,500, fall within park boundaries. Now, much of the Park's activities are aimed at improving the economic conditions and way of life for these communities, which were hard hit by economic upheaval in the last few years and disappearing government subsidies for agriculture.

In addition to these villages, the park "inherited" a dairy farm with 600 head, which produce high quality milk. In recent years, the old-style Soviet farm, once highly subsidized, crumbled in the new economy, and is virtually bankrupt. The park has taken on the financing of dairy production, and with some subsidies from local and regional agricultural agencies, is trying to help the farm break even. The Director of the park is striving to preserve the traditional way of life in this rural area and to provide local people with jobs. As a potential way to achieve both goals, she designed a project to re-construct the farm with efficient management and appropriate equipment to minimize environmental impact while maximizing profit. A second, but related project that Director Shatkovskaya plans to develop is the production, packaging, and marketing of "chemical-free" dairy products from this farm.

Last year, Shatkovskaya attended a US-Russian conference on National Park management held in Petrozavodsk, Russia. Shatkovskaya presented a lecture on the programs in natural and cultural conservation, and hopes that Kenozerski can become a model for neighboring regions where similar ways of life and traditions still exist. By preserving their low-impact land use practices already used for centuries in the Russian north, Kenozerski may be developing a model for sustainable development and conservation for other protected areas as well. The park is currently looking for technical and financial assistance to initiate both projects.

All of the park's activities are guided by a long-term program for social and economic development of the park.
called "Revival of traditional ways of life and adaptation to new socio-economic conditions." Essentially the park has taken on a role as caretaker of the villages under its jurisdiction, actively trying to improve the degerating economic conditions of local residents. For example, in response to lack of jobs in the region for women, the park created a cottage-industry of goods to furnish tourist quarters or be sold as souvenirs. Women are now employed in their homes to produce a variety of textiles and hand-made crafts native to the region. The park opened two studios where folk art and goods are being produced with ancient instruments and tools — boat making, furniture restoration, rug braiding, basket making, and other crafts are made and sold at craft fairs, or used to serve the developing tourist industry. The park also has employed many of the village elders as guardians of the churches and other monuments that are being restored. Not only are they now protecting park treasures, but as long-time residents in Kenozero with a wealth of knowledge about the history and lore of the region, they are teaching others about the region's culture and traditions. The park also helps village senior citizens by providing them with firewood virtually free of cost.

Another example of the services Shatkovskaya took on for the park was the contracting and financing of a school for 40 children in one village. Addressing the poor level of food supplies in local stores, the park rented and now manages its own store. Now, thanks to the park, locals have a better choice of foods at a cheaper price.

Kenozerski National Park is expanding its international ties, also. The park has found several partners with whom to exchange professional experience in fields such as environmental education and protection, such as the Pocono Environmental Education Center in Pennsylvania, and the Association of Barents Sea Countries.

Since the early stages of the park's creation, when local residents had little enthusiasm and much apprehension toward the creation of park, much has changed. Through Shatkovskaya's constant work, that negative attitude is gradually reversing. Communities are beginning to see opportunity, where they once saw obstacles. Combining conservation with economic revival, the park has won more allies (a trend clearly demonstrated recently, when another former collective farm approached the park for assistance, asking the Director to take on the management of their operations, too). Finally, by restoring the dilapidated wooden churches and monuments, the park is raising pride in and knowledge about the residents' cultural and natural heritage.

For more information please contact the Biodiversity Conservation Center, or write to Director Shatkovskaya at the address listed on the back page of this bulletin.

Irina Chebahkova is an expert on National Parks in the Biodiversity Conservation Center's program, Protected Areas Management.

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**FOCUS: BOREAL FOREST UNDER THREAT**

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**PRIME MINISTER CHERNOMYRDIN SIGNS AWAY KARELIA'S FORESTS**

*by Margaret Williams*

On May 17, 1995, Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin signed a decree that, unless reversed, will destroy one of the last intact northern European forests. The decree, "with the goal of accelerating development of the land along the state border between the Republic of Finland and the Federation of Russia on the territory of the Republic of Karelia", will allow cutting "over a period of five years on the territory of Karelia [of] a two-kilometer zone along the state border with Finland, with an annual harvest of up to 1 million cubic meters and provision of timber materials for export."

The decree, "In agreement with the proposal of the government of Karelia," also states that customs tariffs on the above mentioned exports [will be] transferred to the government of the Republic of Karelia and the federal Border Guard of the Russian Federation for financing forest harvesting....on the territory of the Republic of Karelia, the creation of an infrastructure at the entrance to the border; and the improvement of social and living conditions of border guards and their families at border stations. (May 17, 1995. Decree No. 484. Moscow)

Reactions to the decree in the Karelian administration are mixed. Valentin Kalaev, of the Karelian Department of Nature Protection, said his agency was surprised by the announcement of the decree, about which the Karelian Minister of Environment learned at the All-Russian Congress on Nature Conservation, two weeks after the decree had been issued. Kalamaev
Focus: Boreal Forest Under Threat

THE GREEN BELT OF KARELIA: THE LAST STAND

by Margaret Williams

From Lake Ladoga to the White Sea, a 900-km belt of northern European taiga stretches along the Finnish-Russian border. Known as the "green belt of Karelia", (the region straddling the border of both countries), this stretch of land contains old growth forest and untouched wetlands. The green belt varies in width from 2 to 10 km and in some places is buffered by adjacent wilderness areas extending 25-30 km beyond the border. On the Russian side, the green belt has become a haven for flora and fauna species that have become endangered or extinct in Finland, where forests have been intensively managed and wetlands have been extensively drained (two-thirds of Finland's northern wetlands were drained in the late 1960's to create forest plantations). Ironically, these natural areas remain as a legacy of the Cold War: attempting to keep strict control over the border, Soviet rule prohibited any human activity in this zone, effectively creating a protected area. Now, these forests are no longer guarded, and their access to timber companies could mean the loss of one of the most important intact northern taiga ecosystems.

In 1992, recognizing the potential damage the market economy (increased timber and mineral extraction) could have on the natural areas along this border, the Finnish Ministry of Environment and the Karelian Scientific Research Center initiated a three-year study and survey of the region.

Following the project, a team of Finnish and Russian scientists developed a plan for a network of protected areas to be established along the border. Considering that planning regional conservation was articulated as a national priority at the recent All-Russian Environmental Congress, the plan is especially significant and timely. (See map of proposed plan on this page).

Through their research, the team determined that the two-km zone along

"Prime Minister Chernomyrdin signs away Karelia's forests", (continued from page 10)

said the decree has no scientific basis, referring to the studies of his colleagues within the Karelian Research Institute, who are strongly opposed to the plan. In a recent radio program, Chairman (equivalent to Governor) of the Government of Karelia, V.N. Stepanov and the head of the Forestry Committee Nikolai Nerush claimed that selective cutting will be practiced and the forestry activities along the border zone "will not harm the forests".

Scientific data, however, indicate otherwise. According to estimates based on forest service data, the supply of forests in this two-km belt is 11.6 million cubic meters. Much of the forest is represented by old and middle-aged forests, ripe for cutting. Thus, in five years, the annual harvest of one million cubic feet permitted by the decree, would destroy almost half of the green belt of Karelia. Considering these sobering figures, Nerush's assurances ring hollow.

Margaret Williams is Editor of Russian Conservation News, and an assistant in the Biodiversity Conservation Center's program Protected Areas Management

August 1995, #4
the border encompasses 166,178 ha., 112,000 of which are covered with forests, 58% pine and 39% spruce. Seventy-five percent of the non-forested areas is represented by wetlands ecosystems. Timber resources in the green belt are estimated at 11.6 million cubic meters. Given the depleted timber on the Finnish side, and the May 1995 decree on timber harvesting by Chernomyrdin, the forest resources are under greater pressure than ever.

Timber operations are rapidly multiplying in the region, but how much economic benefit will be felt by local Russians is questionable. According to Taiga Rescue Network, an international forest conservation network, with Russian milling technology defunct and too impoverished to pay required stumpage prices, most wood is being sold to western companies. Poor transportation facilities in Russia mean that much of the timber is being delivered to the Finnish side and used by Finnish industry.

