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## Presse-Mitteilung

# Return Of The Wild Horses

## Project for Reintroduction in Kazakhstan Presented at Tierpark Berlin

Amidst the steppes and vast expanses of Central Asia, a new collaborative project will set a milestone for the protection and preservation of biodiversity. After many decades of disappearance from its native steppes, the Przewalski's horse is set to return to Kazakhstan – 60 years after only a few individuals survived in human care. Tierpark Berlin, as part of a new project led by Prague Zoo for the reintroduction of wild horses in Central Kazakhstan, will serve as a conservation center and bring together the herd that will embark on its journey from Berlin to Kazakhstan in June. In the first year, a total of eight Przewalski's horses will be released into the "Golden Steppe" of Altyn Dala in Central Kazakhstan. More wild horses are expected to follow. The joint aim is to reintroduce at least 40 horses into their natural habitat over the next five years.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Przewalski's horse was eradicated from the wild. Only a few individuals survived in human care, and several breeding lines were established in Europe and North America. In the 1950s, an International Studbook was established to better coordinate conservation breeding, a record that is still maintained by Prague Zoo. By the 1990s, the Przewalski's horse population had grown to over 1,500 individuals. With the goal of reintroducing the horse to its original range, initial initiatives were launched in Mongolia, which are still considered major success stories today. After Kazakhstan included the Przewalski's horse in its national Red List, the path was paved for an initiative in Central Kazakhstan. "We are pleased to be able to support Kazakhstan with our expertise in the field of wild horse reintroduction, following our work in Mongolia," explains Director Miroslav Bobek of Prague Zoo, initiator and coordinator of the project. "We have a long history with the Przewalski's horse, which has almost attained the status of a national treasure. We are particularly delighted to lead the reintroduction efforts in Kazakhstan," he adds.

In early June 2024, the first four Przewalski's horses will be flown from Berlin Brandenburg Airport to Kazakhstan in a Czech military aircraft of the CASA type. This valuable cargo will be accompanied by Tierpark veterinarian Dr. Annette Klein and Zoological Director Christian Kern: "Tierpark has been involved in the reintroduction of wild horses into the wild since the mid-1980s. So far, 16 wild horses born in Tierpark have been provided for projects in China and Mongolia. With the current project in Kazakhstan, we are participating in the third country of the former distribution range of this once extinct species."

The Return Of The Wild Horses project is a collaborative effort involving conservation initiatives and zoological institutions. "A professional and promising reintroduction of animals into their natural habitat requires years of planning and can only succeed with an experienced team. From



the selection of the reintroduction area to the preparation of the animals and compliance with all regulatory approvals and legal frameworks, it is a major challenge," explains Dr. Andreas Knieriem. "Despite the tension leading up to this significant journey, we are grateful for the excellent collaboration with all partners with whom we are able to implement this project together," he adds. Simultaneously with the transport from Berlin, another herd of four animals from Prague Zoo will embark on their journey in a Czech military aircraft and will be released into the wild together with the horses from Berlin.

"We are extremely pleased that the Przewalski's horse will return to Kazakhstan. The wild horse had already become extinct in the endless, winter-cold grass steppes of Kazakhstan. Now, it will return and enrich the beautiful, wild nature of Kazakhstan. At the same time, it is also a symbol of the rewarding protection and restoration of our natural ecosystem," announces Dr. Nurlan Onzhanov, His Excellency, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

"The dimensions of the Central Kazakh Steppe present a unique opportunity - but also responsibility - for ecosystem-level conservation. This notably includes the reconstruction of the originally indigenous wildlife, including the large herbivores: saiga antelopes, Asiatic wild asses, and Przewalski's horses," explains Anne Dohrmann of the Zoological Society Frankfurt (ZGF). The implementation of this initiative is dedicated to the "Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative," which has been advocating for the protection and restoration of the unique grasslands, deserts, and semi-deserts of Kazakhstan since 2006. Within the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative, the Zoological Society Frankfurt primarily focuses on financing and project management, thereby supporting the Kazakh conservation organization "Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan" (ACBK) in implementing all measures on the ground. ACBK manages the reintroduction center where the Przewalski's horses from Prague and Berlin will arrive, and, together with state rangers, conducts long-term monitoring of the animals in the "Altyn Dala" protected area.

### **What is next in Berlin?**

At the end of April, six Przewalski's horses move into quarantine in Berlin. The four most suitable horses go on the long journey to Kazakhstan in June:

- Tessa, born 21.04.2019 at Tierpark Berlin
- Vicky, born 18.08.2021 at Gießen
- Uschi, born 04.11.2020 at Schweinheim
- Umbra, born 14.11.2020 at Schweinheim
- Sary, born 20.06.2021 at Thoiry



- Wespe, born 29.07.2019 at Tierpark Weilburg

Image material is available for download here (©Tierpark Berlin): <https://cloud2.zoo-berlin.de/index.php/s/NkaT5i7pFLLGPKr>

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