From January 14th to 16th, 2020, the Fifth Tiger Habitat Ranger Competition was held as scheduled. 18 teams from China and Russia have competed fiercely for the first "Tiger Cup" in Hunchun, Jilin Province for. After 3-days' competing, "Tiger Cup" was finally taken by Jilin Huangnihe National Nature Reserve Forestry Bureau; and Jilin Hunchun Forestry Bureau and Hunchun Municipal Forestry Bureau won the second prize. There were 18 teams in the competition this year, including 2 Russia teams: Russian Primorsky Wildlife Department and Land of the Leopard National Park.

The Tiger Habitat Ranger Competition are aimed to improve the rangers' knowledge and patrol skills, enhance their sense of mission for patrol work, strengthen exchanges among international rangers, as well as to increase public awareness of, attention to and participation in the rangers, patrol work and wildlife conservation.

There were many highlights in the competition: the “Tiger Cup” made its debut. It was designed by WWF and created by Bao Jie, the sculptor of “Walk With the Tiger” on the Global Tiger Day, to reward the champion team for their excellent performance in the competition and motivate them to make continuous efforts on the conservation of Amur tigers and leopards.

Introduction of the “Tiger Cup” fully inspired the rangers’ morale of fighting for conservation. Champion Ranger, Cheng Long from Huangnihe Forestry Bureau holding the “Tiger Cup” said: “‘Tiger Cup’ is our honor. For me, it is the “King”, it is my beloved Amur tiger & leopard and their homes, and it is also an arduous conservation mission. We will work even harder to live up to this recognition.”

This year’s field competition got even more difficult. The length of ditch in each competition area was about 1.5km. The organisers set 50 snares and 10 groups of poaching tools such as foot catchers, ground guns and pitfalls, which were as hard to find as real snares. The more real poaching simulation verified the rangers' professional capabilities of snare removal. WWF produced a short film "Lady Rangers" for the lady rangers team. It was released during the competition and deeply impressed the audience present. Qiu Shi, one of the female rangers, also a contestant and helped the team removed several snares.
She said: "I don’t think female rangers are any special. We are more careful than our male colleagues. Since we joined the team, the patrol records have been with much more details. There were just a few volumes of record books before. After we came, there are several boxes; and the monitoring data are also more refined."

At the ceremony, Zhang Shanning, deputy director of NTLNPA, said: "this competition is a comprehensive test of rangers’ professional skills in tiger range; and has accumulated valuable experience in promoting tiger and leopard conservation. We could take this opportunity to strengthen the transboundary cooperation, continue to expand public participation and to lift the wildlife protection effectiveness to a new height."

Liu Peiqi, head of WWF NEC Office, pointed out: "the participation of volunteers is also valuable. In the fifth year of the competition, we irrigate the natural tree together, nurture its continuous growth, only in way the fruits of conservation will yield."

**WWF Russia Conducted Amur Tiger Survey and its Habitats Research in Evreiskaya Province**

On January 19-February 4, WWF specialists, staff of other NGOs, and the officials of the provincial Directorate on Fauna and PAs conducted the research of the areas suitable for the Amur tiger habitats, the ones where the rehabilitated tigers were previously released (Dichun and Zhuravliny WRs), and those where the Pompeevsky NP is planned to be declared. Such an extensive research was done for the first time in Evreiskaya Province. According to preliminary data collected during the expedition, the tiger group is growing and can be estimated at 20 tigers including the cubs. The group of the Amur tigers has been created from scratch in Evreiskaya Province thanks to the joint efforts of the government and environmental organizations.

“We can state that the tiger group in Evreiskaya Province is viable, stable, and with the potential to grow and expand both into Russia and China”, notes Aleksei Kostyrnya, rare species projects coordinator at WWF Russia Amur branch.

In 2020, similar research of the Amur tiger habitats will be done in Taipinggou Reserve in China and the adjacent to the Russian border areas.

Rangers from Huangnihe Trace Tiger

In early February this year, just after the Spring Festival, the status of coronavirus was severe in the country, and the rangers of the Jilin Huangnihe Forestry Bureau has started the patrol for the new year. On the evening of February 5th, a forest farm worker reported that he met a wild Amur tiger when he was driving home.

After working overtime that day, the worker drove home alone. The sky was gradually dark. He felt the surrounding was extraordinarily quiet, only the sound “sooso” came from the right side of the forest. He thought it was roe deer or wild boar passing by, so he slowed down and had a look. He was shocked, because there was a Amur tiger lying only 10 meters to the road!

He tried to calm himself, but his hands were still shaking. It should be known that the rangers in the nature reserve rarely encounter the Amur tigers, and it’s very dangerous to encounter the tigers. He gingerly took out his phone, filmed a video and immediately reported it to the reserve.

Shi Xiaojun, head of the wildlife conservation divisions of the forest bureau, got to know the situation in detail. He tossed and turned all night, worried about whether the tiger was safe, and whether there was any special situation so the tiger appeared beside the road?

The next day, just after dawn, he led the rangers to start tracing and investigating the area where the tiger appeared. After finding the location in the video, they found that tiger footprints were very fresh. Judging from the size and stride of the palm pad, it is the only Amur tiger in the reserve, and it is "Hu Wa" to whom the rangers attached.

The tiger once roamed nearby and was likely to be frightened. Although there was no blood found, the walking route of it changed abnormally. It wandered in place for a long time, and suddenly disappeared. Rangers‘ hearts were hanging. They must make sure that the tiger is safe!

