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February 2012 - Newsletter Number 27

Dear Wild Camel Supporter,

On-going results of the March/April 2011 camel survey in China

After the expedition which I undertook with Chinese scientists in March/April 2011 into the Taklamakan desert, WCPF agreed a plan with the Chinese Nature Reserve Director to raise awareness among communities which border the Taklamakan Desert, on the importance of the wild camel - a Chinese Red Book listed species. This project had assumed great importance because, as a result of the expedition, there were thought to be up to 50 wild camels in the Taklamakan outside the protection of the Lop Nur Wild Camel National Nature Reserve.

Funding, however was needed for this project. The expedition into the Taklamakan was part funded by Prince Albert of Monaco's Foundation for endangered species and last October I travelled to Monaco to see if the Foundation would fund this educational awareness-raising programme. They also expressed an interest in part funding an additional wild camel project in Mongolia.

New Mongolian Project

As a result of the interest expressed by Prince Albert's Foundation, WCPF has developed and submitted a new funding proposal for Mongolia. This will fund a

field survey and enable detailed research into the requirements for the implementation of a soft release programme for a group of wild camels from the WCPF managed wild camel breeding centre at Zakhyn Us into the GGSPA 'A' (where the wild camel currently exists in the wild) and also identify other suitable sites for such a release. The survey will also evaluate the condition of the fresh water sources in the Gobi Specially Protected Area 'A' (GGSPA 'A') ; count the wild camels there; evaluate all the threats including the impact of illegal gold miners in the GGSPA 'A'. There will also be a field trip GGSPA 'B' to review the potential of this area as a possible release site for the wild camels.

The project will prepare and implement a wild camel environmental educational programme in English, Mongolian and Kazakh for schools and communities local to the GGSPA 'A'. The newly completed building at the breeding centre is being adapted for use as the local environmental educational centre for meetings and displaying educational materials.

The preparations for a soft release programme of a group of wild camels will take a minimum of three years and will have to be approved by the Mongolian Ministry of Nature and Environment and Tourism (MNET). WCPF will continue to breed wild camels at the breeding centre, to ensure there is a wide enough gene pool of wild camels to select from, for the release herd. It is therefore essential to erect a stronger fence at the breeding centre, to separate the young or sick wild camels from the main breeding herd, in particular the bulls during the winter breeding season.

Other Funding - China

The Mohammed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, has provided some funding for the Chinese environmental educational project, in particular for the Taklamakan area public awareness programme. WCPF can now start preparing with the Chinese the educational materials.

We are continuing to look for funding for the environmental educational awareness-raising programme both in China and Mongolia.

CMS ARTICLE ON THREATS TO THE WILD CAMEL

We have been in contact with the Convention on Migrating Species (CMS) regarding the threat to the wild camels and their migrating routes from mining and in Mongolia from illegal gold mining. They have included an article from WPCF.

The article on the Bactrian camel project is featured on the Biodiversity Policy & Practice website:

<http://biodiversity-l.iisd.org/news/cms-wild-camel-protection-foundation-launch-educational-project-to-save-wild-camels/#more-112985>

UNEP/CMS Secretariat www.cms.int

Mongolia - Hunter Hall Wild Camel Conservation, Breeding and Research Centre

At our request, scientist Anna Jemmett spent four months at the wild camel-breeding centre at Zakhyn Us, working with the new management structure, which is overseen by the Director of the Gobi Specially Protected Area ‘A’ – Mijjiodorj. She developed an excellent relationship with the Director and also with other members of his staff and proved herself to be very competent and helpful in many ways. Her full report plus her excellent photographs are on our website www.wildcamels.com and here is a shortened extract:

The family Ger (Mongolian ‘yurt’) of the herdsman who looks after the wild camels is situated in summer grazing pasture. The grazing is based in areas where adequate water is available, which are lush and have more grazing than the surrounding desert. The herdsman’s family, with domesticated Bactrian camels, herds the wild camels.

During the summer months the adult camels are turned out to free-range whilst the calves are tethered overnight. This management technique is used to stop the mothers leaving with the calves. In the mornings adult females are herded towards the desert whilst calves are untethered but monitored throughout the day. The calves are tethered again in the early evening, before the females arrive back. The females returned in the evenings to suckle the calves, usually between 4-6pm but occasionally returned later. The calves called to their mothers throughout the day - calling became more frequent in the evenings towards the time mothers were due to return. On Tuesday the 20th of August the herd (domestic and wild) were moved to a new grazing area. Again calves were tethered at night and females free-ranged, returning in the evenings to feed the calves. The male wild camels were not observed in the same area as the females, but seemed to be based near the enclosure at Zakhyn Us.

