



## **Conservation of Karakachan sheep, Karakachan horse and Karakachan dog - one of the oldest breeds in Europe**

**This project is dedicated to Dr. Yordan Danchev, who devoted his life for saving old  
autochthon breeds and for conservation of Rhodope Mts.**

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Project financed by: Fondation pour les Animaux du Monde, FL-9490 Vaduz

### **Background information**

The Karakachan sheep, Karakachan horse and Karakachan dog are local breeds, which had been formed on the Bulgarian lands, as a result of the most primitive type of livestock breeding - nomad livestock breeding. The Karakachans are Balkan nomad people of livestock breeders, who are considered by most of the historians, as descendants of the ancient Thracian livestock breeding communities. It is considered that thanks to their extremely conservative livestock breeding traditions, Karakachan people have saved the most primitive and pure domesticated forms of animals - a sheep type "tzakel", a mountain horse and a livestock guarding dog.

#### ***Karakachan sheep (Karakachanska ovca in bulg.)***

The Karakachan sheep is accepted as the most typical and most primitive, coarse wool sheep type "tzakel" in Bulgaria (Adametz, 1906; Chlebaroff, 1932, 1940; Bogoljubskii, 1959; Savov, 1964; Terec, 1965; Balevska, 1967, etc.). This was proved by the craniometrical research of Balevska, Petrov (1967). According to the same authors this sheep is closest to the European mouflon *Ovis musimon*.

The Karakachan sheep is small (about 57 cm at withers), the short and thin tail is typical sign of the breed. Its wool is coarse and long (up to 26 cm). The coloration is grey-black and brown-black, but very seldom white. Very vital and energetic animal, very tough, almost never being ill, very unpretentious towards the food source. Highly developed feeling for being in a flock. Low productivity of litters (100 - 102%).

### *Factors influencing extinction of the breed*

The Karakachan sheep had been one of the mostly spread breeds in Bulgaria in the past. In the beginning of the XX century the population size had been more than 500 000 individuals. In 1957, during the nationalization of the farming practice, the number is decreased to 158 896 individuals. (Danchev, 1994). At that time the socialist government decided to replace the local breeds of sheep with foreign, fine-fleeced. As a consequence of the state policy the local breeds had been massively crossbred with other breeds. There are other factors which threaten the breed. The alpine pastures in the country are hardly used. But if the Karakachan sheep is bred in lower mountainous lands it has lower productivity compared with other breeds. At the moment the mountain livestock breeding is a losing practice. The government does not stimulate private livestock breeders to keep and work with autochthon breeds.

### *Current status of the breed*

According to the Red Data List of the autochthon forms of domestic animals, included in the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy of Bulgaria (1994) the Karakachan sheep is categorized as **endangered**. It is noted that the total population size of the breed is less than 2000 specimen (Y. Danchev, 1994). According to the official data of the government a flock of purebred Karakachan sheep is kept as gene material in the Institute of Mountain Livestock breeding in the town of Troyan. The flock number is about 120 sheep and is without a ram. The sheep have clear signs of hybridization - white and softer wool, long tails, larger height and untypical head. The information from employees in the institute is that the sheep have been crossbred in the past with the purpose to obtain new qualities. Only single individuals are similar by phenotype to the original Karakachan sheep. According to data of the Institute of Livestock breeding, the town of Kostinbrod 40 Karakachan sheep are kept there, but are grazed together with 80 sheep from the Replyanska and Zapadnostaroplaninska breeds. The Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program together with a Bulgarian partner (Nature Protection Center "Eastern Rhodopes") works on a project to save the Karakachan sheep. A small flock (about 40 sheep) is being kept in Eastern Rhodopes area. A team of SEMPERVIVA members visited the place to see the flock. It was found out that there are all sorts of mix-bred sheep, which even are not similar to the Karakachan sheep.

During the expeditions of BBPS-Semperviva members to search for aboriginal sheep only single individuals were found with livestock breeders in some mountainous settlements of Rila, Phodopes and Pirin mountains. The only compact flock of Karakachan sheep which was found (about 40), is owned by an old Karakachan man from West Phodopes mountain. We have collected information that few more private flocks exist in different villages in the country. However, this information must be checked out. Generally, we consider that the complete population of the Karakachan sheep in the country is about 200 individuals and is close to the critical status. This opinion is supported by the fact that this population is spread through the country and the different groups do not have contact with each other.