Subsequently, the patrol team began to carpet check its frequent footpath, skidding road, rocks and other areas, but still did not find its footprints. They could only judge the general direction of its progress through the previous spoors, which is the direction of entering the reserve. The rangers just wanted to expand the search area as much as possible. After more than ten hours of constantly tracking, nothing was found. It was already dark. The rangers could do nothing but return. The atmosphere on the car was solemn, and no one dare to think much about it.
On February 7, the rangers set out early for patrol tracking, but they still couldn’t find the footprints the whole morning, Wan Zhongwu proposed to change the tracking strategy that they can search the area where the tiger often stay. So they went back to the forest farm where the tiger often appeared. After some searching, Laowan and Shi finally found the footprints around the forest farm and collected its faeces.

Judging from the freshness of the footprints, Hu Wa roamed here before February 5th. It can be inferred that the tiger had been active in the reserve during the Spring Festival. However, they still could not confirm the situation of the tiger after being encountered by the road. They are still quite worried. Later, the patrol team went to another forest farm. Due to the knee-high snow on the road, the rangers struggled to shovel snow to open the way. They could barely entered the forest farm with anti-skid chains on the wheels.

The sky was getting dark, but everyone was insisting on searching more for a while. Finally, the rangers found the fresh footprints of the tiger and the walking route with no abnormality. This confirms the previous judgment: the tiger was active in the reserve during the Spring Festival and had enough food, so it didn’t leave the habitat. It seems that it is in good health and still living here.

Everyone was finally relieved for a while. In fact, the protectors are worried about the tiger all the time, whether it have enough prey, whether it is safe. The tiger came to the reserve from the age of 2 and has been protected by rangers for 5 years. When the rangers were sorting out the infrared camera trap, they found the vigorous figure of the tiger in the storage card just retrieved.

Amur Tiger Population Grew from Zero to Eleven in one of WWF’s Model Plots over Eight Years

Such are the results of the first stage monitoring of the Amur tiger carried out in Primorye by the Forest and Wildlife Ministry and WWF. Tiger monitoring is being conducted for 24 years in model plots located in different districts of Primorye. Recently, one more plot, Spasskaya, was added to the network of monitoring plots as a quite large tiger group made its appearance in the area. Eight years ago, the tiger number here was almost zero. Now the situation has changed dramatically. Eleven tigers today is a great result for such isolated territory. Tigers lead a full-on life here; females with cubs are recorded, proving that the group of predators is sustainable. To achieve such results, it was necessary to convince and get interest game users in peaceful coexistence with the tiger, and to prove that if all the recommendations are followed, ungulates are enough for rare cats and humans.

All-female Ranger Team from Dongning

The ranger profession around the world is male dominated. A survey of public-sector rangers across 28 countries last year found that just 7.5% of respondents were female and only half of the female rangers felt that their efforts were being fairly rewarded. It’s clear that governments and civil society have a long way to go to reach equity in this field, but there are some glimmers of hope.

Qiu Shi’s team is unique in that they are China’s only all-women patrol team, and play a crucial role in helping double tiger numbers. Join them on a day in their life...

February, 2019. Dongning Forestry Bureau, Heilongjiang Province. This is tiger range territory, deep in the mountains of Northeast China. At first light, six rangers set out on patrol, their breath fogging in freezing air. They will trek for hours across unforgiving terrain, snow underfoot. Their job? To patrol, record data, remove deadly snares and set up camera traps.

My name is Qiu Shi. I am a ranger for the Dongning Forestry Bureau, and today I invite you to join our team of six on patrol. Wrap up, it’s very cold. Where we are is bordering Russia’s Primorsky region, and during the winter even daytime can reach below -20°C. Amur tigers and leopards live here, roaming between China and Russia. We are here to safeguard them and their forest home. Most of the team here are second or third generation forestry people. Our fathers and grandfathers walked these forests before us. As a child, I couldn’t understand why my father was always away, always busy. Some of my teammates feel the same way. My colleague Bai Xue left the city and a well-paid job. She felt the need to return to this rural place. Her father before her was also forestry staff, and she says that it was only when she became a ranger that she began to understand why he would disappear for months on end to work in the field.
Today we are the new generation of forestry people protecting wildlife. For us, this is purpose with deep meaning. We walk quietly in the snow, paying close attention for signs of footprints and snares. The snares - metal wire traps set to catch wildlife - are often well-covered. Over the years poachers have grown more cunning. We are continually learning too, but sometimes an accident is unavoidable.

“Don’t move! Let me check.” My colleague’s foot is trapped in a snare. We manage to untie her. “Be careful next time. It’s lucky we are here, if you were an animal you would be dead.”

In this unforgiving wilderness, with steep mountains and dangerous animals around, even the most simple tasks are difficult. Not long ago one of my peers encountered a wild boar and suffered a bad wound to the thigh. He needed a number of stitches, but fortunately he is recovering.

After three hours of walking we arrive in Tubaogou. My colleague, Li Gang, points toward a steep mountainside, “ok, team here we are. Just up there”. She leads us to begin the climb toward three infrared camera traps in need of fresh batteries and new data cards. Snow makes an already tricky climb even more challenging. We make steady progress; it’s important we don’t miss a single camera trap.

“I’ll go first, and pull you up,” Zhang Xin says. One more hour passes before we finally reach the cameras and do what we need to do. Afterward, we pause for a quiet moment, taking in the beautiful, silver-brown landscape of Tubaogou before us. Have you heard of this place? This is the home of the Amur tigers and leopards. We eat a quick lunch of cold bread prepared that morning and move on, chatting about our families, neighbours and life at home to keep us from feeling tired. After half an hour or so Wu Tong calls out, “Come and see - a string of footprints!” Everyone hurries forward and gathers around the pug marks in the snow. Xu Chunmei takes out a tape measure to record the diameter of the prints. “Leopard, searching for food,” she says. “Take some photos, record it,” she adds, taking out the patrol record. I input the coordinates whilst others take out pens, paper and a camera.