Before the wild camels were brought back into the breeding centre at Zakhyn Us, their wooden shelter was mucked out and all the fences were checked and repaired. Once the work was finished, the camels were brought back into the enclosure for the winter months. The camels were herded back in using horses and motorbikes. The male camels were brought back into Zakhyn Us first. The females and calves were then brought in a few days later.

Towards the end of October, the building of a permanent house, funded by the WCPF began at Zakhyn Us. The aim is to have a weatherproof base for the wild camel herdsman to use over winter. The building began on the 12th of October and was completed on the 22nd of October. Extremely quickly.

Original aims.

The original aim of the my survey was to determine behavioural states of the captive bred wild camels and to observe mother/ young interactions. Because of the management technique of separating mothers and calves and females and males during the summer and early autumnal months, it was not possible to gain an accurate study of the natural behaviour within the herd. Individuals were separated so that natural herd interactions were not visible. Also the inclusion of domestic Bactrian camels changed herd dynamics and interactions. Observations were made on the wild herd and these will be discussed.

Observations

Aesthetic differences with domestic Bactrians.

The wild camels show a number of aesthetic differences from domestic Bactrian. Many of these could be dependent upon the time of year. As these observations were made between September and October they may change throughout the year. Further, observations and measurements would need to be made to gain a clearer understanding of these differences.

The coat of the wild camel is lighter in colour. The colour is also more general amongst individuals, domestic Bactrian's show a much wider variety in coat colour. Wild camels show a distinct dorsal stripe that continues from the head on to the tail, which the Bactrian's lack. The hair on upper front legs is darker than the rest of the coat. During the September/ October period the domestic Bactrian had a much thicker and longer coat than that of the wild, this could change with winter coat.

The wild camels appear to be larger in size and taller, but this could depend upon age of the individual - again a greater understanding could be gained with further investigation. The build of the wild camel is more athletic and leaner- even with the same grazing. The humps of the wild camel are smaller than that of the domestic and they are more pointed and upright.

When looking at the head of the camel it can be noted that the upper lip is split and either side can move independently. As with most ruminants they lack an upper set of incisor teeth, instead having a cartilage pad. The lower incisors are at an angle from the jaw. When the camel is relaxed the lower lip droops. All these features are present in the wild camel.

Communication between individuals appears complex with a number of different vocalisations. Most commonly used vocalisations are a sharp shriek, which indicates a warning or anger, as does a short wail. Individuals also call to one another using a long howl, and this is both used between mother and calf and also between con specifics. While separated throughout the day the calves frequently call to mothers even when the females are not visible. Individuals will also still call to one another whilst lying down.

A call/howl to con specifics in the herd seemed to stimulate movement. It appeared that there was a hierarchy and the lead female initiated movement. This would need to be investigated further, both to determine whether the herd hierarchy is set and also when males are present.

Behaviour pattern.

When herded separately both the mothers and the calves would stay in groups containing other wild camels. Although some domestic camels would also be seen to graze with the wild, the wild would always be together. It would be interesting to know when the domestic and wild were introduced, and at what age the calves were when this introduction occurred.

The camels would often show grooming behaviours between con specifics. This included rubbing the heads and necks together. It would be interesting to determine if this happened between all individuals in the herd.

Towards the end of October the females began to show a number of behaviours that could suggest the beginnings of the rut. They would urinate on the back legs,

including urinating and defecating whilst lying down. They were also seen to slap the tail onto the back.

Herd members.

There were four calves born in the spring of 2011 two male and two female. Other members of the herd include the 4 breeding females, two younger females, two large breeding bulls and 4 younger males. In the two months of the trip most interaction was with the calves and mothers, occasionally with the young females. One male had still not been located by the time the survey was complete.

It is hoped that Anna will return and continue to work at the breeding centre. And if we are successful with our application to Prince Albert's Monaco Foundation, that she will be one of the scientists on the survey team in Gobi 'A' and Gobi 'B'. We are delighted with her contribution and look forward to her field survey work. She has proved herself to be a real asset to the WCPF.

FUND RAISING

Camel fund-raising day in Kent

The date for the fund-raising camel day in Kent has been finalised – **Sunday 23 September 2012**. And we hope as many members as possible will be able to attend. The setting is Hole Park, Rolvenden, Kent that is very close to Benenden where the WCPF headquarters is situated. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Barham have very kindly allowed us to use their parkland and we are planning a bigger and better day in order to raise much-needed funds for the wild camels. If there are volunteers who are able to help or who have fund-raising ideas for the day, then please could they get in touch with either Kate Rae or myself. Camping can be arranged for people planning stay overnight and there are also good B&Bs locally.

Joe and Rebecca Fossett have generously agreed to bring their racing camels from Warwickshire which is a huge commitment on their part. We are very grateful. There will be the usual displays of camel racing, pig racing and much more.

