

Mongolian wildlife face extinction crisis

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Wildlife Conservation Society scientists say they are deeply concerned about an alarming decrease in general wildlife populations in Mongolia.

The New York-based organization blames overhunting and excessive trade in skins and other animal products for the problem, the New York Times reported Tuesday.

A WCS study of Mongolia's wildlife says by some estimates, the populations of endangered species -- marmots, argali sheep, antelope, red deer, bears, Asiatic wild asses -- have plummeted by 50 percent to 90 percent.

Two exceptions are an apparent increase in the number of wolves and a gradual increase in the number of endangered Przewalski wild horses.

"The country is facing a quite extraordinary and unnoticed extinction crisis, or at least the threat of one," Peter Zahler, assistant director for Asia at the New York-headquartered Wildlife Conservation Society, told the newspaper.

The WCS said the nation's independence from the Soviet Union in 1990 "was the undoing of Mongolia's century-long effort to control wildlife trade."

The WCS says nearly all of Mongolia's annual \$100 million in wildlife trade is illegal.

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