These moments are the highlights of our days; every trace of a wild animal is so exciting. It may be an unforgiving world, but when we see roe deer walking among the trees, this landscape feels like a fairy tale. We march onward, chatting excitedly and singing with new spirit. In quiet moments, bird song and the occasional calls of wild animals keep us company. As light falls, we head down the mountain toward home. One by one, we help each other down the slippery slope before reaching the old, right-hand drive car. Shabby and leaking, our feet are freezing and faces red as we bundle into the seats. It has been a long day, but everyone is smiling.

**Safeguarding nature for generations to come**

Our fathers dedicated their youth to these mountains. They loved nature and animals, and they were not afraid of hardship or fatigue. Many people born in the mountains yearn for urban life, but we have a love of nature, and we have inherited the spirit of our fathers. Now we are the protectors of wildlife for the young generation.
Sparta, the Tigress, Met her Saver in Nordens Ark Zoo

One of the remarkable event for the Russian specialists during their visit to Sweden as part of the Northern Tiger Project was meeting of Viktor Kuzmenko, head of the Rehabilitation Centre, with Sparta, the Amur tiger female, that he saved 13 years ago with WWF’s support. Sparta lives in the Nordens Ark Zoo in “deluxe” conditions – in a large plot of enclosed wildness, she is in good shape, she gave birth to two litters. The “date” with Sparta was one of the meetings scheduled for the Russian team by their Swedish colleagues as part of the Northern Tiger Project run jointly by WWF Russia, WWF Sweden and the Nordens Ark Zoo. The agenda of the visitors study tour was diverse. They got acquainted with photo-tourism facilities in Wildlife Safaries Finland; with the way how to manage protected areas and deal with conflicts with large carnivores; with the results of Arctic fox conservation in Vindelfjallens nature reserve; routine of taking biological and genetic samples and storage techniques; the procedure of doing the autopsy in the Veterinary Institute in Uppsala; landscapes restoration after forest fires.

Such trips are very useful. This was the third visit to Sweden. Similar nature conditions in Sweden and Russia enable experts to employ the field experience of their Swedish counterparts and the methods and approaches they use in nature conservation. As a result, the Project has got remarkable achievements – over nine years in Nanaisky and Komsomolsky Districts, where the project is being run, the number of tigers has increased nearly three times reaching 50 animals.

TOGETHER FOR CONSERVATION EFFECTIVENESS

Conservation organizations have issued joint recommendations to save migratory ungulates

In connection with the commencement of construction of the Tavan Tolgoi-Zuunbayan railway, the Ministry of Roads and Transportation of Mongolia requested conservation organizations in January 2020 to provide recommendations for the design of free wildlife crossings. Therefore, WWF-Mongolia and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) developed a recommendation and submitted it to the Ministry of Roads and Transportation. The recommendations are based on information gathered from governmental and non-governmental organizations, research institutes and universities operating in the field of wildlife research and conservation in the region.

Firstly, the conservation organizations have recommended building the railroad between Tavan Tolgoi-Zuunbayan without barbed wires on its both sides in remote and unpopulated areas. Secondly, they recommended installing and building protection wires along the railroad only in vicinities of settled areas and railroad stations and points upon consideration of the necessity to prevent from potential accidents while leaving other parts of the railroad without protection wires in remote or unpopulated areas. This includes planning and constructing wildlife crossings every 10 km. Mongolian gazelle, wild ass, and black-tailed gazelles migrate differently depending on the weather conditions of the year and the yield of plants and other natural factors.

Thirdly, they recommended accurate pursuit and compliance with the new national standards on “Construction of Wildlife Crossings along Roads and Railroads in Steppe, Gobi, and Desert Regions” while putting wildlife crossings during the railroad construction.
There is also a need for additional crossings in hotspots where large numbers of wildlife live and migrate. The fact that the Mongolian Railway’s planned crossings do not coincide with wildlife locations, migration and transition hotspots indicates that the study needs to be reconsidered. Therefore, it is recommended that biologists and railway officials work together along the route to identify potential wildlife crossings and possible crossing points.

**The SMART System Helps Protecting Wildlife and Evaluating the Efficiency of Patrols**

The Bikin National Park awarded the best in foot patrol inspectors in 2019. They were determined with SMART approach that was put in practice in the Park in 2018 with the support of WWF Russia. The winner covered on foot 463 kilometers in the taiga which equals the distance between London and Paris. “To assess the efficiency of each inspector and improve the patrolling work this is exactly what we expected from implementing SMART in the Amur River basin. The final result depends on each ranger performing its best - in this case, the protection of tiger habitats of the Bikin National Park,” comments Alexey Kostyria, PhD, senior project coordinator of rare species conservation unit of WWF Russia Amur branch. Currently, the SMART system is used in more than 765 protected areas in 60 countries, and in 14 countries it is approved on the governmental level as an analytical tool for the protection of natural territories. We are glad that in the Amur Ecoregion along with protected areas of national level within the Amur tiger range, this system is being introduced by the Wildlife Management Department and the Directorate of Protected Areas of Amurskaya Province, and Khabarovsky Province also got interested in this system.”


