

The fact that an animal is listed in the Red Data Book of Kazakhstan does not always positively affect its conservation, experts believe.

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On July 6, 2020, vacationers killed a seal in Mangystau. According to the witness, a group of adults noticed a seal ashore and beat him with sticks and stones.

“They did it just for fun, to take a picture and show the seal to the kids. After it, they threw it back into the sea. Unfortunately, I do not know whether it survived,” the witness said.

This is already the second such case in recent years. Previously, the vacationers threw stones at a seal cub, which swam close to the shore.

On July 25, the Committee on Forestry and Wildlife of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan reported that the Interdepartmental Zoological Commission on Fisheries considered including the Caspian seal to the Red Data Book.

“Upon meeting’s completion, the inclusion of this aquatic animal in the list of rare and endangered species of plants and animals was generally approved. This will be an additional measure for its conservation, as well as one of the important arguments for the creation of a specially protected natural territory in the future,” the message states (quote: liter.kz).

However, according to the Director of the Institute of Hydrobiology and Ecology **Mirgali Baimukanov**, simply adding the animal to the list of rare and endangered animal species and giving it an endangered status is not enough.

“Without preliminary improvement of the legislation in the field of the Red Data Book’s species, a prompt decision-making threatens with



losing the opportunity not only to continue research, but also to preserve the species. I am afraid that the Caspian seal will repeat the fate of those many species from the Red Data Book, about which we are no longer aware of," says Mirgali Baimukanov.

Mirgali Baimukanov. Photo from personal Facebook page

The Red Data Book Is Not a Panacea

In 1999, the third edition of the first part of the Red Data Book of Kazakhstan, dedicated to vertebrates, was published.

It includes 129 species and subspecies of vertebrates, 18 fish and cyclostomata, 3 amphibians, 10 reptiles, 58 birds and 40 mammals.

Experts believe that the fact that an animal is listed in the Red Data Book, at least in the current realities of the environmental system of Kazakhstan, does not always positively affect its conservation.

In addition, according to the Chairman of the Council of the "Tabigi orta" regional association of the Western Kazakhstan's NGOs **Adilbek Kozybakov**, for example, the goitered gazelle, great bustard and saker falcon were listed in the Red Data Book for decades. However, their number is not recovering, but on the contrary, there is a decreasing tendency.



Adilbek Kozybakov. Photo from personal Facebook page

"The situation with the saker falcon can somehow be explained by the demand from the smuggling poachers (although this is not an excuse), transporting falcons to Arab countries. However, the goitered gazelle's numbers clearly demonstrate the inability of nature conservation structures to provide reliable protection. There is no commercial interest in gazelle on the grey market," says Adilbek Kozybakov.

Considering the official data by the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the dynamics of the

Experts: Including Animals to the Red Data Book in Kazakhstan Does Not Help Increasing Their Numbers

number of animals from the Red Data Book is difficult to trace. According to experts, this is due to the fact that systematic studies are not being carried out to characterize the number, changes in the age and gender structure. Sometimes some information about certain species appears. However, without constant observation, no one can assess whether the status of species' population is improving or worsening.

“After all, the qualified specialists who can study the rare species are disappearing themselves, regrettable as it sounds. Therefore, it is impossible to develop the effective measures for the species' protection. It is necessary to preserve the continuity of generations of researchers, develop and improve specific research methods that must be used to study the rare species. No research [means] no recommendations for conservation,” said Mirgali Baimukanov.

The experts are concerned that the Red Data Book status hinders conducting of various activities aimed at increasing the number of the goitered gazelle. This is due to the bureaucratic barriers for obtaining the permits for any actions in relation to animals included in the Red Data Book. For example, scientific research, rehabilitation measures in case of finding injured animals, re-adaptation within Kazakhstan and even within the region, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to develop the clear criteria for including the animals in the Red Data Book.



The Situation Cannot Be Fixed by the Fines Only

On November 6, 2019, the punishment for poaching was tightened in Kazakhstan: the maximum sentence was increased from 5 to 12 years of imprisonment. In addition, the fines for poaching were increased. The largest amount of fine is provided for the killing of the snow leopards and argali: it is above 7.5 million tenge (\$17,819).

The experts believe that increasing the fines alone will not improve the situation. In their opinion, social factors, legal protection, material and financial security of the inspectors should also be considered.

In just 5.5 years, according to the official data of the Committee on Legal Statistics, 2,086 cases were registered under Articles 337 and 339 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In addition to fines, Adilbek Kozybakov proposes to publish the poachers' names in the media and on social networks. In his opinion, fines will not stop a wealthy poacher: he will easily pay them, or bribe a ranger, inspector, investigator or judge, and will further promote

the positive image of a patriotic businessman, or even return to the illegal occupation.

“However, if the wide public learns about his inclination to destroy fauna, then this will be the end of his indisputable authority and positive image that developed over the years. Moreover, the Kazakh “uyat” [social disapproval - Tr.] will work for it,” Kozybakov said.

In total, over 5.5 years, the amount of financial damage from poaching amounted to 5,746,900 tenge (\$13.7 thousand).

The experts propose to financially stimulate ordinary citizens, especially local rural communities, to protect wildlife. In their opinion, this does not require budgeting billions to pay rewards to the public inspectors. It is enough to distribute a certain part of the claim amount for illegal hunting a wild animal, which is paid by the poacher among the participants of the detainment of this very poacher. At the same time, the claim amount for the compensation of the caused damage should not be confused with a fine imposed by the court as a punishment and transferred to the state revenue.

“To sum up, the state will not lose financially from this, but nature and local communities will definitely benefit. This mechanism worked properly during the Soviet times, and has been introduced in Kyrgyzstan for five years now. As a result, the number of wild animals in our neighbors’ country is recovering. For some reason, neither officials nor deputies are interested in this in our country,” Kozybakov notes.



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