Full information on which companies have staked an interest in the Karelian forests is not yet available. In the Lake Ladoga region, a Russian-Swedish joint venture has leased a large tract of forest for cutting. A team of Finnish conservation-activists is currently investigating the issue, trying to learn where the profits are going, what local residents know and think of the problem, and which active timber companies are in the region. The team has also conducted a forest inventory in the northern part of the green belt around Kostomuksha, mapping valuable old-growth forest tracts that they will recommend for conservation to the regional government. As these conservationists point out, the logging of the green belt will completely fracture the corridors between Finnish protected areas and Russian wilderness, further threatening and isolating wildlife populations.

Environmentalists hope that international campaigns to encourage boycotts of paper and wood products made from old-growth trees could pressure timber companies. Conservationists also hope that US Vice President Gore, reputedly a staunch environmentalist, could effect some kind of change. Gore and Chernomyrdin are signatories to a Memorandum of Understanding to create $4 billion in US-Russian trade. The cooperative agreement involves an exchange of US technology in logging and processing for Russian timber.

Taiga Rescue Network and Russian environmental groups have listed the following demands:

1. Support the creation of protected areas and the maintenance and management of existing protected areas;
2. Prohibit new forestry development projects in remaining large unfragmented areas;
3. Permit only ecologically sustainable forest management;
4. Ensure that all information on forest resources, planning, pulp and paper industry and international cooperation is accessible to the public.

In October, such demands will be presented at a meeting in Kostomuksha, a small city in Russian Karelia. Representatives from environmental groups from Russia, Sweden, Finland, Germany, and the USA will discuss strategies for conservation and sustainable use of the Karelian forests. They will be joined by a timber enterprises and government officials.

Russian Conservation News will keep its readers updated on this important issue. In the meanwhile, we ask that you send letters expressing opposition to the Chernomyrdin decree and support for the expansion of protected areas in the green belt.

Prime Minister V. Chernomyrdin 2 Krasnopresnenskaya Naberezhnaya Moscow 103274, RUSSIA Chairman V. N. Stepanov Government of Karelia 19 Leninsky Prospekt, Petrozavodsk Karelia 185928, RUSSIA Director of Forest Committee, NT: Nerush Minister of Environment M.S. Fishenko Dzerzhinskogo Street, #9 Petrozavodsk Karelia 185810 RUSSIA

In a letter written to the Chairman of the Government of Karelia (V. A. Stepanov) and the mayor of their town (V.A. Vare), a group of veterans from the town of Sortavala (in southern Karelia, on the northern shore of Lake Ladoga), expressed their outrage at the decree:

We, veterans of W.W.II, and residents of Sortavala, have been witnesses of the barbaric destruction of forests in northern Ladoga region. Each day tons of train loads of fine Karelian timber are being taken to the neighboring country [Finland]. The harvested areas are left in such a ravaged condition that it is unimaginable that even a blade of grass might some day grow there.

The unique forests around Lake Ladoga were preserved even during the difficult time of war in this country, and remained that way.

Now the current “development” is leading to a no less catastrophic consequences for the local community.

We warn that if measures are not taken to cease this predatory-like cutting, we will be obliged to call for your removal from office, since you have violated the trust of your electorate and permitted pure robbery of the Karelian lands.

We fear for our future generation.

This theme was discussed at a meeting of veterans on March 6-9, 1995, attended by 71 veterans. The vote on how we stand regarding this issue was unanimous.

signed: M. A. Babushkin
What are Russian Environmentalists saying?

So, do we really need to “develop” the border zone? To cut the forest and with the profits from timber exports, feed, outfit and equip a border guard which is now obsolete? If the decree by Chernomyrdin is implemented at the proposed rate of harvesting of these forests, in five years almost half of the entire forest supply in the 2-km belt will be cut and exported!

Two years ago, Greenpeace Germany and WWF of Great Britain conducted a wide-scale public campaign [against cutting of old growth forests]. The campaign resulted in an announcement by two of the largest publishing houses (Otto and Burda) that they would not use any paper from trees cut in an unsustainable manner. Pressure was put on Finnish publishers, too, and many of them (at least in words) made the same commitment to use only paper from sustainably harvested trees. Now, Finnish paper producers using Russian timber fear the same backlash in their country. Thus, it’s very possible that Chernomyrdin’s decree may lead to a boycott of Russian timber exports.

We have learned that the management of one of the largest Finnish timber companies, Enso-Gutzeit, sent a letter to the Chairman of the government of Karelia [Stepanov], in which he recommends conducting research in commercial forests on valuable natural sites that should be preserved from cutting. We applaud this initiative on behalf of business and urge that a sound policy for sustainable use of Karelia’s forest be developed.

— sentiments expressed by individuals from the Biodiversity Conservation Center, SocioEcological Union, and Taiga Rescue Network

THE RUSSIAN-FINNISH BORDER ZONE: PRESERVING VALUABLE WESTERN TAIGA

by Outi Airaksinen and Tapio Lindholm

Along the border between Russia and Finland, in the region known as Karelia, a long stretch of valuable natural areas has been preserved. Despite political changes in recent history, the watershed provided a natural border line dividing Lutheran Finns and Orthodox Russians. In effect the region remained free of disturbance and the natural communities remained intact. During the Soviet period, the closing of the border zone created a long, green zone along the “iron curtain”.

A recent joint research project between Finnish and Russian Karelian researchers has focused on the ecosystems of the border zone between these two countries, and their value for biodiversity conservation. From the Finnish and Scandinavian viewpoint, the border between Russia and Finland plays an important role as a part of the network of natural areas of western taiga and as a direct link with valuable conservation sites on the Finnish side.

One of the study sites for the joint project has been the Tuulijarvi (meaning Tulos, or “windy” Lake). The region is part of the western Karelian upland area. Because the range of this forested vegetation zone continues into northeastern Finland (southern Kainuu), the well-preserved region of Tuulijarvi has great importance to protected forests in northeast Finland. These forests are among the best old growth boreal forests remaining in Finland and provide critical habitat to populations of species common to the region.

Most of the Tuulijarvi area is covered by forests which, for the most part, have been preserved in their natural state. Forested areas alternate with natural wetlands and lakes. A topographic map or satellite photo reveals the difference between Finnish and Russian Karelian wetlands. On the Russian side, artificial ditches (dredged for draining and seeding of forest plantations) are absent; bogs and marshes are usually long and narrow outlets form an integral part of the forests. Fens are small, and commonly fed by springs. In Russian Karelia, the pine bogs and spruce swamps occur on a large scale, and have developed in a natural stage uncommon now for Finnish forests in the region. Such a mosaic of forests and mires as those in the Tuulijarvi region can be preserved only by protecting the ecosystem in its entirety.

Outi Airaksinen and Tapio Lindholm are research scientists in the Finnish Environmental Agency

Kostomuksha Zapovednik. July 10-14, 1995

Here in the land of white nights, the sky above the towering spruce trees was light past midnight. In the outdoor “kitchen” by the lake shore, Dmitry Zakharov, the director of Kostomuksha Zapovednik’s new tourism program, strummed his guitar and sang Russian ballads and camp songs. His audience was a group of Finnish volunteers, who had trudged several kilometers through bogs and bush-wacked through the thick forest to this back country camp site. They would spend a few days helping to re-furbish a site where Zakharov hopes to take the more hardy types of “eco-tourists.”

Kostomuksha Zapovednik is the Russian part of an international Finnish-Russian reserve, Friendship International Park. Before visiting Russia, the volunteers had spent several days in Kuhmo (the Finnish side) working at the site of an old farm house which is being renovated into an educational center. They marveled at the state of the forest in the Zapovednik: such untouched, unvisited and old growth forests are rarities in their own country.

The group of 15 volunteers, organized by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-Finland was part of a growing effort by Finnish and Russian managers of Friendship Park to strengthen ties between the two countries through environmental education and joint conservation activities.
RUSSIAN CONGRESS ON NATURE CONSERVATION: AGONY OR PROMISE OF A DIALOGUE?
by Eugene Simonov

Organizations represented at the All-Russian Congress for Nature Conservation

Out of a total of 910 participants registered at the Congress:
- (62%) - officials from environmental ministries and agencies;
- (32%) - representatives of other governmental environmental services;
- (19%) - representatives from non-governmental organizations;
- (15%) - representatives from research and educational institutions;
- (3%) - businessmen;
(some participants represented several types of organizations)

quote for 100 NGO representatives, including trade-unions. (See insert on this page)

There is another history to the Congress: it began in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992, where the government of Russia expressed its commitment to the mysterious words "sustainable development." Since then, this term, ambiguously translated as "ustoichivo razvitie" (stable development) has been slowly replacing other development-related "cliches" in Russian environmental jargon. In 1994 the Russian government initiated a competition for the best concept for Russia's transition to sustainable development, in which 30 different authors — organizations and individuals — participated.

