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Forest patrols protect precious poplar trees

By Cheng Si in Aksu, Xinjiang | China Daily | Updated: 2023-11-01 09:45



[Photo/IC]

After large-scale logging of Euphrates poplars in the 2000s, worsening sandstorms and erosion became more prevalent in Aksu prefecture in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

In 2009, the central government put a stop to the logging in an effort to preserve what it realized was an invaluable natural asset.

"It's our duty to take care of the Euphrates poplars," said Asan Ayit, a forest ranger from Shaya in Aksu, who patrols a designated area to ensure there is no logging activity and to take in any injured wild animals.

The 43-year-old has a nine-strong team of rangers gathered from nearby villages, who all understand the importance of the Euphrates poplar to the area.

"The older generation wasn't aware of the importance of these trees, and I remember that the villagers cut them down for firewood when I was a child. We never thought about what would happen if all these trees were cut down or disappeared," he said.

The reduction in Euphrates poplar trees in Aksu caused increasing sand and dust storms.

In order to recover and restore Shaya's Euphrates poplars, the county government built water channels and sluiceways to direct floodwater from the Tarim River during the flood season to irrigate the trees. Some 900 million cubic meters of floodwater has been channeled to around 100,000 hectares, according to Asan Ayit.

"The county banned cutting down Euphrates poplar trees in 2009," said Zhao Yuxiang, Party secretary of Shaya's forestry and grassland bureau.

"Many half-dead trees have grown green shoots after getting more water and the trees have become healthier because of our insect pest control work," said Asan Ayit. "What's more delightful is that we can see a growing population of wild animals such as red deer and Mongolian gazelles."

Tohti Lohman, another ranger in Shaya, said he's held his post for eight years.

"We usually work in pairs and patrol around 3,000 hectares of Euphrates poplars by motorcycle," he said, adding that his station has sheltered red deers, hawks and falcons that had become injured in the wild.

"We release them back into the wild after they recover," he said.



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