

ALTA Conservation Update

Amur Leopard and Tiger Alliance

August 2006

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Related websites:

- Amur Leopard Conservation, www.amur-leopard.org
- Tigris Foundation, www.tigrisfoundation.nl

Topics:

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Documents on internet

- New ALTA leaflet (www.tigrisfoundation.nl) ; (ALTA) partners)
- Pipeline report (www.tigrisfoundation.nl on the homepage)
- WCS Tiger Conservation Activities in Hunchun, China (www.tigrisfoundation.nl) ; reports & updates)

1. New member for ALTA

We are delighted to welcome Helsinki Zoo to membership of ALTA. Helsinki is an important member of the tiger and Amur leopard zoo breeding programmes, and their general curator Leif Blomqvist is a well-known big cat expert who has participated in several Amur leopard planning meetings in the Russian Far East over the last ten years. In addition, the zoo has so far contributed over \$90,000 dollars to ALTA's Amur leopard conservation programme, making it by far the most significant single zoo supporter in the world apart from those with

field projects of their own (ZSL and WCS). Helsinki is running a big event this autumn in support of Amur leopards and we hope to feature pictures and perhaps also video footage from it on our websites.

With this in mind, and also because a couple of the founder members of ALTA are no longer involved, we have revised and updated the ALTA information sheet and a new version will be distributed by email to all concerned shortly. Printed copies of this will take a little longer as we are not sure we have sufficient funds, but it may be possible to produce these by the end of the year and circulate them to the members.

2. Sergei Bereznuik receives prestigious Whitley Award

Sergei Bereznuik, Director of Phoenix Fund from Vladivostok, received a Whitley Award from HRH The Princess Royal at a prestigious ceremony at London's Royal Geographical Society on the 10th of May 2006. A group of 10 finalists were selected from 160 applicants worldwide. In London eight of the finalists, including Sergei and two other Russian conservationists, received a GBP 30,000 silver Award. The finalist from Peru received the GBP 60,000 Golden Award.

This is a well deserved triumph for Sergei and his Phoenix colleagues as well as for The David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation who assisted Sergei with his award application. The award will be used to finance a number of additional tiger conservation activities, including anti-poaching patrols, volunteer training camps, tiger festivals and school education centres.



Sergei Bereznuik (with envelope) at the Whitley reward ceremony.

3. The new Darwin Initiative ZSL-Amur Leopard Project

In February 2006 the Amur Leopard Project (ALP) of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) was established in the Russian Far East (RFE) with a three-year grant from the UK's Darwin Initiative. The project is being implemented in partnership with WCS Russia and the Primorskaya State Agricultural Academy in Ussuriysk and its Veterinary Faculty. Additional funding support is being provided by AMUR.

The main focus of the project is to build capacity for wildlife disease monitoring in the Russian Far East. Professional expertise in such issues is to a large extent still missing in the region. The long term goal of the ALP is therefore to educate Russian veterinarians and veterinary students in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of wildlife diseases, hence establishing



Claudia (left) and John (centre) with a group of students at the veterinary workshop

a new generation of veterinary professionals able to deal with a variety of wildlife disease issues. Along the way, we are also focusing on the particular risks that wildlife diseases hold for Amur leopards, given their small population size, and on the veterinary aspects of long-term preparation for Amur leopard reintroduction from zoo stocks.

A veterinary diagnostic laboratory will be established at the premises of the Veterinary Faculty; this Wildlife Health Monitoring Unit (WHMU) will be used for routine analysis of a variety of animal samples collected by the ALP, and will also be able to serve the region's wildlife health needs in general into the future. These samples will be collected as part of an extensive disease monitoring project in Primorski Krai (region) in the RFE. Samples will be collected from wild Amur leopards, their prey species, livestock and pets in the area. The results of this survey will give a comprehensive overview of the prevalence of animal and zoonotic diseases in Primorski Krai, which will serve as a baseline for future work as well as contributing to the process of planning for Amur leopard reintroduction. Through the analysis of the collected samples, the WHMU will provide additional and hands-on training in laboratory veterinary medicine to Russian veterinarians and veterinary students. Practical training is also being given through hands-on workshops, the first of which was held jointly with WCS at the Utios Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in Khabarovsk in April 2006.