However, in the end, only one of the concepts was chosen by the government for further consideration — the concept presented by the Russian Ministry of Economics.

Rather than a useful potential model for "sustainable development", the chosen concept was a hopeless attempt "to fix environmental problems" that would permit development to proceed unchecked. For instance, this document says, that "...transition to a sustainable development can occur only with a restart of economic growth and increase of efficiency in economic production. The (environmental) crisis can be overcome, only if society focuses its efforts on following a path of reforms outlined by the government..."

In other words, as the economy starts growing again, the environment will have no choice but to take care of itself.

This year the Russian government decided that the National Congress on Nature Conservation would be just the occasion to approve this outstanding document on behalf of the people of Russia. Thus, the paths of the Concept and the Congress crossed. However, the emerging hybrid did not look very viable, with the potential conservation assembly made up of too narrow a field of representatives to make informed judgments on how the nation should make the shift to "sustainable development." Early in the year, as preparations for the Congress were made, debates about the meaning of "sustainable" demonstrated widespread disagreement with the government's concept and generated a number of alternative paths to follow. (See insert on page 15.)
The official Concept of Sustainable Development: opponents and alternatives

Regional conferences held by the government in the spring of 1995 to select representatives to the Congress showed that the Ministry of Economics "Sustainable Development Concept" could not gain sufficient support even among the loyal and tolerant state officials attending these conferences. Thirty out of 59 regional conferences did not approve this document. Several conferences even explicitly approved an alternative - "Strategy for Sustainable Development in Russia" which had been prepared in a short time by Svet Zabelin, a leader of the Socio-Ecological Union.

Although far from being complete and prescribing all solutions, the concept suggested by Zabelin is based on completely different approach, one that does not declare economic growth as a necessary precondition for social and environmental welfare. Zabelin’s concept suggests that successful development should be measured by increased human safety, health and spiritual development, rather than in gross national product, kilobytes and megatons. Additionally, according to the well-known conclusions of the Club of Rome, humanity as a whole, and Russia in particular, are experiencing a deep system crisis that can be overcome only through a deep transformation of value systems that guide behavior of governments, businesses and population.

The First All-Russian Environmental NGO Conference

This conference was organized by the Socio-Ecological Union (SEU), the Russian Association of trade-unions from environmentally unsafe regions (ECOASSPROF), the All-Russian Society for Nature Conservation, the Druzhina Student Movement for Nature Conservation, and the "Chernobyl" Union of Russia. The event marked an unprecedented meeting of these major environmental group which previously had worked in competition, or apart from each other. Planning and conducting the conference required negotiations and compromise to find common ground between, for example, the more informal and "horizontally structured" SEU and fairly official All-Russia Society for Nature Conservation, that has long been regarded by "real" conservationists as a semi-governmental "conformist" organization. The outcome of the conference set a tone for future cooperation among the groups that came from far and wide to the conference.

More than 350 representatives from almost all regions of Russia took part in the conference, as well as guests from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Germany, the UK, USA, and Estonia.

The conference was devoted primarily to three themes:

* Cooperation among environmental NGOs and their influence on the government;
* Human rights for a clean and healthy environment - how to realize what's written in the Constitution;
* Strategy for sustainable development in Russia.

The conference rejected the "Concept for Sustainable Development of the Ministry of Economics" and proposed to the government to organize a working group with representatives from governmental agencies, environmental NGOs, the business-community, and scientists working on "sustainable development".

Among many recommendations issued at the conference the participants requested that the government create a strong agency to manage the national system of Zapovedniki, since the division at the Ministry of Environment (responsible for these strict nature reserves) has been intentionally weakened during last two years.

The conference elected 70 representatives to the Congress who would bring environmental policy priorities formulated by NGOs to the attention of the "official" part of the environmental community. And, following the initiative of four NGOs with the most widespread representation throughout the country (SEU, ECOASSPROF, All-Russian Society for Nature Conservation, and The "Chernobyl" Union), the conference founded a Coordination Committee of Environmental NGOs to ensure coordination and united action in the future.

The Congress: impressions and main outcomes

At the National Congress, we learned that we have plentiful new environmental bureaucracies. There were representatives of 25 federal agencies entitled to protect the environment in Russia with representatives of a zillion similar organizations from regional level. Also we learned (and more importantly, they learned) that there is no real power behind them.

The real story was told by those who did not come to this congress. They told it just by not coming. Neither the President, nor the Prime Minister, neither key ministers, nor key leaders in the Parliament attended this forum. Even the infamous "official concept for sustainable development" was presented not by the Minister but by the third vice-minister from the Ministry of Economics, and the audience officials and activist alike took it as an insult.

This was a silent demonstration: those in power do not have any environmental concerns, Russia does not have environmental policy, and will not have one in the foreseeable future. And for all those who gathered it was a powerful sign: you should join forces and combine your efforts if you want to be heard by this government, if you want to have an impact.

Another lesson was that despite all differences, regional officials from environmental agencies have surprisingly similar concerns to those of activists of environmental NGOs. And both of these groups are far distancing from the calm and relaxed representatives of the federal ministries.

The third lesson was an old one - that just a handful of NGO people with a strong sense of urgency and purpose can change the predetermined flow of events at such an official assembly and
Russian Congress on Nature Conservation: Agency or Promise of a Dialogue?
(continued from page 15)

convince its participants to make decisions that can have an impact on environmental policies.

After three days of debates and discussions several important statements were issued:
* The Congress participants did not approve the official "Concept for Sustainable Development" produced by the Economic Ministry, but just approved the intention of the government to develop such a concept. They recommended to the government to gather a committee of representatives of the legislature, executive branch of the government, NGOs, scientists, and business circles to continue work on development of a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development. This committee should lay a foundation for achievement of a broad consensus in Russian society on key questions of the development of the nation. If the federal government does not follow this path, other interested parties can initiate this process and form such committee.
* The Congress also recommended to the government to study and include in the National Environmental Action Plan urgent actions proposed by preparatory conferences before the Congress.
* One of specific but very important outcomes of the Congress was that the Minister of Environmental Protection Victor Danilov-Danilian pledged in public to establish a Department for Zapovednik Management with full authority over policy development, personnel management and budgetary discretion of Zapovedniki by the end of July. (As our readers may remember, the management system for Russia's nature reserves has virtually been ruined in recent months due to inappropriate policies of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, and that put all Zapovedniki under a great threat). We are yet to see whether Mr. Danilov-Danilian holds his word. If he does not, the conservation community will insist on creation of a special governmental agency to manage this principal part of Russia's natural heritage.

Nevertheless, from my perspective, the main achievement of the Congress was the wide opening for opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between environmental NGOs, regional environmental agencies, federal ministries and all other environmental groups in Russian society. There is a strong hope that all parties are ready to enter this process as equal partners.

Eugene Simonov is a member of the SEU Board

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ECOFORUM'95

by Amy McVey

"Ecoforum, Kiev-95: A Dialogue Between Grassroots Environmentalists from the United States and Eurasia" was the name and theme of the international gathering held this past May, 23-28, and attended by over 180 environmental activists from the United States and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. From Kamchatka to California, participants traveled to Pushcha-Ozernaya, a sanatorium just outside of Kiev, to share their experiences, network with one another, and participate in discussions on a variety of environmental issues and lay the groundwork for possible future cooperative projects.

The main idea behind the forum was to provide activists who, due to a number of reasons (geographical, political, etc), have had little contact with those from the US as well as with those from other regions within the CIS, with the opportunity to realize common interests and goals in their respective areas of environmental activity. Through collaborative work, it is the hope that many obstacles which hinder the preservation and cleanup of natural areas, protection of plant and animal species and healthy living conditions, can be overcome. In addition, cooperation on an interregional and international level facilitates an overall strengthening of the global environmental movement.

Geographically, participants represented all the republics of the former Soviet Union (with the exception of the Baltic States) and 21 states within the US. Participant interest areas included alternative energy, biodiversity, eco-journalism, environmental health, NGO development, environmental education, sustainable agriculture and many others. Information was shared and contacts among participants were established through seminars, workshops, trainings, an information center/bookfair, informal meetings and evening cultural events.

