

## WCPF Newsletter 14: September 2005

Dear Supporter,

### Expedition March/April 2005

You will recall from Newsletter, Number 13 of March 2005, that I said that I hoped that we would be able to organise expeditions into the Mongolian Gobi, the Great Gobi Specially Protected Area A (SPA) in April and into the Chinese Gobi (the Lop Nur Wild Camel National Reserve) in October to carry out surveys on the wild Bactrian camel. We hoped that Chinese scientists who had been on the Kenya training course would participate in the Mongolian expedition and that Mongolian scientists would come on the expedition into the Chinese Gobi. The Mongolian expedition took place during March/April 2005 and I was a member. Unfortunately, the two Chinese scientists were unable to come. However, the expedition survey was a great success. We observed 117 wild Bactrian camels, 86 black tailed (goitered) gazelles, 76 wild asses and 43 wild Argali sheep.

Our route took us to the Atis mountains in the south-west corner of the SPA not far from the Chinese border. Because of the rough nature of the ground it was an area where vehicles had not been used. Having successfully reconnoitered the Atis mountains we turned to the west towards Bogtsagaan spring where the park authorities have erected a stone 'ger' built like a Mongolian nomadic felt tent but constructed entirely out of large stones. There were high hopes of us observing wild Bactrian camels here but we had no success and our time was mainly spent in doctoring our own camel's split pads with rubber cut from the inner tube of a tyre. This process resembled a bicycle puncture repair, but the method of repairing holes in the pad caused by the unfortunate creature having trodden on a sharp stone – melted mutton fat poured into the holes as a sealant – was like nothing that I had ever seen before. Both methods were extremely effective but showed that the Atis mountain crossing had not been an easy option for our domestic camels. We moved on in a north-westerly direction to Tsoi spring, named after Tsoijin, our guide, who had discovered it in 2004. This spring was shaped like a horseshoe and surrounded by hills which provided strategic hiding places for observation. We were not to be disappointed. Early in the morning on April 2nd when we reached an appropriate hillock overlooking the spring, we saw an incredible sight. Thirty-nine wild Bactrian camels were already watering, comprising, four bull camels, eleven two-year-olds, seven three-year-olds and seventeen females. A huge herd, bigger than any number I had ever seen before either in Mongolia or China. We watched them for two hours as they wandered in groups, away from the water and then back again.

Later that day we, too, headed north. At about three-o'clock in the afternoon, as our camels plodded across a large open plain under a sun that had the strength to raise the temperature from –15 centigrade, we spotted four, three-year-old bull camels which when they saw us, started to move towards us. This was as unexpected because a wild Bactrian camel normally runs away at high speed at the merest sniff of man. They approached within fifty yards of our camel caravan before one of the wild Bactrian camels spotted something very odd – a man on the back of a camel. They stood stock still, then abruptly wheeled around and galloped away across the open plain. My theory was proven. It is far better to observe wild Bactrian camels using domestic Bactrian camels than it is to observe them from vehicles. Our travel with camels was indubitably justified.

We later 'discovered' another spring unknown to the SPA authorities where there were tracks of many endangered species. Unfortunately, there were also tracks of poachers. The skill shown by the Mongolian scientists in observing and recording the wildlife seen on their handheld Global Positioning Systems (GPS) was very welcome to see and showed that the Kenya course training skills had been fully absorbed.

I have just learnt (at the time of writing), that we have managed to raise the funding for the October expedition into the Lop Nur Wild Camel National Reserve. The Chinese Reserve authorities are paying for a third of the budget; the two Mongolian scientists are being funded from the Mongolian UNDP MSP; and the WCPF has raised the remainder from Arystra, a Hong Kong based biosciences company and the Grocers' Livery Company in London. We are most grateful to these two organisations for their support. The plan for this expedition is to visit the two valleys that we 'discovered' in 1999 when we saw herds of 'naïve' populations of wildlife. Wildlife that had no fear of man because they had no knowledge of man. This was one of the most remarkable experiences of my life which felt as though we were walking into the Garden of Eden. We aim to set up an observation point near the fresh water spring (Kum Su) that we found there and to collect data on the wildlife. This will be the first occasion that Mongolian scientists have accompanied Chinese scientists on an expedition into the wild Bactrian camel habitat of either country. It could also be the last time that it will be possible to mount an expedition with domestic Bactrian camels in China as the domestic camel numbers are declining rapidly.

### **Captive Wild Bactrian Breeding Programme, Mongolia**

While in Mongolia, I visited our captive wild Bactrian camel breeding site at Zakhyn Us. After one full year of operation the wild camels looked well and the young calves were flourishing. The boundary fence had been re-aligned to provide more room for the site and the attention now is on encouraging visitors to the site to observe the wild Bactrian camels from an appropriate safe distance. This in turn should help to generate additional funding for the project.