If you can, do please come. Staplehurst is the nearest station from

Charing Cross, London. Hole Park is situated between the villages of Benenden and Rolvenden in Kent and is only 55 miles south of London. The address is: Hole Park Estate, Rolvenden, Cranbrook, Kent. TN17 4JA <www.holepark.com> gives details of how to get there by road and for non-internet users the A21 out of London should be taken and a left-hand turn to Goudhurst on to the A262. Through the village of Goudhurst and follow the signs for Cranbrook turning right on the B2085 by the Peacock Pub. Then follow B2086 to Benenden . Through the village of Benenden and a mile outside Benenden on the Rolvenden road, Hole Park is on the left hand side of the road and still on the B2086.

INTERESTED IN AN ADVENTURE WITH CAMELS?

John and Amanda (WCPF Trustee) Perrett have a camel trip heading north, and are looking for a return group to help their clients pay for the camels as they walking for charity. Their clients' dates are confirmed as finishing on August 6th, in the Mt Nyiru area. Mt Nyiru is the Samburu's holy Mountain, which overlooks the vast plains of northern Kenya, on the eastern edge of the Rift Valley, south of Lake Turkana (Lake Rudolf). Please contact them direct if anyone is interested in taking up this opportunity for a genuine camel safari, which takes you back to the savannah plains of Laikipia, John and Amanda and their camel's home in **Kenya**.

To cover costs they require KShs 36,000/- (US\$450 or £300) per day for the use of the 18 camels. They will leave camel boxes for carrying food, etc, and water cans. You will need to arrange your own food and equipment, and guide, if required over and above the camel handlers and pay any required conservation/camping fees. If you cannot organise the equipment, food, etc, John and Amanda can do this for you for an additional charge of \$185 per person.

Please look at their connection on the Walking Trails web page, <http://my.walkingtrailskenya.com> for additional insights into the country.

For further information please contact direct:

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I have travelled with these camels and their handlers on many occasions, once right around Lake Turkana -. it is an experience not to be missed.

Fund-raising camel day at Ol Maisor in Kenya

Amanda (WCPF Trustee) and John Perrett are also hoping to organise another camel event during July 2012. They very generously donated their takings last year from their very successful camel day on the late Jasper Evans's ranch in Kenya. It is very good to learn they are prepared to undertake another event this year

The intrepid - Jane McMorland Hunter

Another huge thank you to the intrepid Jane McMorland Hunter (WCPF Patron) who keeps on running now marathons, to raise money for the wild camels. She has another programme of runs planned for 2012 and I hope that WCPF members will continue to give her their generous support.

Jane works for Slightly Foxed (www.foxedquarterly.com) the Real Readers Quarterly, a delightful literary quarterly magazine, and WCPF supporter, at their bookshop at 23 Gloucester Rd., London SW7 4TE.

Dinner in Byron's House in Albany. Piccadilly

Thank you to Damon de Laszlo (WCPF Patron) who very generously hosted a dinner in Byron's former rooms, Albany, Piccadilly in September. Matthew Parris – a long time supporter of the WCPF - gave a compelling talk. Eighteen people dined well and much-needed funds were raised to purchase winter hay for the wild camels at the breeding centre. We are most grateful to Damon for his generosity .

USA Lectures

My lecture tour, thirteen lectures in the States between September 27th and October 15th 2011 to raise awareness of the wild camels and fund raise was arranged and extremely well organised by our very loyal member, Joan Digby. It was a success and much needed funds were raised for the wild camels and WCPF would like to thank her very much for all her hard work for the wild camels.

UK Lectures

In October 2011, on my return from the States I gave four lectures to branches of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, at Dumfries, Borders, Ayr and Helensburgh. These were also very well attended and much needed funds raised.

The lecture at the Royal Geographical Society organized by **TRANSGLOBE EXPEDITION TRUST (TET)** with Ran Fiennes and Ray Mears on 10th of November 2011 had an audience of over 700 and many useful contacts were made. We are extremely grateful to TET (TGExpedition@aol.com) for the great help they have given us over the past few years and for the funds for the China, Taklamakan expedition in 2011.

Annual Subscriptions

You' re annual subscription is used entirely for funding the Mongolian Budget. So please remember to renew your annual membership and if you haven't, please send £20.00 (or its equivalent in foreign currency). You can pay by going direct to the website www.wildcamels.com using Paypal. 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 for the WCPF bank and transfer details.** Many members pay by **setting up a standing order** with their bank to pay direct to the WCPF account. This keep costs down.

SPONSORING A YOUNG WILD CAMEL

If you sponsoring a young wild camel at the breeding centre please remember to send your annual payment by 1st March 2012.

Very best wishes and renewed thanks for your great support for our cause – the prevention of the critically endangered wild camel from extinction. It is with your help and generous support that we are able to achieve so much.

John Hare
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