As a result of contacts made at EcoForum, concrete projects are already in the beginning stages of development. Such projects include an exchange of organizations from the Russian Far East with groups in Georgia (Caucasus), both working on issues of species protection, creation of an environmental video information center with groups in Bryansk, Russia and the Environmental Health Network (Chesapeake, VA), information exchange on issues of biodiversity between the Biodiversity Conservation Center (Moscow, Russia) and the Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (Eugene, Oregon).

EcoForum was organized by ISAR (A Clearinghouse on Grassroots Cooperation in Eurasia) with funding from the US Agency for International Development. For more information about the forum contact:

ISAR-DC, 1601 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20009; tel: (202) 387-3034, fax: (202) 867-3291; email: <isar@ecap.org>, or any ISAR regional field office (Almaty, Kiev, Nizhny Novgorod, Moscow, Tbilisi, Vladivostok).

Amy McVey is an ISAR-Moscow representative
ECOFORUM '95: ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION GATHER IN KIEV FOR A SECOND “DISCOVERY OF AMERICA”

by Ilya Belov

From May 23 - 28, 1995, an Ecoforum, organized by ISAR (now known as International Clearinghouse on the Environment), was held in Kiev, Ukraine. The purpose of this forum, according to the director of ISAR’s Kiev office, was to bring together representatives of grassroots environmental organizations from different areas throughout the former Soviet Union in order to make contacts and exchange information.

The Eco-Forum was not just limited to non-governmental organizations from the former USSR. Over thirty representatives from US environmental organizations also came to Kiev to meet colleague in similar environmental fields. The first US-Russian environmental NGO conference in 1991 in Moscow inspired a tremendous blossoming of international partnerships; it was the first opportunity for many members of non-governmental environmental groups from the United States and the Soviet Union to meet with each other, establishing many new and fruitful contacts and setting the stage for dozens of joint environmental projects. It was also the beginning of the long-time friendship between ISAR and the Socio-Ecological Union (SEU). It was hoped that the Kiev Eco-Forum would be the second “discovery of America,” with partnerships spreading beyond Russia, into other former Soviet Republics.

Environmentalists from the Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Turkmenia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and the USA were invited to the recent Eco-Forum in Kiev. The forum set two main goals to be achieved: to facilitate acquaintances between colleagues from near and far, and to encourage the more seasoned environmentalists to share with members of newly formed organizations their wisdom gained through years of experience. When asked how well these goals were achieved, however, Russian and American participants stated that it was extremely difficult to kill two birds with one stone. The schedule of the forum was packed so full with seminars from the early morning until the late afternoon (with the exception of the arrival and departure days), that participants only had free time late at night. For some of those who had come from far away, jet-lag and time differences prevented them from using this extra time.

As for the seminars, it was difficult to expect that 196 people, representing many different environmental movements, would be able to discuss their professional problems in an open forum. I was able to discuss problems of biodiversity with only 15 people, seven of whom wanted to attend three other seminars at the same time.

The fact that local Kiev organizations and other from the Ukraine were given only a few hours on one day of the Ecoforum to meet with participants seems strange and unusual within the environmental movement. In addition, why groups who came to the Forum to participate for a day, were not allowed on the grounds remains mystery.

I do not, however, want to give the reader a negative impression of the Forum. Undoubtedly everybody at EcoForum made new friends and met with new colleagues. There were some fruitful activities; for example, the book fair, which provided a wide range of materials and publications in Russian and English, was a great success.

Another positive outcome for the group of environmentalists interested in biodiversity conservation, was a very interesting two hour period at an improvised evening round table. At this discussion, we decided to create a bilingual (Russian-English) conference on nature protection. It most likely will be a list server, and all of the technical aspects will be worked out this summer. The representative of the Pacific Environmental Resources Center in the Russian Far East, David Gordon, has already given his support of the idea. At this time we suggest that you send any information or suggestions via e-mail to him at <majordomo@igc.apc.org> (subject <eurasia_biodiv>). A similar decision to create an electronic conference or list server for the “green” press, was made at the seminar on mass media. The address for questions is the same as above (subject <eurasia_ecojour>). Additionally, the group of conservation-journalists, recognizing the need for continued professional exchange and training, decided to prepare a book that will summarize the experiences of various environmental journalists. The Biodiversity Conservation Center has agreed to coordinate the publication of this handbook, and would welcome any sample materials our western colleagues may provide on the subjects of environmental journalism.

Ilya Belov is the editor of the Nature Conservation Bulletin of the Biodiversity Conservation Center, and lay-out editor for RCN.
NEW RESEARCH STATION ESTABLISHED IN THE ARCTIC: “WILLEM BARENTS” BIOLOGICAL STATION

by Dr. Gerard C. Boere

The project to establish the Willem Barents Biological Station began in 1993 and was completed in 1995. The project was funded by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries for the purpose of supporting the newly established Great Arctic Reserve. The station is named after a famous Dutch geographer, sailor and cartographer who died nearly 400 years ago while leading an expedition across the Arctic to find the Pacific Ocean in 1506.

The Willem Barents Biological Station comprises two facilities, a field station and a main building, both of which are located within the boundaries of the Great Arctic Reserve. The field station replaces tents and yurts and is located at the Pyasina Delta where joint Dutch-Russian studies of Brent Geese are taking place. Under normal conditions the field station can accommodate 10-12 people and is suitable for research and bird watching from late spring to early autumn. Small groups of tourists may use the station for a nominal fee which is used for management of the station and the Great Arctic Reserve.

The main building is located at Medusa Bay in a tundra region with high densities of breeding waders and species like Snowy Owl, Red-breasted Goose, Peregrine Falcon, and Brent Goose colonies. The building can provide year-round accommodation for approximately 15-20 people and replace the huts used by scientists and researchers for the past 100 years. Both facilities are managed by Vladimir Badukin, Director of the Great Arctic Reserve, and his staff.

It has long been the wish of the Russian government to name the Biological Station after Willem Barents. Its official inauguration is scheduled for July 23, 1995 at which time Mr. De Vos van Steenwijk, Netherlands Ambassador to the Russian Federation, will open the Station. A joint Russian-Dutch expedition to locate the grave of Willem Barents is also planned for this summer.

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CONSERVATION LEGISLATION

A NEW WILDLIFE LAW IS PASSED IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

by Dr. Vadim O. Moklevsky

On March 22, 1995 the set of Russian conservation laws was augmented by a new act regulating wildlife throughout the nation. This law completely replaced an obsolete law of the Soviet times, the Law on Protection and Use of the Animal World of the RSFSR” of 1987. Overall, the new law more precisely defines a few points, in particular, wildlife ownership, licensing, state protection, rights and social protection of people professionally responsible for wildlife management and protection.

The law stipulates that the “animal world [i.e., wildlife] within the Russian Federation is state property” (Article 4). From the following text of Article 4 it becomes apparent that only wild and free animals are considered state property. The animal kept in captivity could belong to the state, municipal, or private owners. The important point made in the law (similarly stated in the Presidential Decree “On Federal Natural resources”) is that rare and endangered species, species living on federally protected natural areas, those living on the continental shelf, in the inner seas of the Russian Federation, or within the exclusive economic zone, or species listed in international treaties and having high economical value shall be considered part of federal property. Also, species migrating between two subjects of the federation (administrative units such as oblast, krai, or autonomous republic) belong to the federation.

The right of ownership of wildlife is separate from the right of land ownership. Land owners are given priority right to use wildlife resources only if they “possess adequate resources and expertise”. At the same time, the Law preserves the traditional practice of negotiating with the landowners, when transferring wildlife ownership rights. A considerable portion of the new law is devoted to discussion of indigenous rights to wildlife resources. Small indigenous nations dependent upon hunting and other traditional methods of wildlife use are given priority rights for the use of wildlife. Such rights include privileges to hunt in certain areas, outside the normal hunting season, and exclusive rights on taking certain species. These regulations are valid not only for members of ethnic groups, but also for other citizens living on the same territory and leading similar lifestyles.

The section on wildlife protection is small, and fairly traditional in its scope.
ELUSIVE AND ENDANGERED: THE SNOW LEOPARD OF CENTRAL ASIA

by Irina and Oleg Loginov

The Snow leopard (Uncia uncia) is one of the most rare and least studied predators of the world. It is found in the mountain regions of Kirghizia, Tadzikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. The extreme northern border of the snow leopard’s range passes through the former Soviet Union, where its territory covers only 17.4% of the animal’s range. The animal here survives in the extreme alpine conditions, especially in the Altai and Sayan Mountain ranges of the Russian Federation. This is a large cat, with the body around four feet long, and weighing up to ninety pounds. Its main prey is mountain goats, and it almost never feeds on domestic livestock.

