

Rare saiga antelope population now over a million in Kazakhstan

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In 2015, a nasal bacteria wiped out more than half of the world's Saiga antelope population.

The population of endangered Saiga antelopes in Kazakhstan is now over 1.3 million, the ecology ministry said Tuesday, in the latest boost to a

species threatened by poaching and disease.

In 2015, around 200,000 of the [antelopes](#)—well over half the total global population at the time—were wiped out by what scientists later determined was a nasal bacterium that spread in unusually warm and [humid conditions](#).

But last year brought good news as the numbers rebounded from 334,000 in 2019 to 842,000 across the center, west and northwest of the vast Central Asian state.

The April aerial count ahead of this year's spring calving took the population to 1,318,000, according to a dataset shared with AFP by the ecology ministry.

The former Soviet country's vast steppe is home to a majority of the world's Saiga with Russia's Kalmykia region and Mongolia hosting smaller numbers.

Poaching is a persistent threat to the Saiga, known for its distinctive bulbous nose, and is fuelled by demand for their horn in traditional Chinese medicine.

Kazakhstan's leaders pledged to intensify their crackdown on poaching after two state rangers were killed by poachers in 2019.

But the success of conservation efforts have raised fears that Kazakhstan will once again allow hunting, with a ban introduced in the late 1990s running out in 2023.

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