



# **Rare Breeds Center, Vlahi**

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**Model for integrated conservation of Agrobiodiversity and  
Nature protection**

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# Rare Breeds Center

- It was born as a result of fruitful cooperation between project initiative of BBPS Semperviva and support of SAVE foundation. All started in 1999.





# From very beginning we build our work on a few pillars

- To conserve breeds in their original historical type
- To restore historical connections between breeds
- To restore connections between breeds and wildlife
- To preserve strong integration between breed and habitat
- To preserve traditional nature friendly husbandry
- To present a model for integrated conservation of Agrobiodiversity and Wildlife biodiversity



Karakachan sheep rams in Rare Breeds Center, Vlahi



# Background

- In 1970s Bulgarian Government starts a program for conservation of local breeds. In state farms, herds of several local breeds are formed and maintained. During the next 30 years some of these herds are improved because of different reasons. One of the breeds put under improvement was **Karakachan sheep**. As a result, in the end of 1990-ties, in State farms untypical animals are kept, but with pedigree registrations as purebred Karakachan sheep.

# Untypical Karakachan sheep in state farms







- Aboriginal **Karakachan horse** was ignored by the state at the expense of development of half-blood breeds. In the same time Haflingers are introduced with the aim to use them as a working horse in mountain regions.
- Luckily, because of sentiments, few private owners have kept their old strains of Karakachan horses. These small groups are foundation for reviving of the original breed.



- This situation led us to start project for conservation of the original types of the three Karakachan breeds





# Rare Breeds Center

## The area

- We chose to build RBC in an area where will be possible to organize year round grazing with transhumant passage between lowland and alpine pastures.
- In Pirin Mountain there are suitable conditions. In winter, low parts of the mountain are influenced by warm Mediterranean climate. In summer high mountain pastures give fresh temperature conditions and enough pastures for sheep and horses.



# To conserve breeds in their original historical type

- RBC maintains nucleus groups from 4 rare native breeds. The animals are bred *in situ*. We stick strictly to selection of original historical type of the breeds.
- RBC made pioneer work for surviving of original type of Karakachan breeds of sheep, dog and horse.
- The team of RBC was the first which started to investigate, describe and breed Bulgarian native goat breeds. In the RBC nucleus herd of Kalofer longhair goat was formed. In 2009 RBC team organized founding of Association of Autochthonous Goat Breeds in Bulgaria (AAGBB). AAGBB maintains herd books of both native goat breeds – Kalofer longhair goat and Bulgarian screw-horn longhair goat.



# Karakachan sheep

- The herd was formed by searching for typical animals with private owners, in isolated remote mountain regions of Rila and Rhodope mountains. The first year we found and collected only 30 sheep. Now, 14 years later the herd numbers 550 animals/ 40 males and 510 females/. In 2014 over 350 lambs were born.





# Karakachan horse

- The breeding group of horses was formed by purchasing typical animals from three old strains . Now RBC maintains 24 Karakachan horses. Animals are registered in the Karakachan horse stud book kept by Association for Bulgarian Indigenous Breeds(ABIB).





# Karakachan dog

- Karakachan dog was the first breed we were engaged with. Pure breed dogs had nearly extinct in the beginning of 1990-ties. We started breeding program connected with reintroduction to mountain herds who suffer from wolf and bears attacks.



- There is double positive effect.
  1. Karakachan dogs are kept *in situ* and selected by working qualities.
  2. Guarded herds have big reduction of losses from predator attacks. This leads to decrease of negative attitude towards protected large carnivore species.
- Near 85% of Karakachan dogs in the region are descendants of breeding couples kept in RBC. Dogs are registered in stud book of IKDA.







# Kalofer longhair goat

- The nucleus herd was created in RBC as a result of pioneering work for investigation of Bulgarian native goat breeds. 230 Kalofer longhair goats ( 70 males, 160 females) are kept at the RBC.
- The whole breed population in 2014 is 2404 animals.