The snow leopard shares a common fate with most other large predators in the world: early on it became a popular object of sport hunting. The cat bears a beautiful fur, which can be used for making extremely expensive coats. As a result of poaching, the population of snow leopards in Central Asia has been greatly reduced throughout its range. Due to generally low fertility (females usually have 1 to 3 kittens every few years), and the high rate of poaching and habitat destruction, this cat is seriously threatened. It is listed in the Red Data Books of Russia, and the Central Asian Republics.

Ironically, long ago humans treated snow leopards with great respect, using tame animals in place of dogs for hunting. Writer and naturalist M. Zverev (the oldest member of IRBIS Club at age 99) writes about hunting with a snow leopard:

"Ancient hunting on mountain goats with snow leopard probably took place this way: the hunter with his tame leopard hid among the rocks... When a mountain goat would appear at a close distance, the hunter released the leopard, which held by a long lasso. The goat would be caught and exhausted by the beast. Then, the hunter reeled in the tame snow leopard with the lasso, and captured the catch."

In Russia the leopards still survive in a few remote watersheds in the Altai mountains. Here in the Altai, snow leopard population numbers are low, due to a combination of factors, such as population fragmentation (five isolated habitats were identified by one scientist), and insufficient protection, coupled with the animal’s low reproductive rate. This population of snow leopards is estimated to be about 30-40 individuals. Eight to ten more snow leopards permanently live at the southern edge of the Ukok plateau, the Northern slope of Tabyin-Bogdo-Ola ridge, situated on the border of Russia, Mongolia, and China. Several leopards have also survived at the Shapshalski ridge, near Tuva and Gorny Altai republic border (about 10 individuals).

In addition, 20-30 leopards may be found at the Western Sayan ridge. Occasionally the animals come to the ridges of Eastern Sayan, Tannu Ola, and even to Kuznetski Alatau, which is 200 km from the nearest point of origin.

"A new wildlife law is passed in the Russian Federation"

(continued from page 18)

The new law provides for prohibition, or restrictions on the taking of certain species, and prohibits destruction of valuable habitats. The law stipulates that any major economic activities which can adversely affect wildlife or its habitat, should be preceded by an environmental impact assessment.

Unfortunately, the law clearly underestimates the need for and benefits of sound scientific research on wildlife. There are only two cases when the law requires a scientifically based conclusion - when actively managing the population numbers, and when transferring wildlife, or producing hybrids. All other governmental decisions, including those on rare species, are left to the governmental bureaucracy alone, not to the scientific organizations.

Article 24 officially establishes the concept of the Red Data Book (Krasnaja Kniga), including Red Data Books of Federation subjects. Therefore, the law enables creation of Red Data Books not only in the autonomous republics, but also in oblasts and krais.

The section regarding economic regulation of wildlife conservation and use provides for the establishment of a fee for using the wildlife resource. Forty percent of the fee would go to the federal budget, while 60 percent to the budget of the subject of federation (i.e., the given regional government). Fines imposed for over-exploitation of wildlife resources would go exclusively to the subject of the federation. The law itself does not provide the exact figures for fines, referring to the respective administrative decisions, and the criminal law. There are also provisions for tax breaks, loans and awards to encourage the protection of wildlife.

The law clearly and in sufficient detail discusses the responsibility for violating the legislation on protection and use of wildlife. Article 55 lists a vast index of such violations. The law, however, does not include the types of responsibilities themselves, but again refers to the administrative and criminal laws and regulations.

As for other wildlife resources, fisheries traditionally remains outside the scope of the statute, and in Article 42 ("Fisheries") the new law only makes reference to the Law on Fisheries. Currently a similar law “On Plant Protection” is being drafted for federal legislation. With the passage of that statute, the last gap in the federal legislation on nature conservation will be filled.

Dr. Vadim Mokievsky is a member of the advisory board of the Biodiversity Conservation Center, directing the program Nature Conservation Policy and Legislation.
Endangered Species

km to the North from the common habitats of snow leopards. Some leopards come to Siberia from Mongolia.

The number of protected areas protecting snow leopard habitat in Russia is clearly insufficient, with Zapovedniki (strict nature reserves) covering slightly more than 12 percent of the animal’s habitat. In comparison with Central Asia, however, the area of Russian nature reserves is considerably larger. The largest in Russia is Alataisk Zapovednik (about 900,000 hectares), but snow leopards are rare there and live only in the very southern part. In addition, snow leopards are found regularly in Sayano-Shushenski Zapovednik (about 400,000 hectares), Zapovednik Azas (320,000 hectares) and sometimes in Katunski Zapovednik (over 100,000 hectares).

Kazakhstan: In Kazakhstan the snow leopard is found in the southern and southeastern regions bordering Russia, China, Kirghizia and Uzbekistan. This includes the mountains of Kazakh Altai; Belukha mountain (4506m), Yuzhni Altai ridge (Southern Altai), Sarymsakty, Saur, and Tarbagatai. The largest number of the leopards is found at the upper Bukhtarma, Kara-Kaba, and Aras-Kabir rivers, they are also repeatedly found at the Kurstalinsky Peak and Berkitaai Mount, near Markakolski Zapovednik.

To improve habitat protection, Markakolski Zapovednik on the Southern Altai ridge needs to be expanded. In one region of the Altai (Dzhungarskii) the number of leopards was 20-25 ten years ago. Still there is not a single protected area for them here. Although a Zapovednik was planned here, the government has not been able to finance its establishment.

Undoubtedly, the key region for snow leopards in Kazakhstan is the northern and western parts of the Tien-Shan range, where there are two Nature Reserves - Alma-Atinski and Aksu-Dzhabagly. In both preserves the leopards are found regularly, and there is some protection and research being conducted. Without a doubt, Alma-Atinsky Zapovednik, covering 73.3 thousand hectares, has the greatest number of snow leopards. According to researcher V.A.Zhiryakov, two to three families of the leopards regularly occur here. Overall, the Zailissky Alatau range has around 20 leopards. Today, not more than a hundred snow leopards occur in Kazakhstan, compared to a count of 180 to 200 leopards by Fedoseenko in 1982.

Kirghizia, the most mountainous of all the republics of Central Asia, has the greatest number of snow leopards. The Tien-Shan and the Pamir-Alai are located here. According to “Snow leopards in Kirghizia” (probably the most comprehensive source on this species published in 1984 by E.Koshkaryev at least 600 to 700 (and up to a thousand) snow leopards occur in Kirghizia. Most of the cats live in the Central and Northern Tien-Shan (the Terskei-Alatau, Kungei-Alatau, Kyrgyz, Dzhetygymbel and other ranges).

Even in Kirghizia the number of snow leopards is rapidly decreasing due to direct extermination and trapping for zoos. Kirghizia is the world leader in providing snow leopards for zoos. In many areas the leopards have become extremely rare, in some places they have disappeared completely. In the last few years their population has declined by 30%. The leopards can be found in 5 zapovedniki in Kirghizia. The total area of these zapovedniki is very small, and the regime enforcement is weak.

“Currently, only 2% of the total snow leopard geographic range (105,400 sq. km) in the republic is in preserves. Therefore, the majority of population lives outside the protected areas, and its survival is contingent upon the nature of its relationship with humans (Koshkaryev 1989)."

Tajikistan: This small mountainous country, together with Kirghizia, has been an important provider of snow leopards to the world’s zoos. The species has been poorly studied here. According to the Red Data Book of the USSR (1984), 200 snow leopards lived here. V.I.Sokov (1984) gives similar figure (200 to 300) for the entire country. He also mentions that the population of snow leopard has never been large here. Few people have ever seen them. Of the three zapovedniki in the republic, the leopards have been found in two: Ramit (6 individuals in 1988) and Dashtidzhum (numbers unknown). The situation with the snow leopard in the republic is very serious. Much damage to the population has been done by the on-going civil war in the high mountains. According to a writer A.Lukhtanov, border guards in Tadzhikistan were seen with numerous(!) pelts of snow leopards.

Uzbekistan: The situation with the Snow Leopard in Uzbekistan is the least studied. Snow leopards may be found in the mountainous parts of the country, adjacent to neighboring Kirghizia, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. Two Zapovedniki (Gissarsky and Zaalinsky) and a people’s park of Uzbekistan are located here. Apparently, the total number of snow leopards in the republic is fewer than 20 individuals.