ZSL's Dr Claudia Schoene is now resident in Ussuriysk as Project Manager for the ALP. Claudia is a qualified vet with a great deal of wildlife experience and has already settled in very well in Russia. ZSL has also appointed Dr John Lewis of the International Zoo Veterinary Group and Wildlife Vets International as veterinary consultant; Dr Lewis is one of the most experienced big cat anaesthetists in the world.

4. Successes in Pipeline Campaign

In 2005 ALTA members campaigned successfully against the proposed route and terminal location of the Siberia-Pacific Oil Pipeline. The terminal of what will be the world's longest oil pipeline (4,188 km) was planned at Perevoznaya on the Amur Bay opposite Vladivostok in range of the remaining 35 Amur leopards. The proposed terminal site was in fact the worst possible spot. It threatened 30% of Russia's endangered species, two UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (including the leopard reserve "Kedrovaya Pad" and Russia's only marine reserve) and the local tourism industry (the second largest in Russia). Tankers would have had to navigate through a string of small islands and shallow spots to reach the terminal. Scientists calculated that the risk of accidents resulting in oil spills was 17 times higher than if an alternative terminal site were selected. An oil spill similar in size to the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in would have happened once every 20 years on average, if the terminal had been built at the proposed site.



The campaign activities were led by Sergei Bereznuik of Phoenix Fund and Michiel Hötte of ZSL/Tigris Foundation, but many other partners, including David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, Alertis and Moscow Zoo participated. We also co-operated with NGOs from Korea and Japan (where Russia seeks funding for the project), Greenpeace, WWF and the US-based NGO Pacific Environment. We launched a large number of campaign activities aimed at a change of the terminal site:

1. Protest demonstrations and protests at public hearings.
2. A media campaign aimed at coverage in Russian and international newspapers and television.
3. Involvement of international organisations such as UNESCO, IUCN and the European and American zoo associations EAZA and AZA.
4. Website alerts with requests for readers to send protest letters.
5. Assessment of the project's impact and publication of the findings in a report (in Russian and English).
6. Several petitions to President Putin and other decision-makers.
7. Lawsuits addressing irregularities in the project's planning process.

8. Advice to all commercial and public banks active in Russia not to provide project funding unless the route was changed.

The campaign achieved a major victory when on the 6th of February 2006 the supervising agency "Rostekhnadzor" rejected the plan to build the oil terminal on the Amur Bay. Campaigners were of course delighted, but remained wary as no alternative site was proposed at that time. However on the 27th of July the president of Transneft, the state-owned company that will build the pipeline, announced a new terminal site; Kozmino near Nakhodka. Nakhodka is an industrialised zone where oil terminals already exist. The new site was suggested by local conservationists and scientists. The decision gives new hope for the remaining population of 35 Amur leopards.

Meanwhile Greenpeace and other NGOs campaigning for a different route near Lake Baikal also produced a victory. On March 26 President Putin stated that the pipeline should be built at least 40 km north of the lake's shores. The original route passed at a mere 800 metres.

5. WCS conservation in China

WCS China has made very good progress with its tiger and leopard conservation work in the Hunchun and Heilongjiang Provinces in China near the Russian border. Their activities in the region include:

- Training of Hunchun Nature Reserve staff and biology students in recognising animal tracks and other skills.
- Compensation for 70 livestock kills to date in and around the Hunchun Reserve where livestock forms the main prey for tigers.
- Involving local villages in anti-poaching activities in and around the Hunchun Reserve.
- Social research into the attitudes and opinions of local people towards the Hunchun reserve, tigers and wildlife conservation.
- Monitoring of ungulate, leopard and tiger populations in and around the Hunchun Reserve and in Heilongjiang Province.