- The population of the second native breed – Bulgarian screwhorn longhair goat in 2014 is 2025 animals.
- Stud books for both breeds are maintained by Association of Autochthonous Goat Breeds in Bulgaria(AAGBB).





# To restore historical connections between breeds

- The three breeds of Karakachan nomads have been developed in one complex. But every breed has its specific role. One of our goals was to restore and demonstrate this historical symbiosis.



# To preserve strong integration between breeds and habitat

- Old breeds are developed under high influence by natural habitat. That's why they are very well adapted to local environment and traditional husbandry methods.

















- Our herds graze all year round. Even in snowy winter. We believe, preservation of historical developed adaptation of breeds to environment is one of the main factors for conservation of original genetic diversity.







- Karakachan sheep herd maintains floral diversity in wide territory.

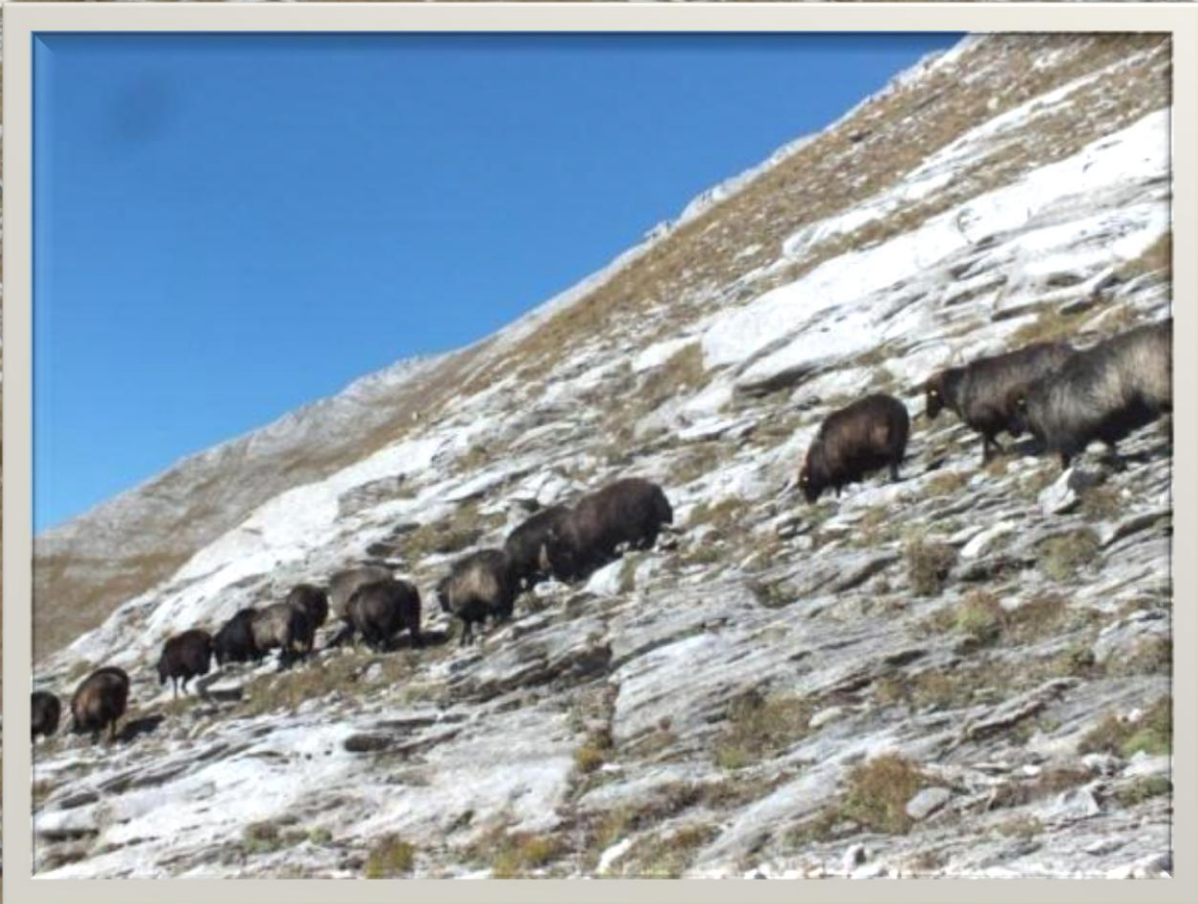




- In summer months sheep herd grazes on high alpine pastures of Pirin National Park between 2000 – 2600 m. This is the highest grazing herd in Bulgaria. Pastures are on rough steep rocky terrain. But Karakachan sheep loves it.