The general tendency is a decline in the population of snow leopards throughout the former Soviet Union, and a general lack of effective conservation measures. The total population of snow leopards in the CIS is 800 to 1200 at best. The small
number and insufficiently large area of protected territories can not provide adequate protection to the species. Overall, only 5.4% of the geographic range of snow leopard is protected in the CIS. In the near future, as many additional natural protected areas as possible should be created throughout the species geographic range in the high mountains of the Central Asian Republics. There is also an urgent need to promote snow leopard conservation through public education campaigns, anti-poaching raids, and increasing material support to the rangers in the existing preserves. Without such rapid and effective actions, the continuous survival of the snow leopard in the Central Asian states will not be possible.

The first NGO dedicated to preservation of the snow leopard throughout the former Soviet Union was created in March of 1993. We called it “Irbis,” after the animal’s common Russian name. The Club collects data on snow leopards, unites specialists and amateur lovers of this animal, and promotes conservation of the Snow leopard on all levels. We believe that only radical measures can save the species. Much can be done through public education. For example, we publish a newsletter telling people about the leopards and why they should be protected. We use folklore, and nature writings to illustrate the age-long traditions of cohabitation of snow leopards and humans in Asia.

We organize demonstrations against poachers, and attempt to influence local administration’s decisions to ensure species protection. The future of this magnificent cat is in the hands of the people.

Irina and Oleg Loginov direct the snow leopard conservation organization IRBIS.

FROM STEPPE TO STORE:
THE TRADE IN SAiga ANTELOPE HORN

Excerpts of an article by Simba Chan,
Anatoly V. Maksimuk, and Lir V. Zhirkov; compiled by Stephen V. Nash (reprinted with permission from authors)

The endurance of the Saiga Antelope (Saiga tatarica) has long been tested by the harsh climate of its habitat on the steppes of Central Asia and by hunting predominately for its meat and hide. Today, however, the extremes of nature and such hunting are not the greatest threats facing the Saiga Antelope, but rather demand for its horn in traditional Chinese medicine.

The situation of the Saiga Antelope illustrates one of the most pressing conservation challenges of this decade: how to conserve a species threatened by demand for a cure. The Saiga Antelope’s plight has become more dire in recent years with dramatic political changes in the former Soviet Union leading to poor wildlife protection, greater incentives for poaching and weaker export controls.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) can play an important role in the conservation and management of the Saiga Antelope. In November 1994, the Parties to CITES approved listing the Saiga Antelope on Appendix II of the Convention. The listing requires Parties to regulate and

Drawing by I. Chebakova

monitor all international commercial trade in the species and its derivatives. Russia, which issues CITES permits on behalf of newly independent republics, is a Party to the Convention, as are China and Hong Kong (UK), the two largest consumers of Saiga Antelope.

The use of Saiga Antelope horn in Chinese medicine

Today, the Saiga Antelope is generally believed extinct, or nearly so, in China. Nonetheless, the use of Saiga Antelope horn in traditional Chinese medicine remains common in China and indeed can be found in Chinese communities throughout Asia. Destinations of Saiga horn include Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and elsewhere. Most horn of the trade in originates in the Autonomous Republic of Kalmykia in the Russian Federation and the Independent Republic of Kazakhstan, although some horn may originate in Mongolia as well.

In traditional Chinese medicine, Saiga horn is classified along with rhinoceros horn as having salty-cold properties that can detoxify the body and reduce “heat,” which may appear as fever, and treat “internal wind,” a condition often associated with liver problems. In cases of coma and severe convulsions owing to fever, both Saiga and rhinoceros horn are often used together. In combination with other medicines, Saiga horn is used to treat headaches, vertigo and other problems and is believed to help delay aging.

Status and commercial harvesting of Saiga Antelope in Central Asia

The subspecies S. tatarica tatarica inhabits the semi-arid steppes in the northwest Caspian region in Kalmykia and much of the Republic of Kazakhstan, while the Mongolian subspecies S. tatarica mongolica inhabits two isolated areas in northwest Mongolia. Only the male Saiga Antelopes have horns.

In Kalmykia commercial harvesting began in 1951. Over the next 39 years, 2.2 million Saiga were harvested. The Kalmykia Saiga Antelope population is
Endangered Species

currently estimated at 120,000 to 150,000 animals, compared to more than 700,000 animals in the 1970s. Hunting has been prohibited since 1991.

In Kazakhstan, commercial harvesting began in 1959, and the number of animals harvested reached up to 500,000 in some years. The population now numbers an estimated 976,000 animals, compared to more than one million in the early 1970s. Hunting of Saiga Antelope in Kazakhstan has been regulated under a quota system since 1986.

Illegally killing a male Saiga Antelope is punishable by a fine 10 times the minimum monthly salary of US$12 in Russia and 15 times the minimum monthly salary of US$4 in Kazakhstan, but such penalties appear insufficient to deter poaching.

In both republics, Saiga Antelope poaching takes place unabated. In Kalmykia, local experts estimate that the illegal harvest could have been as high as 10,000 to 15,000 animals in 1993 alone. Each year in Kazakhstan, some 1,500 cases of poaching are investigated and up to 1,500 kg of Saiga horn are confiscated. In Mongolia, where Saiga Antelope once numbered several thousand and are now believed to number only 336, illegal hunting is believed to be a problem.


However, illegal exports number the most. In 1994, some 44 tonnes of Saiga Antelope horn were exported illegally to China, Korea, Japan and some European countries. Illegal large-scale exports have been made by numerous cooperatives and business people going abroad on shopping trips, and the purchase of poached Saiga horn has been widespread among Chinese citizens visiting Russia and Kazakhstan.

**Markets for Saiga horn in East and Southeast Asia**

TRAFFIC surveyed 14 cities and territories in East and Southeast Asia from August-September 1994 to establish the availability of Saiga horn. The cities and territories were Hong Kong; Macau; Guangzhou, Harbin, Heihe and Chengdu in China; Seoul in South Korea; Taipei and Kaohsiung in the territory of Taiwan; Tokyo and Osaka in Japan; and Penang, Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. These were chosen because they were known or believed to have large traditional Chinese markets or important medicine shops. Heihe was chosen as an important trading port with Russia.

The equivalent of 2,012 Saiga horns were found in a random sample of 131 shops visited in Hong Kong, which has long been the major importer of Saiga horn and was also formerly the major exporter. Many shops stocked at least 15 horns and shopkeepers said new stock would arrive shortly. The average cost of horn without the bone core said to be from Russia was US$0.764/g. Extrapolating results to the whole of Hong Kong, it appears that at least 30,720 horns could have been available at the time of the survey.

In the four cities of China, TRAFFIC observed more than 2,900 Saiga horns for sale in markets and traditional medicine shops. One stall owner stated that he could obtain up to 6,000 Saiga horns within a few days, claiming to import tonnes of Saiga horn every year (one tonne being roughly equivalent to 5,000 horns).

In Heihe, which lies along the Amur River and is famous for its wildlife products, discussions with stall owners in the main trading area revealed that up to 6,000 horns may have been present or in nearby storage and thousands more could be brought over from Blagoveshchensk, the second largest city of the Russian Far East. Several dozen to several hundred horns can be sold in one day.

In Chengdu, home to the largest Chinese traditional market in southwestern China, about 650 horns were found.

In Taipei, five out of 76 shops visited admitted to having Saiga Antelope horn—a dramatic change from when dozens of Saiga horns could be seen on display earlier in 1994 before the government banned the sale of Saiga horn in September 1994. Many more shopkeepers likely stocked Saiga horn but were wary of showing or selling them to strangers because of the ban. None were seen in Kaohsiung.

In Malaysia, 35 out of 39 Chinese medicine shops visited in Penang had Saiga Antelope horn products for sale. Saiga horn was also sold in Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh.

Although traditional medicine in both Korea and Japan has been greatly influenced by that of China, only six out of 110 shops surveyed in Osaka and Tokyo had Saiga horn, and none were found in the 31 traditional medicine shops visited in Seoul. It is likely that the use of Saiga horn has never been very popular in these two countries as none of the pharmacists interviewed knew the product well.

**Recommendations**

Effective protection and population management in Kalmykia and Kazakhstan must be re-established. This requires securing, protecting and managing suitable habitats for all aspects of the Saiga's biological needs, conducting reliable population censuses, supporting management-oriented research and providing strong financial and political support to anti-poaching teams and courts dealing with poaching offenses.