The parties will work together to implement the management of Khar Yamaat Nature Reserve

WWF-Mongolia has been responsible for the management of the Khar Yamaat Nature Reserve since 2013 under an agreement with the Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism. Since the agreement, a participatory management plan has been developed and successfully implemented. It was decided to establish a joint management council based on the agreement with the parties that the decision to develop an optimal model for the management of Khar Yamaat National Park. In February 2020, all parties, including the Minister of Nature, Environment and Tourism, the Governors of Khentii and Sukhbaatar province, and WWF-Mongolia, formally selected members to join the Joint Management Council and approved the rules of operation. Consequently, Khar Yamaat NP Joint Management Council has been officially established. The main goal of the Joint Management Council is to create an optimal management structure for Khar Yamaat National Park, to establish a stable financial mechanism, and to strengthen its capacity to operate independently. This is a formal legalization of all parties will be involved in
the management of the nature reserve and in making the necessary decisions in the future. Although some PAs in Mongolia have established joint management councils, this decision is unique in that it is able to operate sustainably as it is formally established with legal claim.

**Zeisky Nature Park Established in Amurskaya Province with WWF Support**

On the eve of the World Wildlife Day, the Governor of Amurskaya Province signed the decree to establish Zeisky Nature Park on the area of 3600 hectares. According to Yury Gafarov, coordinator of protected areas projects of WWF Russia Amur branch, “Though the nature park is relatively small in size, it is an important chain in the network of protected areas that preserves primary pine and oak forests on the right bank of the Zeya River”. WWF Russia helped to carry out field surveys of this territory and to prepare of socio-economic background for the Park creation. In 2020, WWF will provide start-up support to the park such as purchase of cross-country vehicles necessary for the patrolling of protected areas, equipment for fire-fighting activities and artificial feeding for ungulates. Since the park has a very complex terrain, its territory can be covered only with special off-road transport. The Zeisky Nature Park is located just 100 kilometers away from the city of Blagoveshensk, the capital of Amurskaya province. The purpose of its activity is environmental education of local population and the development of ecological tourism.


**The mobile data transmission network is working successfully**

Spring is a risky season of wildfires and poaching. Therefore, members of the environmental communities of the soums along the Onon River in Khentii province regularly conduct inspections to prevent, monitor and warn of fires in the steppe and forests under their protection from March to May since 2018. The operation of a mobile data transmission network is showing positive results. Citizens are able to protect their forests and pastures from fires by notifying the authorities immediately. This spring, members of the 40 communities most affected by the fire have been using the mobile phone network for monitoring since March.
Community members report fires and poaching to their soum rangers and community leaders by phone at regular intervals, and the soum reports to the province Emergency Management Agency. The community members’ work was supported by the Onon River Community Association, WWF-Mongolia and Khentii province Environmental Protection Department, which provided incentives for them to communicate with each other during high-risk months. As a result of this work, several forest and steppe fires have been registered in Khentii province since the beginning of the year, and they have been extinguished quickly.

Water Deer Needs Official Status in Russia

Staff of the Wildlife Management Department with WWF’s support started supplementary feeding of the water deer that does not officially exist in the Russian fauna.

“Having a new species in the Russian Far East fauna is the unique case that demands a careful attention both from the government and public organizations. It is needed, first, to grant the water deer the status of an officially registered in the Russian fauna species and, second, to ensure favorable conditions for the deer to stay here”, comments Pavel Fomenko, senior coordinator of rare species conservation unit coordinator at WWF Russia Amur branch. In late 2020, at the meeting of a working group it was decided to create feeding stations in Khasansky Nature Park following the example of some model hunting clubs of WWF. WWF funded the forage purchasing and the Directorate for Fauna Protection and Protected Areas started the feeding. This can be regarded as the experiment as no one before did this in the Russian wilderness.

Camera traps fixed in the Park prove that the animals attend the feeding stations and confirm that in the southwestern Primorye there is already a relatively large group of water deers (https://wwf.ru/en/resources/news/amur/vodyanomu-olenyu-trebuetsya-ofitsialnyy-status-v-rossii/). According to WWF’s experts, if managed and conserve in a right way this water deer population has good chances to increase in number and become an additional potential prey for tigers and leopards which is very important under low densities of wild boars due to African Swine Fever.

Sukhbaatar province established a Sub-commission on prevention of environmental crimes

WWF-Mongolia supports cooperation of law enforcement agencies, knowledge and skill development of personnel, and joint training and advocacy on environmental protection. Within the framework, a consultative session involving Khentii, Sukhbaatar, and Dornod province authorities and representatives of law enforcement agencies was successfully held in Baruun-Urt city in 2019. As a result of meeting, Sukhbaatar province established a Sub-commission on prevention of environmental crimes on February 2020.

The parties agreed that particular attention should be paid to reducing illegal hunting and poaching. They mentioned there is a need for specific planning in this area, as the eastern region is the main gazelle habitat area and the exposure to illegal hunting is not decreasing. Experts from WWF-Mongolia emphasized that mitigation of environmental crime requires coordination of the eastern provinces.

Prohibited two-meters Deep Bladed skid roads revealed on logging site near Beltzovo village in Primorye

Task force raid conducted in March by the staff of the Primorsky Province Ministry of Forestry and Wild Animal Protection, Spasskoye Forestry Unit, and WWF has helped to reveal barbarian loggings near Beltzovo as well as evident discrepancies between forest inventory data and real forest stands. Local people are keen to conserve the Korean pine and linden so when grew suspicious that loggings were being done in a wrong way they called the authorities. The raid affirmed their suspicions. It was discovered that around 40% of cut timber was left on the felling site. Also, it became evident that manipulations with forest inventory data were pretty common due to a conflict of interest between forest managers who do the inventory and a forest leaser. As the latter wants to skim the cream and leave he does not need the objective information on his forest but the data that allow him to get maximal profit in a minimal time. Digitalization of the forest industry will help to improve the situation.
As for the logging near Beltzovo, the experts envision earth erosion, changing the level of the ground water and raising its muddiness that will cause problems with drinking water in the wells. Therefore, it is important both to register the violations and prevent those that might happen in the future.