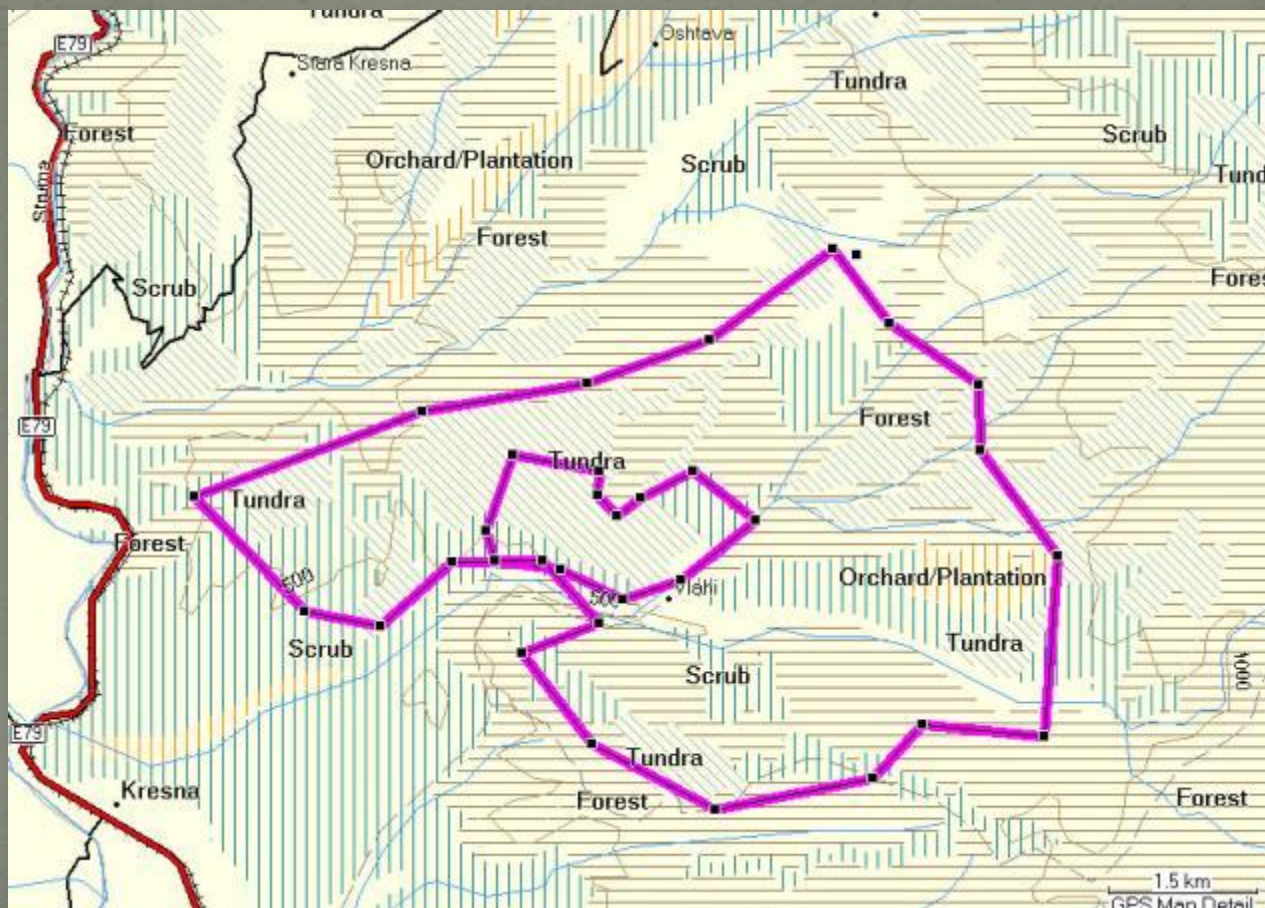








- In cold part of the year sheep herd grazes in lower part of Pirin Mountain (500-750m) in area of Vlahi village.
- Same area is used year round by Kalofer longhair goat herd.





Kalofer longhair goat herd maintain vegetation in low parts of the mountain





# To restore connections between breeds and wildlife

- Through centuries of selection, old local breeds get in interactions with different wild species.

flora on pastures <>grazing herds<>guarding dogs<>large carnivores<>vultures and birds of pray<>ground squirrels<>flora on pastures<>insects<>grazing herds...





# To preserve traditional nature friendly husbandry

- Transhumance implementation









## Support of traditional gastronomical diversity

- Slow Food Presidium “Karakachan sheep”
- Small scale production of milk products
- 2013 -Slow Cheese Award





# Presentation of a model for integrated conservation of Agrobiodiversity and Wildlife biodiversity

- RBC acts as an open for public model farm
- Shows live animals in their original type
- Presents traditional pastoralism in vivo
- Demonstrate interactions between domestic animals and wildlife
- Cultivates open minded attitude toward symbiosis of wild nature and traditional livestock husbandry

# BBPS Semperviva initiative

- **Spring Feast of stock–breeding and agriculture in Kresna.** Annual from 2012. Organized in partnership with breeding organizations and NGOs.





# The hard trial

- In 2013 lightning totally burn the building for goats in RBC





2014 same place  
after rebuilding





# Current environment

- In 2007, EU subsidizing of native breeds in Bulgaria under Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 started. It led to contradicting results.
- From one side subsidizing made native breeds attractive for more farmers. The result is in increasing of purebred animals.
- From other side these breeds became attractive for speculators. From their point of view, every single animal with pedigree/typical or not/ mean profit: money for the farmer, but also money for breeding organization. More animals with pedigrees means more satisfied members and more money for organization. The result is in rapid increase of population numbers in some breeds on account of untypical animals.
