

“Kids in Gobi’s protected area”

Protected area driver Lhagva T.’s oldest son Orgilbold will be in 8th grade this year. He is living with his mother, father, and two younger brothers in a place called “Takhi” that belongs to Takhiin tal which is quite far from the next province center. Since he was little he has listened mostly to words like nature reserve, takhi, and conservation. His brother Batzorig is 7 years old and is excited about being in the 2nd grade, but he almost forgot the school he was in last fall. After quarantine and joyful summer holidays, he could only recognize a few letters. The youngest brother Sanjaadamba hasn’t started talking yet but is walking fast behind his bigger brothers. He spends his day chasing lizards, picking chives, and throwing rocks. He can’t ride his brother’s old red bike yet, but he always is pushing and dragging it everywhere. Like a parrot, he repeats few words taught to him by people. This year Orgilbold learned new words like “quarantine”, “corona”, “vaccine”, “Sinopharm”, and “delta”. But that is not all knowledge that he gained.



In his childhood curiosity, he followed, helped, and imitated the researchers who sometimes come to the protected area. This summer people from the nature conservation center came to study amphibians and reptiles. Orgilbold was born in the Gobi, and like other kids, it is easy for him to name gecko and snake lizards better than he knows his 10 fingers. Once, when he was walking with his father on the Alag lake shore, he saw an elbow-long-sized (Mongolian measurement) lizard with a rugged head, that is called "Zamba zaraa". Recently, while he was playing basketball at the village center, he glanced up to a kid holding a long, thin worm called a snake. That was all his knowledge about cold-blooded animals until then.



When he accompanied the researchers, he learned that there are many kinds of lizards and snakes. He was eager to learn many steps, such as how to find lizards and snakes, characterize and observe them, catch them safely and collect samples. Sometimes when he doesn't catch them, he just counts and observes them. In addition to the two lizards he knew since he was born, there are other rare lizards in Mongolia such as the Steppe-runner (*Eremias arguta*), Kaspischer even-fingered gecko (*Alsophylax pipiens*), Gobi racerunner (*Eremias przewalskii*) and more. Apart from that he learned that there are many types of snakes too, like Tatar sand boa (*Eryx miliaris*), Slender racer, Steppe ribbon racer (*Psammophis lineolatus*), steppes rat snake (*Elaphe dione*), Siberian pit viper (*Gloydius halys*), and so on. It's interesting that researchers found a lizard of the size of a finger which is dark, grey colored, with big eyes with vertical pupils, as they lifted up the rocks. Little did he know that there was a lizard under the rocks that could be found everywhere in the countryside. This lizard is a nocturnal animal and eats small moths.





When the researchers visited the Alag Lake Gobi, they found a lizard that has a long and spotted body. Its colorful appearance was eye-catching. He had never thought that lizards had beautiful colors and were such cute animals.

His brother Batzorig is a very irrepressible child who is curious about everything that he sees. Orgilbold saw his brother chasing the lizards, cutting off their tails and watching the tail rolling. So Orgilbold told his brother Batzorig not to do such things again.

As a child, Orgilbold was very interested in all of this. He read the books brought by researchers, looked at the pictures, and dreamed that he would come to the Gobi as a researcher, and observe many strange lizards and snakes.

Summer is over and school will start soon. Orgilbold spent his summer studying reptiles. Now he has enough knowledge to teach his classmates about a few lizards in his homeland. His younger brothers, Batzorig and Sanjaadamba, now know that they shouldn't play with lizards and particularly with their tails. It was a fun summer for him. Even in "lockdown", he had learned something new.

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Picture credits: Yondon G.

Third prize winner of a competition by the Hans Seidel Foundation Mongolia.

The competition was conducted under the motto "Environmental protection is everyone's obligation".

The main goal of the competition was to promote environmentally friendly actions and activities of people and sensitize people to environmental problems, especially during the summer/main vacation time of the country.

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