

Rare breeds center in Vlahi. Ten years of Breed and Nature conservation

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Abstract

The Rare Breeds Centre (RBC) in Vlahi village was founded by SEMPERVIVA society, in the 2000. It was done in the frames of a conservation project aiming to save the three breeds of the Karakachan nomadic people.

SEMPERVIVA started a long term project for conservation of the original type of those three breeds – Karakachan sheep, Karakachan horse and Karakachan dog. At the Rare Breeds Centre the biggest flock of original Karakachan sheep has been bred. There is also a group of Karakachan horses from some of the last original lines and a number of Karakachan dogs. At its initial stage, the project was financially supported with the big help of Hape Grunenfelder and SAVE Foundation. Practicing of transhumance grazing of the project nucleus herd was supported also by Frankfurt Zoological Society. The project developed basic infrastructure of the Rare Breed Centre. After the fourth year of its implementation the farm at the RBC started developing towards self-financing and sustainability.

The main goals of the RBC are:

- Preservation of original type of breeds;
- Keeping and breeding *in situ* in typical conditions and historical, traditional area
- Investigation, research and education in the field of rare breeds conservation.

Biometric surveys of nucleus groups of the Karakachan breeds at the RBC, show that the animals are in their original type described by authors from the first half of XX century. The RBC maintains also nucleus breeding herd of rare local Kalofer Longhair goat and a small group of Bulgarian Screw-horn Longhair goats. The animals are bred in a traditional way with all year round grazing. Close connection with natural habitats supports selection to original breed type. Grazing of sheep and horse herds in traditional transhumant way supports preservation of rich floral and animal biodiversity on the Pirin national park pastures. Grazing goats are effective management tool for arid pastures in the west slopes of Pirin mountain.

Rare breeds at the RBC are becoming attractive touristic focus point.

A milk processing area is being built, in order to produce milk products from the rare breeds milk.