### *Karakachan horse (Karakachanski kon in bulg.)*

In contrast to other nomad people in Asia and on the Balkans, which use donkeys, Karakachans use as a transport facility only horses. The Karakachan horse is the most consolidated breed from all the local primitive horses. This is due to the very conservative livestock breeding traditions of these nomads. A specific feature has been the wide use of close inbreeding when breed this horse (A. Petrov, 1940). The Karakachans had used these horses for transportation of their whole household, during the seasonal migrations from the summer pastures to the winter ones and back. The pasture had been the only food for those horses. The horses which had not been currently used by people had stayed all year round high in the mountain in groups taking care about themselves. Even during cold winters they had found food and protected themselves from predators. Each Karakachan man had owned 50-100 horses in the past. In 1940s this number was decreased to 10-15 and seldom 50 animals from which 5 - 10 breeding mares from old breeding lines.

The Karakachan horse is comparably short (about 128 cm at withers) (A.Petrov, 1940). It is thickset with good musculature, with wide forehead. The legs are perfectly set and strong. The hoofs are exceptionally solid and strong. Horses often work without horse-shoes. Among people Karakachan horses are known as exceptionally strong and tough animals.

### *Factors influencing for extinction of the breed*

In 1957-58 after the government took away the livestock from private owners, the Karakachan horses have not been in use by the state farms anymore. They had been killed and given to chickens and pigs for food. Recently such horses are being exported for meat (mostly to Italy). Attempts have been made in the state farms to “improve” the breed by crossbreeding with Hucul, Kabardin and Haflinger. The government does not have policy to save the aboriginal breeds of horses. There is no promotion of their valuable qualities.

### *Current status of the breed*

According to the Red Data List of autochthon forms of domestic animals, included in the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy of Bulgaria (1994) the Karakachan horse is put in category II - **disappearing** forms (or **critical**) by Y. Danchev (1994).

According to the BBPS - SEMPERVIVA investigations, nowadays the Karakachan horse number has been decreased so much, that if urgent measures are not taken it will disappear in few years. During our expeditions we have seen only single specimen, or small groups from 2 - 4 horses, usually in Rila and Rhodopes mountains, but also in Pirin and Stara Planina Mts. and Kraishte region. Those horses are with proved origin. Until this moment we know about three bigger compact groups of horses which are owned by local people from Rhodopes Mts. The first one consist of 18 animals owned by a 60 years old man. These horses are very typical, with perfect working qualities and very good, calm characters. The other group is bigger. It is owned by a man who is relative to the old man. These are 54 typical Karakachan horses, which are let free all year round high in Rila Mts. and nobody works with them. Because of this fact and also because people chase them out of the potato fields, these horses are very wild and scared. They reproduce within the group on the principal of the natural selection. The owner has only five working horses with perfect working qualities. The destiny of the 54 horses is not clear, because the man does not mind to sell horses for meat. The third group of 16 horses belongs to a Karakachan man from Rhodopes Mts.. Those horses work as the first group does. They carry wood material on pack saddles transporting it from forest to settlements. Those horses are also bred traditionally. They belong to several generations of that family. According to the opinion of their owner they have not been crossbred with other horses. This group varies a bit more in exterior. We have information about such horses in South Stara Planina Mts., but it needs to be checked.

### *Karakachan dog (Karakachansko kuche in bulg.)*

The Karakachan dog is a very ancient breed of livestock guarding dog. It comes from the shepherd dogs of the ancient Thracians and dogs used for livestock protection by the proto-Bulgarians, who came from Central Asia. Karakachan people had selected this dog conservatively and had formed its present type. Due to its perfect working qualities this breed has been also widely used by Bulgarian shepherds. According to the literature, in the past some livestock breeders, who had had a huge number of sheep (about 12 000) had owned 100 dogs for protection of these flocks. Until the World War II the Karakachan dog had been used in the Bulgarian army.

These dogs are large, powerful, with harmonic proportions. The coat is long and coarse. The coloration is mainly spotted (big contrast spots on white base or white spots on dark base). These dogs are very movable and have big aggressiveness towards carnivores. They are also very unpretentious to the conditions they live. They can work in different conditions, which are sometimes very hard (rough terrain and high number of predators). Due to their qualities these dogs became legends in the Bulgarian folklore.