Students Brigades on Nature Conservation Getting Ready to Become the Amur River Ambassadors

In the Year for the Crane, an international campaign Ambassadors of the Amur River was kicked off aimed at involving students from three countries into science and practice activities and public awareness actions on conservation of cranes and their habitats. Nature reserves’ staff, scientific organizations, students’ brigades for nature conservation, volunteers will study nesting grounds and migration routes to further elaborate decisions on how to minimize the negative impact of human activities and to improve the cranes habitats. The first meeting of the campaign held in Amurskaya Province in mid-March by WWF Russia gathered together students from four provinces to teach them the biology of the cranes and the threats the birds suffer from. The students got instructed on how to count the cranes, how they can monitor and control the wealth of the environment. Forest fire prevention activities were planned as well as the program for the awareness raising reach-out visits to the villages during the year. The results of the campaign will be summed up in October at the Far Eastern Conference for Protected Areas. WWF Russia, China, and Mongolia are the campaign organizers.

Zabaikalsky Province Authorities are against Mongolian Gazelle Protective Hunting

On February 6, WWF Russia sent the appeal to the Governor of Zabaikalsky Province in which underlined that the Mongolian gazelle is a Red List species and if the local authorities decide to do protective hunting of the animal it will be against the Russian law. The appeal became a reaction to the statements of some officials regarding a need of protective hunting on the Mongolian gazelle. The environmental press-club “Berloga”, one of WWF’s partners in the region organized a round table on the issue and invited representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Veterinary Service, Directorate for PAs, of two NRs, and WWF.
According the Ministry of Agriculture, the idea of protective hunting was triggered by the complaints from agricultural products producers on the harm from the gazelles. At the same time, not a single appeal was officially registered by the Ministry. Head of the Wildlife Management Department stressed that the agency received no instruction to conduct protective hunting.

Daursky NR’s specialists reminded that a special federal program for the animal conservation was created that became part of the national project “Ecology” initiated by the Russian President.

Wrapping up the meeting, the authorities’ representatives confirmed that a working group would be formed from among all interested parties to find out whether there problems caused by dzerens and to work out possible activities including public awareness actions. WWF has been supporting Daursky NR in their efforts to restore the Mongolian gazelle population in Russia for 20 years.

**In the Year for the Cranes Indigenous Peoples are ready to Continue Public Control over Salmon in the Amur River Tributaries**

On February 14-15 in Khabarovsk, WWF together with the Khabarovsky Province Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North discussed the issues of public control over the status of the Pacific salmon spawning sites and citizen participation in fish conservation on water bodies of Khabarovsky Province. Over 40 representatives of indigenous peoples from seven districts came to the meeting where the most common violations were reviewed. After each presentation, the attendees discussed
the challenges in the fishery industry and issues of fish resources conservation with the governmental agencies’ specialists. Also, the results of the field season 2019 were summed up. Heads of three volunteer brigades reported on their research of the spawning rivers.

**Earth Hour Came to Vladivostok on a Flake of Ice**

Vladivostok-based community of SUPboarders has joined Earth Hour with their traditional action “A Farewell to a Flake of Ice” which happens each March. The SUPborders paddle the flake of ice into the ocean to symbolically meet the spring. According to the movement’s leader, his fellows needed something more serious and purposeful for this headline action and Earth Hour is an excellent idea for them to feel more in charge of the environment.
WHEN THE BELT IS GREEN

Traffic signs have been set up on the road to eastern side

WWF-Mongolia in cooperation with Environment and Tourism Office of Sukhbaatar province set up traffic signs on the eastern route. The basis for this effort was the absence of any signs or markings indicating the possibility of wildlife crossing on the road. The experts erected 30 traffic signs along the 543 km highway from Baruun-Urt to Khulunbuir on the spots where the gazelle herds cross. This will allow drivers to slow down in places where wildlife may appear, thus reducing the likelihood of wildlife crashes.

In addition, as a result of joint efforts of WWF-Mongolia and other partner organizations, Mongolia approved the “Standard for wildlife crossings in the steppe and desert” for the first time in Central Asia in 2015. Three years later, the "Standard for wildlife crossing along roads and road infrastructure in mountainous area" was approved. In this way, wildlife crossing is mandatory when road and railway is being constructed. It is very important to implement the standard. That is why, WWF-Mongolia is conducting a series of meetings with stakeholders to promote standards. In addition, surveys are being conducted to identify potential crossings for newly planned roads.

An In-depth investigation on the economic activities of community residents in Huangnihe Forestry bureau

The five-month-investigation covered 17 communities inside and outside the reserve. And the research has found that there are 13 types of economic activities of residents in Huangnihe Reserve and its surrounding areas, such as salary (including pension), planting crop, doing part-time job, picking edible wild herbs, cultivating black fungus, animal husbandry, planting osmunda, self-employed household, and other economic activities. The economic survey studied economic activities of residents in the reserve and its surrounding areas from five aspects including types of economic activities, cycle of economic activities, proportion of economic activities in the total income of residents, occupancy of economic activities and attributes of labor force. It was found that income from planting ginseng
accounted for 77.72% of the total income of residents, while the income from picking edible wild herbs accounted for 4.83%. The proportion of economic activities in the total income of residents is shown in the following table:

It can be seen from the types of economic activities and the proportion of economic activities in the total income of individual, the production and living of residents in the reserve and its surrounding areas depend heavily on forest resources, resulting in the occupation and destruction of forest land, logging, human activities interference, production waste pollution and other serious problems.

