

Przewalski's Horse

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Species

Why in News?

Recently, 2 Przewalski's horse foals were born in the steppe region of Kazakhstan.

- These foals are considered the **1st Przewalski's horses** to be born in Kazakhstan's grasslands in almost 2 centuries.
- It represents a significant milestone in the ongoing **rewilding and ecological restoration efforts within Kazakhstan's steppe ecosystems**.



Icon	Attribute	Value
	Scientific name	<i>Equus przewalskii</i>
	Common name	Przewalski's horse / Mongolian wild horse
	Status	Endangered – IUCN Red List
	Native region	Central Asian steppes
	Current conservation range	Mongolia, China and reintroduction sites in Central Asia
	Wild status	Last truly wild horse
	Domestication	Never domesticated
	Chromosomes	66 chromosomes
	Domestic horse	64 chromosomes
	Social structure	Small groups/harems, generally 5–10 animals
	Diet	Primarily grasses and other vegetation

Key Features

- A **stocky, sturdy horse** with a short upright mane, adapted to harsh steppe conditions.
- Considered the **last truly wild horse species** in the world.
- **Never domesticated**, unlike modern horses.
- Different from domestic horses, with **66 chromosomes** (domestic horses have 64).

Conservation Range



Current conservation range

Interesting Facts

- Native to the grasslands and steppes of Central Asia.
- **Reintroduced in the wild** in Mongolia, China and other parts of Central Asia after near extinction.
- Plays an important role in maintaining grassland ecosystems.
- A **conservation success story** through global efforts.

“Last Truly Wild Horse” refers to the unique status of Przewalski's horse.

- Przewalski's horse has **never undergone domestication**.
- This characteristic distinguishes Przewalski's horse from **feral horses**, such as **mustangs**, which are descendants of domesticated horses that have reverted to a wild state.
- It represents a **distinct lineage within the equine family**.

Historical Decline

- The species was once widely distributed across the **Central Asian plains**.
- Major threats to the species included:
 - Hunting,
 - Agricultural expansion,
 - Habitat loss,
 - And competition with livestock.
- The last known wild individual was observed in **1969 in the Gobi Desert**.
- The species persisted through populations maintained in **European zoos** and captive-breeding programs.

Reintroduction in Kazakhstan

- **Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative**
- **Began in - 2005.**
- **Aim** - To restore approximately 75,000 square kilometers of degraded **steppe and semi-desert**.
- The project addresses degradation resulting from the following factors:
 - Overgrazing
 - Unsustainable farming
 - Climate change
- It is recognized as a **UN World Restoration Flagship**.

Przewalski's Horse Reintroduction

- Since **2024**, **22 Przewalski's horses** have been transferred from European zoos to Kazakhstan.
- The **Alibi Reintroduction Centre** serves as the main facility for this effort.
- The animals are gradually acclimated to survive in natural conditions.

Ecological Significance

As a large herbivore, the Przewalski's horse plays a critical role in grassland ecosystems.

- **Grazing** - It regulates vegetation growth and may reduce the risk of wildfires.
- **Movement of their hooves** - It disturbs and loosens the topsoil, promoting soil aeration.
- **Dung** - It contributes essential nutrients to the soil.
- **Grazing and movement** - It helps to sustain healthy grassland ecosystems.
- Therefore, the reintroduction of Przewalski's horses supports broader ecosystem restoration rather than solely focusing on species recovery.

Conservation Target

- Kazakhstan has set a target to establish a population of **40 Przewalski's horses by 2029**.
- **Long-term objective**
 - To establish a stable, free-ranging population.

- To reduce dependence on human intervention.

Reference

[Down to Earth | Przewalski's Horse](#)