In addition to Bilgee the project director, there are now two other project staff, the herdsman in charge of the captive herd and the vet. A Mongolian veterinarian has been appointed on a part-time basis to ensure, there is a vet on hand should one of the wild Bactrian camels require attention. It is important to understand the responsibility we have for maintaining and protecting what is the only herd of captive wild Bactrian camels in the world. All of the trustees are acutely conscious of this responsibility.

Meanwhile, Bilgee continues to manage the centre extremely well. He is implementing extensive public awareness programmes among local schools and with the local government officials in the administrative centres that surround Zakhyn-Us. He has organised wildlife clubs for children in many of the schools that he visited. In addition, he is adapting the film that we produced, *The King of the Gobi*, which features details of our expeditions into the Chinese Gobi during the nineteen-nineties for use on Mongolian television. His reports are very good and he is extremely enthusiastic about his work and the future of the project. We are planning to purchase a small tractor to assist with the grassland management of the area used by our captive wild herd. If any member is planning to visit Mongolia and would like to see the work or visit the centre at Zakhyn-Us then please contact me direct.

### **International Stud Book**

When there are limited numbers of a critically endangered species, and only a small number of them held in captivity, for example in zoos or the wild Bactrian camel captive breeding centre in Mongolia, it is usual and best practice to establish an International Stud Book. In this way all of the wild Bactrian camels in captivity are identified and an accurate genetic record is kept. As the Wild Camel Protection Foundation has the largest number of wild Bactrian camels in captivity and they are breeding naturally, we have decided to establish the International Stud Book. It had been hoped that we would establish it in the spring of this year. However, this was dependent on successful results being obtained from the genetic tests being undertaken on captive wild Bactrian camel blood and hair samples in Dubai and Beijing. We have some results but require a wider sampling before they can provide us with the DNA results. We cannot establish the International Stud book until we have this data and are

certain of the genetic make-up of all the wild Bactrian camels at the Captive Wild Bactrian Camel Breeding Centre. This DNA data must be included in the International Stud Book at the outset.

The scientist who is working on our behalf in Dubai comments as follows:  
"I am happy with the DNA quality we have extracted from the samples you have kindly provided. We have done a test with our panel of micro-satellites to confirm the amplification and quality of the DNA. However, distinguishing between Wild Bactrian from domesticated is not an individual identification or parentage verification which I can provide you with a result in couple of days. To identify a wild Bactrian from a domesticated one we need (a) more micro-satellite markers( b) other molecular markers e.g. SNP c) alternative test method. I have taken steps towards all three!

a) This is to increase the genome coverage and presently, we are testing primers for micro-satellites developed for dromedary, Bactrian and even New World Camelids.

b) There are not many available for camelids, unfortunately. Genome sequence information should become available first before having polymorphic markers such as SNP. This is something for future but we have initiated it.

c) Mitochondrial DNA is maternally inherited. We are presently getting the sequence of mt-DNA and later will be used to screen for Control Region (CR) which contain area of polymorphism. This hopefully provides more information to distinguish the wild from domesticated Bactrian.

Please, do not forget that we are trying to differentiate between to closely related "groups" of a species not two distance species or individuals! Once we have mt-DNA sequence and larger panel of micro-satellites then I maybe able to give you a time limit for the result."

**MSP- Mongolia. Management Plan and proposed Workshop**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility are, with the Mongolian Ministry of Nature and the Environment, implementing a project for biodiversity protection in the Mongolian Great Gobi Reserve A. This medium-sized project is similar to work WCPF did with SEPA in China to establish the Lop Nur Wild Camel Nature Reserve in Xinjiang. Bilgee is working closely with the MSP project director and has attended all the workshops so far, including the recent Workshop which was held to discuss the Management Plan for the entire protected area. The Management Plan is now in its final draft and will be discussed at an international workshop which the WCPF will attend in the spring of next year. The WCPF has responsibilities under the MSP for cross border liaison between the Chinese and Mongolian authorities and part of our work on the training course in Kenya with Chinese and Mongolian officials has already played an important part in achieving this end. After the Chinese expedition in October this year, I hope to accompany Mongolian officials to meet the Chinese authorities in Gansu to hold preliminary discussions with them on cross border co-operation regarding the protection of the migrating wild Bactrian camel and to discuss the establishment of a new Nature Reserve south of Mongolia in Gansu, China which would be contiguous with the Mongolian border.

#### **Parasite Study: Captive wild Bactrian camels**

Bilgee the Project Co-ordinator is working with the MSP staff and park administration to develop a comparative parasite study for domestic Bactrian and captive wild Bactrian camels in the buffer zone of Gobi SPA 'A'. This study is undertaken with the Livestock and Veterinary Department of Mongolian Agricultural University. WCPF has provided part funding. The study will be detailed and focused to identify all type of camel diseases, including ecto-parasite, endo-parasite and blood. All the captive wild Bactrian camels will be included in the study.

