



# Saiga Antelope

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## Why in News?

The [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) Red List](#) has recently reclassified the status of the **Saiga Antelope (*Saiga tatarica*)** from **Critically Endangered** to **Near Threatened**.

- This significant update reflects positive conservation efforts and offers a hopeful outlook for the survival of the Saiga antelope species.

## What are the Key Facts about Saiga Antelope?

### ▪ About:

- The saiga antelope is a **large, nomadic, migratory herbivore** that lives across the Eurasian Steppe.
  - It's found in Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.
- It belongs to the family of Bovidae (order Artiodactyla).
- The Saiga has two subspecies: ***Saiga tatarica tatarica*** (found in most of the range) and ***Saiga tatarica mongolica*** (found only in Mongolia).
- Typical habitat consists of **flat open areas** covered with low-growing vegetation, allowing animals to run quickly.
- They have an **unusual hanging nose**, which makes them look like a camel, although they are goat-sized, and male saigas have horns.

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- **Decline in Saiga Population:**

- The Saiga, which has roamed the earth since the last **Ice Age**, faced a drastic decline in its population by more than 95% within a decade after the collapse of the **Soviet Union in 1991**.
- The decline was primarily **due to poaching for the species' meat and horn**. The horn is used in **Chinese Traditional Medicine**.
- In 2015, a major epidemic killed more than 200,000 animals, which was a blow to the species' promising recovery.
- **Conservation:**
  - Conservation efforts have led to a **positive change in the global Red List status of the Saiga antelope**.
    - **Kazakhstan** has shown commendable leadership in species recovery, implementing **anti-poaching initiatives**, law enforcement measures, and establishing State Protected Areas.
    - The Convention on the **Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)** has facilitated cooperation among governments and civil society organizations for the conservation of the Saiga antelope.
  - The Saiga antelope population has soared to **over 1.9 million**, with the Mongolian subspecies witnessing a notable increase, reaching 15,540 individuals in the 2023 census.
- **Ongoing Challenges:**
  - **Poaching**, illegal trade, disease, **climate change**, disturbance, and infrastructure development continue to pose challenges.

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/saiga-antelope>