**Educational Tourism Development in the Bikin NP**

On 14 March, the Bikin National Park celebrated “Va:khai ni” ecological festival devoted to the end of the hunting season which is based on an old tradition of indigenous peoples. As one of the NP’s goal is to preserve the traditional lifestyle of the Nanai and Udege tribes the Park’s administration keeps celebrating the holiday. More than 150 local people and guests from the cities and villages became spectators and participants of the competition in traditional sports of indigenous peoples. Va:khai ni is becoming a significant tourism event. More and more people are coming to visit this unique event to be closer to the wildlife of the Bikin River. WWF Russia is one of wildlife conservation organizations that put a lot of efforts in the Bikin National Park establishment.


**The administration staff from Onon-Balj National Park collected 500 kg of pine cones**

Rangers from Onon-Balj National Park Administration collected and prepared 500 kg of pine cones on March 2-5, 2020, with the financial support from the Eastern branch of WWF-Mongolia. This work is being done to expand the arboretum under the protected area administration and to plant the seedlings needed for a forestation. According to experts, this year the number of mature cones was lower than in previous years. This 500 kg of pine cones will be prepared by forest unit rangers in Bayan-Uul soum of Dornod province.
In addition, WWF-Mongolia initiated the "Tree for water, water for life" campaign, in cooperation with the parties since 2017. The goal is to increase the livelihoods of local residents through the protection of forests in the Onon River Basin and eco-friendly green businesses and to develop a green development model. Organizers said that over the past two years, trees have been planted for 60 hectares and have been growing well.

**WWF Staff Helped Reveal Illegal Logging of over 800 Cubic Meters of Valuable Tree Species Timber in Khabarovsky Province**

At the request of the Khabarovsky Province Administration of Ministry of Internal Affairs, WWF staff served as experts in the field operation “Forest” aimed at revealing violations of Forest Regulations in Vyazemsky District which is key habitat for the Amur tiger. In December 2018, during one of the raids, it was discovered that there were no marks on the trees prescribed for cutting. That meant that the lumbermen voluntarily chose the best trees making the marks with chainsaws. These facts were proved in winter 2019-2020 when on the felling sites a significant overcutting was registered particularly, of oak and ash. Diameters of cut trees were much bigger compared to the ones prescribed for logging by the documents. Only on three felling site of the Avansky forestry unit the volume of illicitly cut timber was 818 cubic meters which costs 46 million rubles environmental damage. All this timber could be loaded into ten railroad goods wagons (!). This February criminal cases were initiated

Right away at the Governor of Khabarovsky Province an interagency commission is being forming to reveal violations of forest laws on the southern districts. Such a decision was made after the Administration of Ministry of Internal Affairs presented the “forest” operation results to the Governor. WWF Russia Amur branch invited to send its experts to become the commission’s member.

**Automatic camera research is being conducted in Khar Yamaat Nature Reserve**

Khar Yamaat Nature Reserve is a protected area inhabited by a wide range of wildlife, including red deer, roe deer, wolf, lynx, and Pallas cat. Forty automatic cameras were installed to determine the location, numbers, and movements of these animals in the protected area, as well as to determine the impact of domestic animals on wildlife spatial distribution. The research is started in January 2020, by WWF-Mongolia experts in collaboration with Khar Yamaat Nature
Reserve rangers and research students. Automatic cameras will be stationed throughout a year for research. According to the experts, they observed 16 roe deers, 2 wolves and 3 eagles during a camera trap installation in January.

In addition, WWF-Mongolia has been responsible for the management of the Khar Yamaat Nature Reserve since 2014 under an agreement with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the administrations of Khentii and Sukhbaatar provinces.

**WWF Launched the Year for the Crane-2020 in the Amur River Basin**

by holding a press conference in Vladivostok on the eve of the World Wetlands Day, on February 2. Jointly with partners, WWF plans to continue creating protected areas and upgrading the status of the existing PAs in the key habitats of cranes and storks; to carry out the crane survey on its entire home range; support the activity of anti-poaching and fire-preventing brigades; carry out ecoregional public campaign “The Crane is a Bird of Peace” which will unite 24 nature reserves and national parks, 6 student nature protection brigades and 22 public organizations of the Amur ecoregion. The campaign the work with adults, kids, contests and workshops, Days of Crane, work of the students “Crane Ambassadors”. And in October 2020, at the Far Eastern Conference on PAs Management the new edition of the Red-crowned and White-naped Crane Conservation Strategy will be considered. WWF Russia has designed a special section on the AmurInfoCenter web portal dedicated to the Year for the Crane with lots of useful materials for everyone interested. The “crane” nomination is announced in the Far Eastern contest of environmental journalism “Living Taiga”. On the World Wetlands Day, staff of crane-range NRs and NPs and local NGOs conducted a variety of activities for kids across the Amur Ecoregion.


**The work to expand the water protection zone is continuing successfully**

WWF-Mongolia has been successfully worked with Khentii province Department of Nature, Environment and Tourism and Kherlen and Onon-Ulz River Basin Authorities to improve the water protection zones of water bodies as a no-go areas in regards to Law on Water. Within the framework of this work, the water protection zone are being expanded and redefined in cooperation with soum and bag citizens and all levels of government organizations, and are being approved as a no-go areas by the Provincial Citizens’ Representative Khural (CRK) on April 2020. This work was first carried out in Khentii province in 2016, and there was a need to revise the GAPs and improve the water protection zones of river basin.
There are additionally approved 445k hectares as a water protection zone which partly covers 17 soums and 445 streams and rivers, 89 lakes, 256 natural springs. The water protection zones established in the floodplains and wetlands of the Kherlen and Onon rivers and their tributaries, as well as in lakes, ponds, springs, natural springs, pasture wells and drinking water wells and the others. Additionally, the river network will be fully protected. It is also to protect water sources from depletion and pollution, and to prevent floods for settlement areas.