#### **Sponsorship: Captive Wild Bactrian Camels**

The captive wild Bactrian camels have to be protected and properly managed. This will mean paying our herdsman or another person on site to oversee the camels' welfare. During the winter and spring months it is necessary to buy hay

for them. This is expensive to buy and also to transport to the site. Medicines are required for the females and their offspring during the first five years. Nine Foundation members, individuals and organisations have already generously agreed to sponsor wild Bactrian camels. However we urgently require at least five more sponsors as a number of the female camels are pregnant.

If you would like to sponsor a captive wild Bactrian camel and want more information please contact Kate Rae, a WCPF managing trustee at the following email address: <krae77777@aol.com> or you can easily download the SPONSORSHIP FORM from the <www.wildcamels.com> website and post it to our head office.

The cost of sponsoring a new born camel for five years is £500 per year or £2,500 for five years. (\$750 per year or \$3,750). This covers the cost of winter feed, the herdsman to protect the young camels from wolves, the medicines and veterinary costs. Will those of you who have already sponsored a camel and are paying on a yearly basis, please remember to send your next year's donation as soon as possible.

### **Funding**

As members and supporters you are aware, the work of the Foundation is funded entirely by donations. Your ideas and suggestions for possible sources of funding are always welcome.

### **Fund Raising Events**

#### 1. Kalamunda Camel Farm

Several of our members have already raised funds for the work of the Foundation. In western Australia, thanks to the terrific support from Chris O'Hora of the Kalamunda Camel Farm, who provided the camel, Romy and her group hosted an evening event with camels called "Camels Causing the Miraculous". They raised AUS\$600.00 for the wild Bactrian camel.

>From Romy's email

"We did have a successful event, and there were many volunteers who also helped make this happen. One I would like to mention is Chris O'Hora from Kalamunda Camel Farm (www.camelfarm.com) in the hills of Perth W.A Australia. Without him the event would not have been possible at all, he provided the camels, infrastructure and leadership to make it happen. Not only did he have to train new camels and build new saddles to have enough for the event, but he agreed to this only if we were donating the money raised to WCPF. He is an active supporter and passionate about the wild Bactrian camels and the work of WCPF. " A big thank you to them all

#### 2. The Weeping Camel – Benenden Village Hall, September 29th 7.30pm

The WCPF has been given permission to show the film, The Weeping Camel to help it raise funds. We can show the film anywhere in the United Kingdom on a royalty free basis. This highly acclaimed film which has been shown on general release follows the life of a Mongolian family living near the south Gobi desert and their many and varied attempts to encourage a reluctant female camel to suckle its new-born calf. The film with its unscripted commentary, wonderful scenery and natural and spontaneous Mongolian performers is a delight. There will be a raffle and a short talk about the work of the Wild Camel Protection Foundation after the film. The performance is supported by Benenden School. All proceeds raised from the evening will be used for the work of the Foundation in China and Mongolia. If any member would like tickets they cost £5.00 and are available from me at the WCPF address. Please come and bring your friends. Suggestions for other suitable sites to show the film would be welcome.

#### 3 Port Lymne Lecture. November 19th 6.00pm

I will be giving an illustrated talk on our work and recent expeditions at Port Lymne (The Aspinall Zoo) near Folkestone in Kent on November 19th. Could any member who would like to attend please let me know and I will send them ticket details and directions. This should be a very interesting and instructive evening in a great setting.

#### 4 Hydro Active Women's Challenge, Hyde Park, September 4th

Jane McMorland Hunter is running a five kilometre run at Hyde Park on Sunday September 4th in the Hydro Active Women's Challenge 2005. She will be running wearing a wild Bactrian camel T shirt and all proceeds of this sponsorship will benefit the Wild Camel Protection Foundation.

#### 5. Arts and Crafts

Bilgee our man in Mongolia is talking to the craftsmen/women of Bayan Toroi near the captive Hunter Hall Wild Bactrian Camel Breeding Centre to get them started on making artefacts for sale. Wooden carvings, handknitted camel scarves etc. A charitable organisation called AFTA is helping us to raise funds by putting them in their catalogue. In due course, these artefacts will be available for sale here.

#### 6. Talks

Since the last newsletter I have continued to give talks to institutions, schools and colleges. If any member has ideas for future lectures then please contact either Kate Rae or myself. In particular I will be visiting Dumfries on October 3d, Galloshiels on October 4th, Dumferline on October 5th and Lanockshire on October 6th as the guest lecturer of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society to talk about the 2002 Sahara crossing with camels. I would be delighted to meet any members who live in these areas.

#### **Membership Renewal**

Most members have renewed their annual membership for 2004/2005, but if you haven't, please send £15 (or its equivalent in foreign currency). If you are paying in US dollars or Euros you can also transfer funds direct into the WCPF's Euro or US dollar accounts. Please email us and ask for the bank transfer details.

#### Email Address

IF YOU HAVE AN EMAIL ADDRESS PLEASE SEND IT TO US AS THIS SAVES POSTAGE AND OTHER COSTS.

Thank you once again for all your most generous and highly valued support.

Yours faithfully,

John Hare