Under proper management, it would be possible to ensure exports of sufficient quantities of Saiga horn to meet at least the most urgent medicinal demand. Cutting off the supply altogether would alienate the consuming public and, as history shows, demand will be met by supply, either legally or illegally. However, a controlled supply...
Endangered Species

might still raise prices and thereby increase poaching incentives, so authorities would have to ensure penalties for illegal hunting and trade are enough to deter significant levels of poaching.

The possibility of raising Saiga Antelopes on game ranches or farms needs to be explored. However, there has been little success so far in making the species adjust to captivity and research is needed to assess the feasibility of integrating management of Saiga and livestock on the same land.

The management and conservation activities for the populations in Kalmykia and Kazakhstan must not be implemented in isolation from the populations of Mongolia, which are the most threatened. Consideration might be given to the establishment of a regional agreement on Saiga management and conservation involving the two republics and Mongolia. The agreement signed by the Andean states for the management of Vicugna (Vicugna vicugna) may serve as a useful model.

CITES provides the appropriate international framework for future exploitation of the species. Kazakhstan, which seems to hold the future of the species in hand, is not a member of CITES and neither is Mongolia. Both should be encouraged and assisted to become parties. In Russia, CITES implementation should be supported and reinforced considerably.

Workable substitutes for Saiga horn must be researched and identified to lessen or displace the demand on Saiga. Any such substitute would need to be at least as available as Saiga horn and at lower cost, and present no threat to the survival of wild animal or plant species. Over the long term, public awareness activities to dissuade Asian communities from using endangered species must be carefully developed, implemented and monitored worldwide.

Ensuring the conservation of the Saiga Antelope while coping with the health-care needs of Chinese consumers will be daunting. The conservation community must examine, understand and face up to the challenge of reconciling wildlife conservation objectives and the needs of the Asian medicinal trade. Debate about the merits of Western conservation and medical theory versus opposing Asian traditional practices will not solve the problems, but rather further isolate each side from the other. Most importantly, any solution will take time and the basic steps recommended above must be implemented soon if the Saiga Antelope is to have that time.

For more information or to obtain a copy of the full report, contact your local TRAFFIC office or TRAFFIC International, which coordinates the worldwide TRAFFIC network:

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NORTHERN SAKHALIN: UNIQUE ZONE OF BIODIVERSITY IN DANGER

by Dr. Vladimir Masterov

Editor's note: Sakhalin Island, rich in biological diversity, is also known to be rich in oil. As economic development increases in this area, many Pacific seabird and other species may be threatened. The following article describes particular threats to conservation on Sakhalin.

S akhalin Island is the largest island in the Russian Pacific, stretching for 1000 km from north to south. The northeastern coast of the island is deeply dissected with a 350-km chain of shallow lagoon-type gulfs from Schmidt Peninsula to Cape Delil-de-la-Kroela.

The sea shores in this area host a variety of endangered and threatened birds, listed in the Red Data Book of Russia, such as Steller's (Haliaeetus pelagicus) and White-tailed Sea Eagles (H. albicilla), Osprey (Pandion haliaetus), Spotted Greenshank (Tringa minutus), Aleutian Tern (Sterna aleutica), Siberian Spruce Grouse (Falcipennis falcipennis) and Marbled Murrelet (Brachyramphus marmoratus). About 6-7% of the world population of Steller's Sea Eagles nests here (Masterov and Zykov 1992). Aleutian tern's colonies were found in Nyivsky, Chaivo, Pitlun and Dagi Gulfs. Spotted Greenshank, endemic to Sakhalin Island, nests in Chaivo, Nyivo and Nabiul Gulfs (Nechayev 1994, personal data). Shallow Gulfs serve as an important feeding habitat for these birds, as well as a migratory stop-over site.

A dense network of short rivers and creeks provide ample spawning grounds for chum and humpback salmon. In the spring, ice hummocks on the shelf, having large patches of unfrozen water due to strong currents, become a "delivery room" for Sakhalin seals. Seals feed in the Gulfs and offshore zone year round.

Oil Discovery - What Comes Next?

Right in this area a large gas and oil field is being rapidly developed. This large-scale human impact is drastically transforming the surrounding landscapes. New oil fields will be open for bids beginning in 1995. Yasynginsk field (from the Konga river to the Nabiul Gulf), Jindanski field (from the Greater Venya river to the mouth of the Tyn river), Impchinsky field (in the northern part of Nabiul Gulf), Eastern Coastal field (in the middle of Nabiul Gulf), etc. Overall, the oil exploration will involve the whole coast for 250 km from Pitlun to Lunsksy Gulf. Four drilling platforms are proposed on the shelf offshore from Pitlun-Astokh, Lunsksy, Chaivo Gulfs and the mouth of river Kiri. The Russian company "Sakhalinenergia" will be extracting oil in the gulfs, while

August 1995, #4
international firms (Shell, Sadeco, Exxon and Mobil) will be working on the shelf, and expect to extract over 1.5 billion barrels of crude oil (according to the San Francisco-based Pacific Environment and Resources Center).

The oil wells on the shore are drilled by Russian companies using the most primitive pollution prevention technologies. Oil spills are not uncommon here. For instance, in 1994 after a rupture in an old pipeline over 15 metric tons of crude oil were dumped into Nabilsky Gulf, which killed many animals. According to the specialists from a regional research and planning institute “SadkalinNIPImonofit”, spills of crude oil or other liquid hydrocarbons are likely to happen in the future spills are predicted at from 600 to 4900 tons in the summer, and from 4000 to 35000 tons in the winter (Mansurov 1991). Heavy ice for over half of the year and high seismic activity greatly increases the probability of future spills.

The potentially disastrous impact of the spills is further amplified by the presence of the strong East-Sakhalin sea current in the area of the projected oil exploration. Due to low temperatures in the Okhotsk sea year round, the processes of biological decomposition go very slowly.

After the catastrophic earthquake on May 28 in Neftegorsk (situated on the Pilun Gulf shore), 18 ruptures were discovered in the pipelines, and a few breakdowns on the drilling stations. Spills of thousands of tons of crude oil may be expected in the near future, however, no estimates are available yet.

What has been done?

We started researching the oil spill impacts on bird populations in northeastern Sakhalin in 1989 as a part of the Far-Eastern research team of the Department of Biology of Moscow State University. During two summers, we studied the distribution of sea eagles and other birds along the shore. The Sakhalin coast was explored by boat from Baikal Gulf to Cape Ramanov. We established permanent monitoring plots in Luntsky and Nobilsky Gulfs to study long-term impacts on the population of rare birds. We put special emphasis on studying population dynamics, distribution and nest inventory of Steller’s sea eagles.

This species is one of the largest raptors in the Northern Hemisphere.

Some birds can weigh up to 9 kilograms (20 pounds)! The average time they spend daily in flight is only 22 to 27 minutes (Masterov 1992). This determines the high sensitivity of the bird to the destruction of its habitat and human disturbance.

Due to high in-flight energy consumption, these birds prefer to build their nests directly along the shoreline, at the tops of high trees (for 150 nests studied the average distance from the sea was 80 m). However, this is also the territory most intensively used by humans. Sea eagles cannot nest far from their hunting habitat (i.e., the sea itself), and therefore seriously suffer, if the shore becomes unavailable for them due to a high level of human disturbance. In the last few years, for example, 65 to 72% of all sea eagles’ nests were abandoned each year along the shore of Pilun and Nabil Gulfs due to increased disturbance. Because of such sensitivity and the tendency (if undisturbed) to occupy one nest for many years, Steller’s sea eagle is a convenient indicator species.

What are we planning to do?

We propose to create a computer database and map of distribution of the populations of common and rare species of the northeastern Sakhalin coast. We also want to create a map of their nesting habitats and chemical contami-
NOT JUST A THISTLE...
(About one of the rarest European plants, Cousinia astrachanica)
by Dr. Vadim A. Sagalaev and Eugene V. Mavrodiy

In the Southeastern part of European Russia there is no other place so thoroughly studied in the field of botany as the vicinity of Sarepta (a city currently known as Krasnogvardeisk, a suburb of Volgograd). One hundred fifty years ago, in this area alone, over 40 new species of higher plants were named. Two amateur botanists were primarily responsible for their discovery: Karl Claus and Alexander Becker. Although the first was a professor of chemistry, and the other an organist, their interest in botany was not accidental.