### *Factors influencing extinction of the breed*

After the nationalization of private livestock in 1957 a big number of Karakachan dogs had got useless and many dogs had been killed. In that period the wolf had been heavily persecuted and almost exterminated. In the period 1960s - 1980s the socialist government carried out several campaigns for extermination of domestic dogs including Karakachan dogs with the aim to trade with their furs. The main part of the population of the breed was saved in the state livestock farms, particularly in mountainous areas. However, after 1991 when the state farms stopped to function, these dogs became “homeless” and most of them were killed by hunters again. Due to the extremely low number and particularly shortage of females, shepherds started to crossbreed them with other mix-bred dogs or such

from similar foreign breeds. Up to day the government has not supported the breed survival in any way, except including it in the Red Data List of the autochthon forms domestic animals, which is a part of the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy of Bulgaria, as a **disappearing** breed (or critical).

#### *Current status of the breed*

Until the middle of 1990s common decrease of the Karakachan dog population (working dogs and such which do not work) was observed. The status of the dog became critically low. In contrast, since that time increasing occurred. However, after that time and up to now the number of purebred Karakachan dogs, owned by dog breeders or by dog lovers, increased at the expense of the decreasing aboriginal population of the breed. It turned out that almost all the best working, aboriginal dogs were taken by Karakachan dog breeders and kept by them, with the purpose to save and to breed those dogs. Recently, thanks to the popularizing activities carried out by BBPS -SEMPERVIVA and some other breeders and thanks to the projects of returning the dog to its natural environment there is a slight trend of increase of working dogs.

On the base of BBPS - SEMPERVIVA studies, the alive purebred Karakachan dogs in Bulgaria are between 600 - 700 individuals. In the herd book of the society 202 dogs have been registered.

#### ***Why these three breeds are so valuable and need to be saved?***

These are one of the oldest forms of domestic animals in Europe. They are the connection between the modern high-productive breeds and the wild predecessors. These three breeds have been selected in a way and in conditions which can not be repeated. This process has created breeds with very high vitality and excellent adaptability to different live conditions. They almost never get ill and are totally unpretentious to the food base. Being a fruit of the eternal, natural harmony they have strong body with good proportions, vital temperament and proverbial toughness. The sheep the horse and the dog must be saved for the research purposes in the fields of immunology, nutrition, reproduction, etc. The rich genetic potential which these breeds carry, will probably be of a big importance in future. They have been and will be unique for the specific, local conditions, because their economic potential is in using them in the low-productive mountainous areas.

For example the Karakachan sheep is resistant to illness and able to survive on the hard and severe mountainous terrain and conditions. It is adapted to long trips on high-mountainous trails. The wool is used in local handicrafts to make traditional products.

The Karakachan horse is still irreplaceable in mountains, where it is used in the logging industry. Horses carry wood material down the settlements without damaging the unity of natural forest ecosystems. These horses have a good character and are perfect for riding and recreation, particularly in mountain regions where other breeds of horses can be even dangerous. They are very cheap for their owners, because they graze all year round and do not need to be fed and kept in enclosures in winter time.

The Karakachan dog has ever been the only effective and the most suitable traditional protection against predators. It is a key factor in solving the predator - man conflict and consequently saving large carnivores. These dogs still prove their irrefutable working abilities in contrast to many other European livestock guarding dog breeds, which have turn to show-dogs. Except all, they are devoted and selfless to their owner.

And last but not least the three Karakachan breeds are an integral part of the Bulgarian culture and customs.

#### ***Common economic situation***

During the last several years, after the political changes Bulgaria is in hard economic situation, which is getting deeper. Particularly the agriculture, which has been one of the leading branches in the Bulgarian economic (before the socialist system) is in a big crisis. For instance the number of sheep in the country is 5 079 938 individuals in 1992. Compared with 1987 it has been decreased with 76,1%. In the beginning of 1990s the number of sheep from the aboriginal breeds is only 1,3% from the whole sheep population. During the last three years farmers have worse and worse conditions for their practice. The purchase prices of the products (milk, meet, etc.) are getting very low, but prices of the production (cheese, yogurt, meet products, etc.) in shops are much higher.

There is no subsidies by the government for the private farmers to breed local, aboriginal breeds.

