

USPB reaches new stage of steppe restoration project

Title

The Ukrainian Society for the Protection of Birds (USPB; BirdLife in Ukraine), as part of its 'Steppe Biodiversity' project with EU financing has reintroduced ten critically endangered Saiga (wild antelope) and five Kulan (wild donkey) into the National Nature Park Charivna Gavan on the Tarkhankut peninsula of Crimea. Watch the release of the five kulans in [video](#).

For the first time in Ukraine, the project team is using a unique restoration practice by returning wild mammals serving as natural renovators to their native habitats. Saigas and Kulans help fertilise the soil through their droppings while their hooves push seeds deeper into the soil, allowing them to germinate. Their grazing habits keep the steppes open and prevent weed expansion. USPB is delivering and releasing these wild mammals into a large open aviary (102 ha) purposely designed to restore the degraded steppe ecosystem in the National Park thereby benefiting all wildlife who have made it their home.

Further steps in the project include the introduction of Marmots (ground squirrels) which will occur in June of next year. The Marmot population being prepared for the park have already entered their normal winter hibernation and would not take well to having their long winter sleep interrupted. They are important for restoration as their burrowing techniques serve as natural ploughing for the steppe land.

In addition to informing Ukrainians and the world about the most recent developments in the Steppe Biodiversity project, USPB also held a roundtable discussion in Chornomorske to keep the regional and local communities informed about the project and to seek public support for enlargement of the Park territory into the Black Sea.

'This is an area of Crimea that depends for its income primarily on summer tourism based on good beach access to the Black Sea and winter tourism mainly for hunters. The success of the project depends upon our working to meet local concerns and needs to the point that the local population fully adopts the project as their own,' said USPB director Dr. Oleg Dudkin.

'This is a decade's long process that with careful implementation and maintenance should eventually return Crimea to a level of biodiversity similar to that which existed hundreds of years ago. Now we are creating 'Ukrainian Serengeti'. We are proud to be a part of a process that will make Crimea a more ecologically balanced area for generations yet unborn,' concluded Dr. Dudkin.

For more information visit the project [website](#) or contact [Tamara Zykova](#) at *USPB (BirdLife in Ukraine)*.