Rehabilitation of a White-naped Crane in Primorye

WWF Russia has been taking care of a white-naped crane that is under the rehabilitation at the Rehab Center “Tigr” in Primorye. A young rare bird was placed here in November 2019 after the local people noticed a lonely bird on a roadside in the area near the Khanka Lake in Primorye. As it did not fly away at the approach of humans, people assumed the bird felt bad and needed help. Medical examination revealed no injuries. For a couple of months in the rehabilitation center, the crane has already returned to physiological norm. Before the release in April, crane will be put to the enclosure that was built last year for storks with WWF support. Specialists will tag the crane with a radio transmitter and release it into the wild near Khanka Lake Nature Reserve in Primorye.


Promoting the value of cranes

WWF-Mongolia and WWF-Russia is organizing an international children’s drawing contest "Crane - Bird of Peace" to draw the attention of children and teachers to the importance and protection of cranes as part of the "Year of the Crane 2020" campaign. The drawing contest was announced in March and being held on Amur info center website.

In addition, a handbook for cranes for all ages has been prepared and published for the local community. Also, a thematic videos on 6 species of cranes was prepared and presented to the public. Within the framework of the Year of the Crane, it is planned to organize advocacy activities to improve the protection of the breeding grounds of rare birds in the Khurkh Valley in cooperation with local people and to reduce the negative impact of domestic dogs and cattle.
On International Bird Day WWF Presented the Comic Strip on Japanese Cranes

This graphic novel Is it easy to be a baby crane is based on real events and reflects the fate of one Japanese crane family. Is it easy to be a baby crane tells us what difficulties the chicks have managed to overcome to stay alive, take flight, and reunite with the lost family after a long separation. WWF Russia raises awareness on the state of the cranes in the Amur River basin. WWF deals with grown-ups and kids so its staff tries to use all genres to get the people involved in nature conservation. The graphic novel will be posted in the social media on April 1 along with the announcing a competition to rhyme the comics title. Three best rhymes will receive branded awards from WWF Russia.


The brown bear will be released back into the wild

In November 2019, a brown bear with frozen paws was found in Onon-Balj National Park, where he was unable to find food on its own. A two-year-old bear was reported to have entered the home of a local herder family and was rescued by PA administration officials. Immediately after the bear was brought in, biologists and soum veterinarians examined the bear and found that its four paws were frozen, cracked, and bleeding. Veterinarians concluded the bear is not able to winter on its own due to the injury and PA administration staff prepared warm place and have been feeding him ever since. Residents of the buffer zone were provided with up-to-date news about the bear, food donations were issued, and daily observations of the bear’s diet, behavior, and health were made.

The bear’s paws healed properly and now able to live independently in the wild. Therefore, soon he will be returned to the wild. Specialists from the Onon-Balj National Park Administration took the initiative to care and feed the bear, with financial support from the WWF-Mongolia, Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism and the local community.
Furthermore, in 2019, a total of 32 brown bears were observed in the Onon-Balj National Park and buffer zone, and 4 bears that entered the residential area were caught and fed by PA administration staff using special nets and returned to the wild in a remote area.

**Oriental Stork Survive the First Wave of Grass Fires**

The Oriental storks nest with the first egg got locked in the grass fire which was recorded by video cameras fixed in the nest in Amurskaya Province with support of WWF Russia. WWF keeps monitoring this pair of storks online for the second year. They live in this nest near Tambovka village for more than 10 years and always successfully raise chicks.

“Storks arrived here 11 days ago and this morning we were happily surprised to see the first egg. From now, during 30 days parents one by one will be taking care of it. Last year in the end of April the fire broke near this stork nest located on the inactive transmission power line, the valley of the Gilchin River was in flame. Storks bravely stayed in the nest covering eggs with their bodies. Today this situation happened again. This family was lucky to survive thanks to the “iron house”, the other birds breeding in wetlands don’t have this chance. These fires annually kill dozens of nests in the region with eggs and chicks”, comments Anna Barma, PhD, protected areas coordinator of WWF Russia Amur branch. You can watch the Oriental storks online on the AmurInfoCenter web portal up to the late August: [https://amurinfocenter.org/tools/projects/cameras_stork.php](https://amurinfocenter.org/tools/projects/cameras_stork.php)

**Tripods for Oriental Storks**

This March, eight high tripods for the Oriental stork nests mounted in Primorsky Province with the support of WWF. Five metallic tripods with baskets on top were erected in the Khankaisky Nature Reserve where 50% of this rare bird is concentrated. According to the data of a large-scale census in 2018, more than a half of all breeding in Primorye pairs are registered in Khankaisky NR. While in general, thanks to the implementation of the Amur-Heilong Ecoregional Program the number of storks has doubled having reached 720-800 breeding pairs. Three tripods were mounted in the Khasansky Nature Park in the southernmost Primorye, right on the Russian border with North Korea and China which is regarded a bottle neck of migration routes for many bird species. This work became possible due to the cooperation between WWF Russia, the Khankaisky Nature Reserve, and the South Korea Research Center for Endangered
Species of the National Institute of Ecology. The supports construction is one of the activities of MOU on Oriental Stork Conservation and International Cooperation signed in November 2019 by the three parties.