Claus and Becker belonged to a German sect of Herrnhuter, traditionally renowned for its doctors. Doctors in medieval Europe necessarily knew a great deal about herbs and their medical properties. According to tradition, it was their thorough knowledge of herbs that brought the Herrnhuter sect to Russia. A member of the sect once cured the mother of Catherine the Great. When the latter became the Empress, she invited the persecuted sect to move into Russia. Thus, the first German settlers arrived on the Volga River, and the exploration of the flora of the region began.

Lost plant:
One of the most fascinating species of the flora of Sarepta is Cousinia astrachanica (Spreng.) Tamasch. The scientific name of the species is misleading. Probably, it was called "astrachanica" because by Russian standards, the Astrakhan region begins not very far from Sarepta. There is nothing particularly remarkable about how Cousinia looks; it is a small thistle which can easily remain unnoticed. An analysis of the plant’s ecology, however, reveals that Cousinia is a strong calcifil, i.e., it can grow only on soils very rich in calcium. It is therefore affiliated with chalk cliffs and limestone outcrops, where there is little competition from other species of plants. However, because such habitats are hard to find, the overall population of Cousinia is very small.

Dr. Vadim Sagalaev of the Volgograd Pedagogical University spent over seven years searching for this species. Claus and Becker, who had discovered the plant, noted in their floristical report that the plant was growing on just one hill outside Sarepta. Imagine the awe of Dr. Sagalaev, when he found the plant at that very location about 15 years later! There are no other documented occurrences of this species elsewhere in European Russia, and there is just one more occurrence in the world (poorly documented) in Central Asia. The population on the hill in Sarepta grows within 100 meters from a small town, and has fewer than 20 individual plants growing at this location now. Probably this is the only population of this plant in the world. According to Dr. Sagalaev, it has remained fairly stable over the period of eight years of monitoring. This plant is a veritable "scientific miracle", which literally sits right under our feet.

Possible threats:
Apparently the only real threat to this population which has been surviving for 150 years is abrupt and intense human impact. In particular, the population is threatened with construction of garages in the area, one of which was built within 50 meters of the plant’s unique habitat. The hill is frequented by recreants, using a trail that has run right through the population site for 5 years.

What can be done to protect Cousinia?
A National Park should be established in the vicinity of the city of Sarepta. Unfortunately, it might be a bit late now, since many of the unique ecosystems in the area have been mercilessly transformed over the last 40 years. Cousinia is but one, albeit most spectacular example of endemic plants growing in the area. At the very least a mechanism should be found to prevent destruction of the last remaining unique habitats. Although many protection measures were suggested by the biologists from Volgograd Pedagogical University, their ideas were not supported by local authorities. Currently, we are working on a complete report on the flora of Sarepta, in which we will attempt to estimate the degree of human impact on rare plant species in the area.

Unfortunately, we can not expect to find as many rare species as our predecessors did in the XIX century. We welcome contacts or ideas about possible partnerships in research and conservation.

Dr. Vadim A. Sagalaev is an Associate Professor of the Department of Botany. Eugene V. Mavrodiy is a recent graduate of the Department of Evolutionary Theory of Moscow State University.

Bibliography:

Drawing by I. Belov
THE STATUS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN TORTOISE (TESTUDO GRAECA NIKOLSKII) IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS

by Drs Olga A. Leontyeva & Solomon I. Pereshkolnik, and Sergey A. Demin

Typically the tortoise lives underground in slopes of southern exposure, depending greatly on gravel soil cover and its structure.

Until the 1970s, factors such as few roads, rugged terrain, and steep slopes with impregnable subtropial forests served as a reliable defense of the natural systems from agricultural activity and recreational disturbance. However, the situation has changed abruptly over the last twenty years. The human population in the region has grown, as have road networks, seaside resorts, and boat, train, and airplane facilities. At the beginning of the 1960s the pistachio-juniper forests of the entire Mediterranean zone of the Caucasus Black Sea coast occupied 4.5 thousand hectares, while at the present time only about 2 thousand hectares remain. Between 1976 and 1987, more than 540 hectares of juniper sparse growth forests on the Abrau Peninsula were taken by different organizations for construction of lodges, sport areas, roads, and other purposes, drastically reducing and transforming the tortoise’s habitat.

Where the hornbeam-oak forests still survive, the habitat has not been directly exposed to human influence during the latter part of the century. Yet in the last decade, population numbers have continued to decline. The average number of T. graeca in the first half of the 1970s in May in their priority habitat (pistachio-juniper forests on slopes with southern exposure) was 4-5 individuals per hectare, for the whole investigated territory, 0.3 individuals per ha. But in the middle of the 1980s, an inventory of the same general area found only 0.1 individual per hectare. This decline can be traced to anthropogenic influences which threaten the natural demographic structure of the population of the Mediterranean tortoise and have isolated populations, reducing reproductive possibilities and hastening a quick decline in their numbers.

It is well documented that for birds high concentrations of some chemical substances may lead to death of mature birds or thin egg shells and increased embryonic mortality. Tortoises suffer the same fate, particularly when pesticides, herbicides and other pollutants are used in the spring before the breeding period.

In addition to habitat loss and environmental contaminants, the tortoises are also preyed upon by domestic animals (cats and dogs), crows, and people. Commercial collection of juvenile and adult tortoises is one of the main factors threatening their existence. The preference for juveniles contributes to an imbalance in the population’s age structure: young tortoises are preferred, as they are more easily transported and more easily sold as pets. The tortoise of the genus Testudo typically brings $150 on the world market. In Moscow pet shops and at the city’s outdoor pet market a single Central Asian tortoise (Testudo horsfieldi or Agramonys horsfield) can be purchased for between $2-8 US dollars.

This year we were awarded a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Society for a field research project in the summer of 1995 entitled "Monitoring the Decline in Subspecies Testudo graeca nikolskii along the Northeastern Black Sea Coast." This spring, two groups of scientists conducted field research in different areas of the Peninsula.

As a result of our research we plan to analyze the causes of the tortoise population’s decline, and recommend methods for tortoise conservation. We have begun to implement some of the preliminary recommendations, beginning efforts to create a reserve and organize a tortoise breeding and release facility. Continued financial support will be central to our conservation work over the next few years.

Dr. Olga A. Leontyeva & Sergey A. Demin are researchers at the Biogeography Division at the Department of Geography, Moscow State University. Dr. Solomon L. Pereshkolnik is a researcher at Moscow Zoo, Moscow, Russia.
Corrections from last issue:

Adress for Druzhina:

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In the article on the Russian Bird Conservation Union, (page 34), RCN incorrectly printed the Latin name of Slender-billed Cuckoo as Numenius borealis, which is actually Numenius tenuirostris. Our apologies to ornithologists!

In the article "Conservation Finance" (page 24, left column), the sentence beginning "In 1994 total support..." should be read: "In 1994 total support of National Parks was about $10,917,200 ($10,643,000 from federal sources and $274,200 from regional ones), and total support of Zapovedniki was about $17,792,200 ($6,888,000 from federal sources and $291,200 from regional ones)."

Know your Metrics?

One foot = 0.301 meters (m)  
One mile = 1.61 kilometer (km)  
One acre = 0.405 hectare (ha)  
One square mile = 2.59 square kilometer (km^2) = 640 acres

Conservation Library

The Sturgeon Quarterly is a newsletter providing references and abstracts of the current publications on the problems of general biology, genetics, embryology, physiology, behavior and conservation of sturgeons. The newsletter also features original short articles. Send your requests to:

Dr. Vadim Birstein, Scientific Director, The Sturgeon Society, 331 West 57th Street, Suite 159, New York, NY 10019, USA. Phone (212) 245-3907, fax (212) 955-2543, e-mail: birstein@pipeline.com, or vbiirstein@igc.apc.org

WORDLY WISE

Republic, Krai, Oblast and Okrug are all types of administrative, political units which are subjects of the Russian Federation, similar to a state in America. In total, there are 89 subjects of the Russian Federation.

Zapovednik (zap-o-VYED-nee) = Nature Reserve; plural: Zapovedniki (zap-o-VYED-nee-kee) = areas that protect representative landscapes or unique landscape features, and have served scientific, conservation and educational purposes. Human activity is highly restricted in these territories.

National Park = areas protecting Russia's cultural and natural heritage, where limited use for recreation and education is permitted.


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