

## **Project Update: October 2015**

Activity 1. **The preparatory period** (working with maps, selecting the spots for the installation of the camera traps and the survey of the distribution of the Pallas's cat's principal food objects, and obtaining permissions for entering the border areas).

In the preparatory period we carried out a detailed analysis of all the records of the Pallas cat in the mountain regions of neighbouring countries adjoining the territory of Uzbekistan. We also worked on the zoological collections of the biological faculty of the Tashkent National University, the Institute of Gene Pool of Plants and Animals under the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the biological faculty of the Samarkand State University. We analysed the collections of the Turkestan red pika and silver mountain vole gathered in the territory of Uzbekistan and the neighbouring countries. On the basis of the analyses we selected five potential territories for the accomplishment of the field work. We decided to work in two areas within the framework of the project. 1. The Ugam-Chatkal National Park, an area bordering on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (the Western Tien Shan Mountains), for which we obtained permission for the project team from the authorities to visit the border zone and from the park's administration to visit the territory of the national park. 2. The Hissar and Baysun Ranges in Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya Provinces.

Activity 2. **Development of the poster and distribution of the posters among the governmental organisations dealing with nature conservation.**

We prepared a poster in three languages containing information not only on the Pallas's cat, but on all the representatives of the family Felidae in Uzbekistan. The posters were distributed among local people, local administration and governmental organisations.

Activity 3. **Working in the field.**

The project team assisted by several volunteers organised expeditions to the abovementioned two mountain areas of Uzbekistan. In the course of the expedition we installed the camera traps, which are expected to function up to the summer of 2016. We were recording rodents, with a special focus on the Turkestan red pika, which, according to the information we had obtained, must be the main food for the Pallas's cat. Colonies of the Turkestan red pika were found both in the territory of the Western Tien Shan Mountains and in Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya provinces. The camera traps were installed in the places the colonies were encountered. The project team interviewed the soldiers of the border troops, the park's rangers, beekeepers, hunters and local people. We regret to say that we recorded instances of poaching some other rare species, such as the Tien-Shan brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Central Asian otter (*Lutra lutra*) and Turkestan lynx (*Lynx lynx*). It should be noted that for the first time from the start of the project we met three persons, who not only identified the Pallas's cat, but also described how they encountered the animal. Their information seems reliable, as the abovementioned respondents confidently connected the Pallas cat and the Turkestan red pika.

