

# PPR virus poses threat to conservation

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MAGE: PPR caused a mass mortality of saiga antelope in Mongolia in 2017.  
Credit: B. Ariunbaatar/WCS Mongolia

A team of conservationists from the Royal Veterinary College, WCS, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna published a letter in this week's edition of the journal *Science* on the threat of the virus peste des petits ruminants

(PPR) to conservation.

PPR is a viral disease of sheep and goats, of great significance to the livelihood of rural communities, biodiversity [conservation](#), and national and global economies. Repeated [mass mortality](#) events in wild steppe and mountain ungulates of the Middle East and eastern Asia is raising significant concerns about the conservation impact of this virus.

The mass mortality of over two-thirds of the critically endangered Mongolian saiga in 2017 is a dramatic illustration of the threat of PPR to wildlife. The situation is particularly bleak for the saiga antelope, as this is the second known mass mortality event due to infectious disease in less than two years, effectively reversing decades of conservation efforts to limit the impact of other threats, such as poaching for horn and meat.

Mass [mortality](#) events in saiga are linked to changes in climate, spillover of pathogens from livestock, and resource scarcity due to increasing competition with livestock for forage. The impact of livestock diseases on other wild ungulates is likely under-appreciated due a lack of systematic surveillance.

The authors say there is an urgent need to explicitly include wildlife protection as an objective of the PPR global eradication campaign.

Growing human and livestock populations put increasing pressure on natural resources; a better integration of rural development and conservation strategies is a critical challenge of our time.

To better understand this disease, Science for Nature and People Partnership SNAPP Steppe Health is gathering a diverse group of animal health and conservation professionals to measure and mitigate the impact of pathogens, such as PPR virus, at the [livestock](#)/wildlife interface.

**More information:** Jennifer Sills et al, PPR virus threatens wildlife conservation, *Science* (2018). [DOI: 10.1126/science.aav4096](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aav4096)

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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