- Begins process of inventing of “old”/pseudo native/ breeds. These are groups of mix-bred animals claimed as breed with idea for subsidizing.

- Unfortunately 15 years after beginning of conservation work for the original type, some breeding organizations still make selection of untypical Karakachan sheep. These animals are included in Stud books, have pedigree certificates of pure breed and receive subsidies.



Untypical “karakachan” sheep on exhibition in March 2014. Note that the wool is not sheared. It is short and soft.



# Comparison between original and imitation

Karakachan sheep – original type. Ram from Rare Breeds Center herd.



Untypical, improved "karakachan" sheep >



# Karakachan horse is in similar condition

- ABIB is a first breeding organization who started to register typical horses in breed stud book.
- Later, another organization started to issue pedigrees of untypical horses.
- As a result, official numbers of animals in stud books are higher than real typical Karakachan horses are.



Karakachan horse -original type



Untypical mix-breeds, but with pedigree



- In 2014, official data about pedigreed populations of both breeds are:

Karakachan sheep – 7678

Karakachan horse - 2800

# How to solve the casus?

For effective conservation of the old native breed There are two ways:

**Soft solution:** current population and stud book should be separated into two groups:

- 1. With original breed name – only for animals from original historical type. This is autochthonous breed. For example: Karakachan sheep, Karakachan horse
- 2. With addition “Improved” in the name/or with new name/ – for mix-breeds and untypical animals. This must be listed as an improved new developed breed/population

**Radical solution:** to exclude all untypical animals and annulate their pedigree documents.

Realization of this measures is in hands and will of Ministry of Agriculture and breeding organizations



Thank you!



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