## Goal of the project

**Conservation and restoration of the local, ancient breeds of Karakachan sheep, Karakachan horse and Karakachan dog, as one of the most primitive breeds in Europe and as a part of the natural, cultural and historical heritage of Bulgaria. Saving the traditional way of their breeding.**

## Responsible people and organizations

The project for saving the three Karakachan breeds was initiated by the BBPS - SEMPERVIVA.

Different agencies and institutions are going to be involved in this project.

Main partners of BBPS - SEMPERVIVA are local private farmers from Kresna municipality in Pirin mountain and BALKANI Wildlife Society.

The Pirin National Park administration is going to provide in kind support to the project.

### ***BBPS - SEMPERVIVA***

Sider Sedefchev, MA - Coordinator of the project. (Karakachan dog breeding, Karakachan sheep and horse studying, public awareness.)

Atila Sedefchev, MA (Karakachan dog, sheep and horse studying. Maintenance of information database.)

Vergil Murarov, graduated vet assistant (vet assistant, contact person for eco-turism)

Veselin Stanoev, student in veterinary (maintenance of the cryoconservation)

Emil Danchev (maintenance of technique, cars, etc.)

### ***Local people and farmers from Kresna municipality (Pirin mountain)***

Todor Georgiev, student in ecology – regional coordinator of the project. Employed in the National Park Service, as forest keeper (guide of tourists)

A family of shepherds Georgievi (day-to-day care of sheep, making milk products)

Other shepherds (assistant of the family in sheep care)

Horse keeper (day-to-day care of horses, horse tourism)

### ***BALKANI Wildlife Society***

Elena Tsingarska MSc, Mammal biologist working on large carnivores (tourism, media relationship, public awareness)

### ***Other specialists***

Yonko Semerdgiev, MSc zoo-engineer (selection, reproduction and herd-book)

Dr. Valery Naichev, veterinary doctor (vet of the project)

## Infrastructure of the project

Two main stations will be constructed in Pirin mountain for the project purposes. One of the stations will be down in the foots of the mountain and the other up on the alpine zone. Thus the traditional way of breeding of these breeds (transhumans) will be saved and practiced.

### **Polena station**

The first station will be in area called Polena, about 16 km up from the town of Kresna. The area is very suitable for the sheep and for the horses to spend winter time, because of the Mediterranean influence in the climate. The place is very good for grazing and has wonderful landscape – open meadows and old, natural mixed forests.

Following buildings will be built and equipped:

A sheep pen in old, traditional stile, for 300 sheep.

Hayloft in traditional stile.

Shepherd cabin in traditional stile.

Tourist cabin, made with natural materials and with comfortable atmosphere.

### **Curnata voda station**

The other station will be on 2300 m altitude in the mountain in the borders of the National Park. It is placed below the highest peak of the mountain (Vihren 2914m). The area is amazingly beautiful. This will be the summer station. The flocks go for grazing further up on about 2600 m, every day. The whole area from the station up to 2600m is perfect for grazing. Here Karakachan sheep and horses had been bred traditionally in the past.

Following buildings will be built and equipped:

Traditional sheep fence made out of stones (without shade).

Shepherd cabin in traditional stile.

Tourist cabin for six persons, made with natural materials.

**Note:** All the wood material needed to build the farm facilities and tourist houses will be provided to the project by the National Park forest administration.

The farm facilities on the summer station will be built voluntarily by the local people working on the project.

The project needs a four wheel driven car. "Lada Niva" is good for these conditions. The car has to be equipped with a trailer for transporting sheep and all the materials needed.

For the purposes of the eco-tourism the project needs a microbus for nine persons. "Mitsubishi" or other.

A computer with printer and scanner is needed, due to the conditions and the character of the work. They will be used for general management of the project and maintenance of Herd books.

For communication the project needs at least three GSM mobile phones.

### **Working area**

One of the three National Parks in Bulgaria was chosen for implementation of the present project. The conditions are perfect for livestock breeding practice, moreover for such tough, primitive breeds and also for tourism. Pirin mountain is placed in South-west Bulgaria. It is a part of the Rilo-Phodopean massive. Pirin is one of the two highest mountains in this country (peak Vihren, 2914 m). Rila mountain, which is the highest one (peak Musala, 2929 m), is placed North of Pirin. A big part of the mountain is a National Park (Pirin National Park, about 40 000 ha). It is declared as a site of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Convention (UNESCO). Several strict nature reserves are placed on its territory.