Tiger tracks in the Hunchun Nature Reserve, Jilin Province, China

- Conservation education in villages and schools in and around the Hunchun Reserve and in Heilongjiang Province.

WCS organised a first social survey in spring 2004 in and around the Hunchun Nature Reserve, and repeated this survey a year later in order to measure progress. The second survey recorded very significant improvements in the attitudes and opinions of local villagers towards the reserve, tigers and their conservation. For instance, the percentage of villagers that fully agree that it is necessary to protect tigers rose from 56% to 73%. The discovery of tracks of a tigress with a single cub close to the Russian border in the central part of the reserve in 2004 was also encouraging; the first sign of tiger reproduction in China in many years. However, WCS's ungulate monitoring indicates that ungulate numbers in China remain suppressed even in the more remote parts of the reserve and are lower than on the Russian side of the border.

6. International Amur tiger conservation workshop in China

The Amur tiger is critically endangered in China. Although 450-500 individuals remain in Russia, in China it is estimated there are less than 20. Prey depletion, poaching and illegal trade are the main threats in China.

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Wildlife Research and Development Center of State Forestry Administration organised a tiger conservation workshop on 24-25 July in Yanji City in the Jilin Province. The workshop was hosted by the Jilin Provincial Forestry Bureau and Yanbian Forestry Bureau. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) provided funding.

Much has been achieved in Northeast China since the first international Amur tiger workshop was held in Harbin in 2000. Large tracts of forests remain, and the area with potentially suitable habitat is in fact increasing as a result of greatly reduced logging volumes and intensive reforestation programs. New protected areas have been established and there is clearly a much greater understanding of the problems associated with tiger conservation in the region as well as a clear commitment from the responsible agencies to address these problems. Monitoring programs have been developed and an increase in the number of documented tiger tracks indicates that tiger populations have begun to recover.

Since tigers and leopards don't recognize international borders, cooperation between Russian and Chinese colleagues is an essential component for recovery of both felids in Northeast China. The workshop brought together all relevant Russian and Chinese stakeholders to identify threats, develop the outlines of an action plan that will alleviate those threats, and explore mechanisms to further develop and implement the plan. WCS is hopeful that in 10 years (the timeline for the action plan) we will see significant improvements in the tiger landscape of NE China.

WCS's extensive education and snare removal programs across the region are ongoing. The compensation program for livestock depredation has been temporarily halted in Hunchun due to organisational changes in the Hunchun Nature Reserve, but will likely be restarted soon, and hopefully expanded to other areas.

7. Amur tiger count 2005

Dale Miquelle, Director of the WCS Russia Program, was overall coordinator of the latest full tiger survey in the Russian Far East. The survey was the most comprehensive in Russia to date and the results indicate that tiger numbers are stable with preliminary estimates of approximately 334-417 adult tigers and 97-112 cubs. The news was a welcome relief to tiger conservationists around the world, who have seen spiraling decreases in tiger numbers in other parts of Asia.

To determine numbers of tigers in this remote, densely forested part of Russia, researchers sent out nearly one thousand fieldworkers to search the entire region where it is believed tigers could occur for footprints in the snow. Workers covered over 21,000 km of transects by foot, skis, snowmobile, and car. Over 4,100 tiger tracks were recorded, most representing multiple tracks of a single individual. Researchers mapped out the location of all these tiger tracks, and then estimated a minimum number of tigers based on their sizes and distribution.

The project received funding from the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and a host of international organizations (Save the Tiger Fund, the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund, 21st Century Tiger, AMUR and WWF).

A final survey report is still to be produced.