Checking of Quality of Forest Management in Primorye Discovered Loopholes in Legislation

Thanks to the cooperation between WWF and Primorsky Province Ministry of Forestry and Wild Animal Protection it became possible to reveal and neutralize gaps in forest legislation that enabled dishonest lease holders to overcut valuable tree species for years. For instance, only within one year and only within one out of elven forestry units of Primorye, the estimated cost of the valuable tree species harvested over the limits was 500 million rubles. According to Evgeny Chuvasov, head of forest unit at WWF Russia Amur branch, such situation is the result of imperfection of the forest regulations. In 2006, after a new Forest Code was adopted, the forest management type was changed from permissive into the declaratory one. The latter means that a logging company chooses itself which trees to fell. They inform the authorities on the place of the logging site and what timber will be harvested. Also they make up reports on the factual logging operations. This enables the company to legalize illegally cut logs. Schematically it looks like this: a lease holder informs the authorities about felling 100 cubic meters of oak but in reality he cuts 200 cubic meters. He takes away only the most valuable timber assortment leaving behind low quality logs and fuel wood. In his report on the forest resources use he mentions that he has harvested 100 cubic meters of oak timber where 80-100% of it is of high quality (saw log).

On February 3, at a meeting in the environmental prosecutor’s office the results of the checking were presented. The loophole has been “blocked”. This step will significantly decrease unsustainable logging in Primorye but there are still some unsolved issues left. WWF and Primorsky Province Ministry of Forestry and Wild Animal Protection work out a plan of joint activities for 2020.
BRIEF NEWS

A Documentary on Transboundary Cooperation between Bastak and Honghe Nature Reserves

was presented to the wide audience at the visitor center of Bastak Nature Reserve on the World Wildlife Day. In the Year for the Crane, a 15-minute film on the cooperation of two protected areas in the Amur River Basin sums up the results of a five-years-long collaboration between the staff of Bastak (Russia) and Honghe (China) NRs. “Bastak NR is part of the Sino-Russian network of bordering protected areas designed to preserve the unique ecosystems and habitats of migratory species. That is why the international cooperation of the reserve is one of the important aspects of work that WWF supports,” commented Peter Osipov, PhD, director of WWF Russia Amur Branch.


WWF Organized Courses on Fire Prevention Measures for 12 NRs and NPs of three provinces of the Amur River basin. The courses A Leader of Forest Fires Suppression were held on January 22-26 in the Forestry Innovation Centre by WWF Russia in cooperation with Primorskaya State agricultural Academy. There were different issues on the courses agenda, like how terrestrial and aerial services should interact, how forest fire combating should be managed in PAs, how to make up an action plan to prevent fire ignition, to stop fires from spreading; the basics of forest pyrology, checkout procedures, safety regulations and tactics of wild fires suppression. Fire-fighting equipment were presented to the courses participants as well as the usage of GIS-technologies in forest monitoring, employing drones in fire detection and determining the location and and extent of the fire. The “students” got acquainted with the legislation on forest relations and administrative liability in violations of fire safety rules. All 32 participants passed the exams and received certificates that enable them both to combat wild fires and lead a firemen group. Forestry Innovation Centre was created in 2017. In 2019, with WWF’s support, altogether 210 employees of forestry units, aerial forest protection service, forest inspectors of Primorsky and Khabarovsky
Provinces, deputy directors on protection of 22 NPs and NRs of the Amur Ecoregion were trained here.

Cranes of the Amur River Basin Became Heroes of the Seminars for Teachers and Cultural Workers

In the Year for the Cranes-2020, WWF together with Pas, NGOs, educational and cultural institutions organized a series of seminars for the teachers of three Far Eastern provinces.

In Zabaikalie, five seminars were conducted with total 250 teachers, librarians, museum staff, and pre-schools and additional education entities as participants. The focus of the seminars were the biology of cranes, threats, and plans on the rare birds conservation.

In Amurskaya Province, in Zeya, over 30 school and pre-school masters were introduced to the “erane” topic while in Blagoveshensk, teachers from seven districts attended the seminars.

In Khabarovsk, a seminar for the teachers and cultural workers was hosted by the Joint Directorate for PAs while in Ussuriisk, the event was held by Ussuriisky NR.

Similar seminars are planned to be run in other cities and districts of the Amur Ecoregion. In May, the teachers of Amurskaya Province will gather together in Khingansky NR to have a chance to participate in counting nesting crane pairs.

Reality Show “Oriental Storks Online. Third Season”

continues this year in the Amur Ecoregion. The first pair of Oriental storks is back to their nest located on the inactive transmission tower. Thanks to video cameras provided by WWF, online streaming is available on the AmurInfoCenter. According to Anna Serdyuk, senior project coordinator on protected areas at WWF Russia Amur branch, “This is a legendary pair of storks that settled in this nest for more than 10 years and always successfully hatched chicks. It is the pair that stayed in the nest after terrible grassfire had burnt the valley last year. These birds saved their eggs and raised five chicks after that”. The first online cameras were tested in Amurskaya Province in 2018 in a nest on the inactive transmission tower. In 2019, with the support of WWF Russia, online cameras were installed on 4 nests. This season, online surveillance has been expanded with one more nest on a tree. In early March, staff of the regional Directorate of Protected Areas installed 5 new tripods in the Berezovsky WR, 4 supports were mounted in the Amursky WR, and three more are planned to be erected in Muravyevskiy WR. In total, over the past 10 years, with WWF’s support more than 50 tripods have been installed in Amurskaya Province and almost 70% of them are inhabited by storks

**Director of Sokhondinsky NR Awarded a Medal for the Amur River Sources Conservation**

WWF Russia congratulates Viktor Yashnov with the award from the Governor of the Khentei aimak of Mongolia for his contribution to the wildlife protection of the transboundary area. Together with the Mongolian Onon-Baldj National Park, Sokhondinsky Nature Reserve in Zabaikalsky Province of Russia will become the core of the Sources of the Amur River - the planned transboundary PA.

1. River Ecoregion Vision

2. Migratory species:
   - Mongolian gazelle
   - Taimen

3. Key species:
   - Tiger, Leopard
   - Oriental Stork