The landscape of the mountain has unique alpine character. It looks severe with its high peaks and steep slopes. Numerous glacial lakes make this landscape even more beautiful. Because of the specific longitude and latitude the climate varies from soft Mediterranean in the foots of Pirin to cold mountainous. The biodiversity in this mountain is one of the highest in the country. Number of rare and endemic plant species, are found on its territory. For example it is the north border of the Balkan pine tree *Pinus heldreghii*, which grows naturally only in Pirin and in North Greece.

The flora in the lower lands is rich on Mediterranean species. Oak forests form the zone up to 1000 m altitude. Beech forests dominate from 1000 to 1500 m altitude. The pine zone comes above this level reaching to 2200 m. The pine forests are formed by *Pinus peuce*, *Pinus heldreghii*, *Picea abies*, *Pinus sylvestris*, *Pinus nigra* and *Abies alba*. In the following sub-alpine zone *Pinus mugo* and *Juniperus sibirica* are present. The wide alpine pastures of the mountain provide very good conditions for livestock grazing in summer time.

The fauna of Pirin is also very rich. Many species of Mediterranean amphibians and reptiles inhabit the foothills of the mountain. The large mammalian fauna is present by chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra*, red deer *Cervus elaphus*, roe deer *Capreolus capreolus*, wild boar *Sus scrofa*, wolf *Canis lupus* and brown bear *Ursus arctos*. The density of these large carnivores is one of the highest in the country. High diversity of birds of prey species (eagles, buzzards, vultures, etc.) inhabits the mountain sky.

# Activities

## *Conservation and restoration of the Karakachan sheep, horse and dog.*

### *Conduction of census*

The aim is to get as total picture as possible of the current status of the Karakachan sheep and horse in the country. Thus the future activities will be based on exact information. A questionnaire will be prepared, with questions about:

- the number of specimen/ groups from the certain breed;
- structure of a herd (sex, age);
- common use;
- sources of reproductive material and methods of breeding;
- geographic localization;
- information about the owner and his/her family

As a result of the conducted census a data base about the breeds will be available as a base of our work and of future monitoring.

### *Establishing herd-books*

Separate herd-books will be established for the nucleus herds of the Karakachan horses and the Karakachan sheep. The nucleus herd of Karakachan dogs kept by members of BBPS - SEMPERVIVA has been already included in a herd-book.

The following activities will help in preparation of the herd-books:

- Collecting data about the predecessors of a specimen (at least mother and father);
- Identification of a specimen (by ear tags);
- Recording of particular features.

### *Selection and reproduction of the three breeds.*

On its first stage the conservation program will concentrate on receiving higher number of specimen from the horse and the sheep, i.e. expansion of the genetic base. A bit higher variety of the type will be allowed. Reaching the effective population size of 50 ind. per generation, the ambition of the selection will be to get closest to the old type. It is described by the authors Chlebarov (1940, 1942) and Petrov, (1942) who had studied the Karakachan horse and sheep as numerous and vital populations. Fortunately, concerning the Karakachan dog the problem with extremely low number has been already overcome.

In situ conservation will be implemented, with the purpose to keep the contact with nature and local people, thanks to which the breeds have been formed as they are today. The ambition is to develop the project into sustainable system.

Ex situ conservation has been and still is used to save the Karakachan dog. The nucleus of the breed has been bred *ex situ* and *in vivo* up to now.

Cryo-conservation of semen is envisaged as a support of the *in situ* and *ex situ in vivo* conservation. It will be used as a reserve in case of future problems or accidents, but also as a tool for reduction of the inbreeding coefficient.

## *Karakachan sheep*

Purchase of nucleus herd of Karakachan sheep. Up to this moment only one compact flock of sheep was found by us. It consisted of 30 sheep, 3 rams and 10 lambs. It was the last part of a big flock of 240 sheep. The flock has been sold in parts during the last five years and more of the sheep had been slaughtered. It was announced for sale when we found it. Unfortunately, due to lack of sources we could not buy it and the flock was already sold. The owner is 80 years old and sick man. He kept the sheep until now from sentimental feelings. According to his words the sheep are ownership of the family at least three generations back and have been bred conservatively. No crossbreeding with other breeds has been allowed.

At the moment we try to find out where the sheep are, because they were sold to different places. Our ambition is to find and buy more sheep from this flock, because the animals are with proven origin and typical exterior.