8. WWF and ALTA co-operation in Amur leopard conservation

On 23 May 2006 ALTA conservationists met with representatives of WWF and three Russian NGOs involved in Amur leopard conservation (Zov Taigi, ISUNR and the Primorsky Krai Hunting Society). Cooperation between ALTA and WWF, and Amur leopard conservation, were the main topics of discussion. The WWF delegation included a representative from WWF International, representatives from WWF China and four WWF offices (UK, Germany, USA and Holland) that provide finance for the WWF activities in the Russian Far East and adjacent parts of China. ALTA was represented at the meeting by Dale Miquelle (WCS), Sergei Bereznuik (Phoenix Fund), Claudia Schoene (ZSL) and Michiel Hötte (Tigris Foundation / ZSL).

The participants agreed that there is a need for more intensive cooperation and coordination of leopard conservation activities between ALTA, WWF and other NGOs. It was decided to work towards a single Amur leopard conservation plan and that efforts would be made to get the programme endorsed by the appropriate Russian authorities. WWF, ALTA members and Russian NGOs will organise regular meetings to further develop cooperation and work out joint plans for at least four areas of Amur leopard conservation: 1) research, 2) fire-fighting and forest recovery, 3) education and 4) law enforcement.

9. New brigade combats illegal logging with support from DSWF

Phoenix Fund has received support from The David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation for a new brigade that fights illegal logging. The brigade is part of the Federal Natural Resource Service ("Rosprirodnadzor") and started its operations in 2005. The "mobile" brigade consists of 10 inspectors and is active in all forestry service lands in Primorsky Krai. During 7 expeditions with a total of 100 field days the brigade confiscated a total of 2,000 cubic meters of valuable timber including oak, ash, cedar and walnut. The brigade checked the operations of 18 logging enterprises and 6 forestry units. A total of 11 criminal prosecutions cases were initiated.



The violators will have to pay fines and a total of \$US 1,6 million damage payments. The inspectors also searched vehicles for poached animals and illegal fire-arms. They issued two citations for poaching and confiscated over 20 illegal hunting rifles.

DSWF provided \$15,600 in 2005 and in 2006 for the new brigade. WWF has provided around \$15,000 in 2005.

Confiscated illegally logged timber is hauled onto a truck

10. AZA Felid TAG

Amur tigers and Amur leopards were both high on the agenda for the American zoo association (AZA)'s annual Felid Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) meeting early in 2006. The meeting focused on North Asia, featuring snow leopards, pallas cats, Amur tigers and Amur leopards. Dale Miquelle, Director of WCS Russia, and Sarah Christie, Programme Manager for ZSL's Carnivores and People Conservation Programme and Co-coordinaor for the European zoo breeding programme for Amur leopards, were invited to speak. Between them they gave an overview of the situation in the wild, the status of the European/Russian zoo population, the potential for reintroduction and the availability of a conservation support service for zoos with this taxon on www.amur-leopard.org . There was considerable interest and concern among the north American zoos, several of which have since sent funds (thank you!) and begun using the website. The Coordinator post for the north American Amur leopard breeding programme is currently vacant, and following the meeting the AZA Felid TAG decided to advertise not simply for someone to run the studbook, but for someone with the time and expertise to also promote support for Amur leopard field conservation in the AZA community. The Amur leopard needs all the help it can get, and AZA zoos could make a huge difference in terms of both raising funds and producing leopards for reintroduction. The new coordinator should be selected in August, and we look forward to working with him or her, and with many more AZA zoos!

11. AMUR registered in Moscow

AMUR has successfully registered as a Russian NGO after months of tortuous work (previous to that AMUR was only registered in the UK). The new Founders and Trustees of AMUR Russia are all Russians which shows that more and more Russians, from all parts of society, are becoming interested in conservation and charity work. AMUR Russia is planning a series of fund raising and awareness raising events in Moscow and St Petersburg over the course of the next year with the aim of bringing more and more attention to the problems of Amur tiger and leopard conservation in the Russian Far East.