



Where I work Sergey Zimov

I am a geophysicist and founding director of the Northeast Science Station in Cherskii, Russia – a settlement of about 2,500 people in the delta of the Kolyma River in northeastern Siberia, beyond the Arctic Circle. Annual temperatures here average around -10°C . For the past 30 years, my team has been trying to recreate the grassland ecosystem that existed here tens of thousands of years ago by repopulating the area with large herbivores, such as this camel. The area we're rewilling covers 20 square kilometres, and we call it Pleistocene Park.

Our aim is to investigate how we can affect the climate through ecosystem reconstruction. The project requires us to deal with a lot of societal and political issues. Our civilization is not able or willing to share living space with wild ecosystems: we tend to destroy them and then declare their pitiful remains 'natural reserves'. If you treat nature this way, it's hard to get it to help us save the climate.

We work with teams at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in the United States and the

Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry in Jena, Germany, to track gas fluxes and other climate data from the ecosystem. In that way, we can see just how much the planet is warming. The winter here in Cherskii has already warmed by 6 or 7 degrees on average; we've even had winter rains.

This winter I'm spending my time writing papers and popular-science articles, as well as doing weekly visits to the park. The long polar night is upon us, and right now, as far as the eye can see – and that's about 40 kilometres – there are no lights.

I took this photograph in warmer times, in September last year. We want the animals here to be wild, not buddy-buddy with humans, and we don't normally name them. But this camel is very tame because my son, Nikita, fed the herd on the long journey here. We run another park, 300 kilometres south of Moscow, and I wouldn't dare get this close to the camels we have there.

Sergey Zimov is founding director of the Northeast Science Station in Cherskii, Russia. **Interview by Olga Dobrovidova.**

Photographed by
Maxim Shemetov/Reuters.