Some of the single individuals, which were found in flocks of other breeds of sheep also will be bought. The ambition is to collect 55 sheep for the nucleus flock, during the first year. On base of some income of the project, additional sheep are going to be bought during the second year.

In case we find private owners, who breeds Karakachan sheep and wish to keep them purebred, these people are going to be involved as our partners and the sheep will be included in the herd-book.

Additional investigations. There is information about few more small flocks of Karakachan sheep in different parts of the country. This information was still not checked. Expeditions will be made to find those flocks. In case there are Karakachan sheep in those flock, some of them will be bought, with the purpose to obtain rich genetic base of the nucleus herd.

Location of the nucleus herd. The sheep will be kept in Pirin mountain. In winter time the flock will stay in Polena area and in summer - in Curnata voda alpine zone. Vertical transhumans will be implemented. The aim is to save the traditional way of breeding of these three breeds, with the purpose to conserve their original characteristics and qualities.

Using the sheep products. Traditionally the Karakachan sheep is used for milk, meat and wool. The milk quality is very good with high percent of fat (6,5-8,0%). Traditional products will be made out of the sheep milk, as yogurt, cheese, kashkaval. At the beginning the production will meet the needs of the project, i.e. for tourists and ecovolunteers. Later, a small scale production with the label "ecological friendly product from Karakachan sheep" can be organized. The income will cover part of the project needs.

The wool will be sold to local handicraftsmen and artists, who make traditional covers and gobelins.

When sufficient number of sheep is reached animals will be available for seal to people who wish to breed Karakachan sheep.

## ***Karakachan horse***

### Purchase of nucleus herd of Karakachan horses.

The team BBPS - SEMPERVIVA considers that the group of 18 horses, which was found, is very important for establishing a nucleus herd. The horses are ownership of a family for several generations. The owner has photos of the horses owned by his father and grand-father. From those photos it is clear that there is no change in the type of the animals. The horses are bred (reproduced) traditionally, within the group. They spent the whole winter free and alone in the mountains of Kraishte area (middle West Bulgaria), where this season is cold and snowy. The present group is in a very good condition and age structure. All the horses from this group are with exceptionally calm characters. They work perfectly receiving only basic commands by their owner. Moreover they are very well educated for riding. These qualities make them irreplaceable for the purposes of the present project. The owner have announced them for seal, because is old and tired of work. Otherwise these horses bring him very good income. We have agreed with him to keep the horses for us until the end of the year.

Some other horses will be bought, with the purpose to enrich the genetic base of the herd, but also to conserve higher genetic diversity.

In case we find private owners, who breeds Karakachan horse and wish to keep them purebred, these people are going to be involved as our partners and the horses will be included in the herd-book.

If single mares are found with some people, the owners will be convinced to breed them with purebred Karakachan stallions and it will be controlled where the foals are sold/given.

Location of the nucleus herd. The horses will be bred and used in the traditional way as in the past. The herd will be let free, except in the cases when the horses are needed for work. Pirin mountain provides perfect conditions for such horses. In winter the group will be in Polena area, close to the winter sheep pen. In summer time the horses will move again together with the sheep up to the alpine pastures in



Curnata voda area. In this way optimum conditions will be provided for them, but also easy control will be done over the herd.

Use of the horses. Two-three horses will be always available for the sheep flock, for transportation of different things (sheep products, food for shepherds, etc.). When needed, the rest of the horses will also be used for transportation of luggage. These horses will be one of the main attractions for tourist, who will make trips through the mountain on the horse back. Of course, the project team will also use this nature friendly “transport” to do its work.

The herd will also continue to work as it has worked until now, but already for the forestry unit in Kresna town. The horses will carry down wood material on their backs, with the purpose to keep their fit condition, but also to bring some income to the project. The horses will be also main transport while farm facilities are built, particularly on the summer station (carrying stones, wood, etc.)

The young horses which will be born with us, will also be educated how to work and to be ridden. Thus the working abilities of the breed will be saved.

### ***Karakachan dog***

Support of dog breeding and reintroduction. The project will stimulate and support reintroduction of the Karakachan dog to the natural environment of the breed - among flocks of livestock. Breeding of the dogs and the expenses for raising puppies is much more expensive than the amount which can be taken selling a puppy to livestock breeders, because those people usually do not have possibility to buy a dog. That's why raising the dogs needs to be supported until the moment the puppy is given to a shepherd. From the experience BBPS - SEMPERVIVA has by working on the project “Wolf-Man Coexistence” it was found out that when puppies are given to shepherds for free, they do not feel responsible enough for the dogs (good feeding, medical treatment, etc.). That's why it is considered that the puppies should be given to livestock breeder on lower prices (for instance  $1/5$  of the amount spent to raise the puppy). The amounts given by people who buy puppies will be used again for supporting the dog breeding and the selection and reproduction of the breed. The process of dog reintroduction to flocks of livestock has been already established by implementing the above mentioned project “Wolf - Man Coexistence” and works very well. When a specialist of the project defines that the breeder really needs protection for his livestock and is reliable for raising a dog, it is decided that that person can be provided with puppies. A contract with certain conditions is signed between the farmer and the project executors. A team member makes control visits to the shepherd with the purpose to monitor development of the dogs and to advice the new owner about better raising and training of the dogs. In this way, proper dog breeding and surviving of more Karakachan dogs in the natural environment of the breed is controlled.

Use of the dog. Protection of the nucleus sheep herd. Purebred Karakachan dogs will protect the nuclear flock of sheep. The pedigreed puppies will be chosen from the ones raised by members of BBPS - SEMPERVIVA. The dogs will be reliable and needed protection of the livestock against the number of predators in the mountain. The flocks which are grazed in this region are attacked regularly by wolves and bears. The livestock guarding dogs will close the circle of the traditional live and breeding of the three Karakachan breeds. The model group of sheep, horses and dogs will demonstrate how this harmonic system works. The qualities and the working abilities of each one of the breeds will be expressed. Moreover, the region chosen for implementing the project provides perfect conditions, as high alpine terrain, numerous large carnivores, etc. for expressing and hardening of these qualities.

## ***Tourism***

With the purpose to support the project and to present the idea to the wide public small scale tourism is going to be developed. The goal is also to promote eco-tourism in the country as more nature-friendly. The intention is to involve local people buying their products and thus showing them that they can benefit by summer eco-tourism, but not only by ski-tourism. It is very important issue especially for Pirin mountain, because a big discussion and arguing is going on between the Government and local municipalities from one side and nature protection organizations from the other side, whether to construct or not several new ski resorts within the borders of the National Park. Local people do not have enough information about the possibilities which eco-tourism and village tourism give and consider that only the high developed ski-tourism (like in the Alps) can support and develop economically their municipalities.

The tourist program includes:

- eco- and village tourism;

- eco-volunteer tourism.

Travel agencies and eco-volunteer programs will be contacted and information about the project will be given. Tourists will be accepted in summer time when the mountain conditions give more possibilities to visit it. The two cabins will provide accommodation for visitors. Following options are planned to be included in the tourist and volunteer program:

### Eco- and village tourism

- Getting to know the three Karakachan breeds, to observe the traditional way of their breeding and to participate in this process.
- Observing the traditional way of making natural, milk products and participating in the process.
- Horse-trekking and hiking to the most beautiful and wild places of Pirin mountain. The upper station “Curnata voda” is very suitable and strategic spot for one-day trips to different parts of the mountain, as climbing to the highest peak Vihren, visiting the four Vlahinski lakes, visiting the Bunderishki circus, etc.
- Visiting villages with saved traditional Bulgarian architecture, local handicrafts and ethnographic values.

### Eco-volunteer tourism

- Helping to build and maintenance of the project infrastructure.
- Participating in the breeding and raising of the sheep, horses and dogs.
- Participating in the process of making natural, milk products.
- Helping with tourists.

## ***Public awareness and education***

Information for public about the three breeds is needed. In this way the three Karakachan breeds will be popularized with the purpose to make people interested in breeding such breeds. The implementation and the results of the project is going to be popularized. Following activities and materials will be used for this purpose:

- A brochure containing information about the three Karakachan breeds. For local people;
- A brochure containing information about the project idea and activities. For tourists and volunteers;
- A poster promoting the three breeds. For local people;
- Bulletin providing information about the local, aboriginal breeds, directed to wide public, with the purpose to stimulate the interest of saving and breeding these breeds;
- Web site containing information about the Karakachan breeds and the project for their saving;
- Photo exhibitions;
- Presenting the three breeds on exhibitions of farm breeds.
- Project Report about the first three year period of the project (first stage);