

Newsletter Number 11: May 2004

Dear Supporter,

Talk at the Royal Institution of Great Britain

The talk at the Royal Institution in London organised by The Wilderness Trust and the Wild Camel Protection Foundation on 6 October 2003 was very well attended and resulted in most welcome donations for our work in Mongolia. The talk was entitled 'A Desert Wilderness - Last Refuge of the Wild Camel' and was followed by a fund-raising auction for both charities.

Captive Wild Bactrian Breeding Programme. Mongolia

I visited Mongolia in April with the WCPF co-trustee, Jasper Evans from Kenya. We were able to see for ourselves the completion of the captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme established by the WCPF near Bayan Tooroi north of the Great Gobi Reserve A where the last herds of wild Bactrian camels remain in Mongolia.

With the establishment of the Wild Camel Reserve in the Lop Nur area of China, we feel it is important for the WCPF to turn its attention to the protection the wild Bactrian camels that have been captured in Mongolia and China. Members should understand the reasons why this is considered by us to be a priority. Although the majority of wild Bactrian camels are now afforded protection both in China and Mongolia, their future is far from secure. Both the protected areas are desert wildernesses, but they might contain mineral wealth and no one knows what the future holds in store. What is undeniable is that if oil, gold or other important mineral finds were discovered in either country, then the wild Bactrian camel would be given scant regard, even though the area of discovery was in a protected area. That is the reality and we are aware of this.

The recent DNA tests which emphasise a distinct genetic difference between the domestic Bactrian camel and the wild Bactrian camel holds great significance. We might even be dealing with a separate species. We believe that it is vital to ensure that this unique genetic make-up is preserved.

We did not initiate the capture of these captive wild Bactrian camels. They had been captured over the years by both Mongolians and Chinese. Now, thanks to the co-operation of the Mongolian government we have been given land to set up a captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme and a Mongolian, Mr. Enkhbileg (Bilgee) is the Project Co-ordinator. He is a scientist and member of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences and has extensive experience both scientific and practical of the particular protected area where we are siting the captive camel-breeding programme. Over the winter months he fenced the designated area and had calving sheds and a hay barn constructed. Jasper and I were extremely pleased with the work that has been done. It had been properly carried out and when one considers that it was completed in temperatures of -28 degrees which necessitated lighting fires to soften the ground before driving in the fence poles, it is a truly remarkable effort. Thirteen wild camels are fenced in at the site having been gathered up from the domestic herdsman who were looking after them. We have appointed our own herdsman and are in the process of appointing a vet to look after them. Jasper was able to offer practical advice on the construction

of a camel 'crush' where the wild Bactrians could be safely held when they were being, examined, tested or treated by the vet. The whole area covers about 500 square kilometres and incorporates the flow from a fresh water spring, whose source is outside the fence so that domestic camels are able to water there.

Three of the wild camel females have calved down and so we already have two female calves and one male. Tests will be carried out to ensure that they are truly wild stock and not hybrids. Indeed, all the wild Bactrians, male and female will be tested to ensure purity and the testing will be done in Dubai by a leading camel vet, Professor Ulli Wernery.

We are currently looking at the possibility of tourists being taken to the site, accommodated in the WCPF felt tent or 'ger' and offered rides on domestic camels to the nearby spectacular 'mother mountain'.

The proceeds will raise funds for the project. Later it will be seen if the Mongolia wild Bactrian camels can be crossed with the wild Bactrian camels (five) currently held in China. This project is a very important part of our current work and we are working with the full support of the Ministry of Nature and Environment in Mongolia and the Mongolian National Commission for Conservation of Endangered Species (MNCES) which has responsibility for protecting all Red Book listed species and its Director Mr. Dorjraa. The Mongolian Minister for Nature and the Environment, Mr. Barsbold has formally approved the programme and the involvement of the WCPF.

A page will shortly appear on our website <www.wildcamels.com> which will cover the captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme in full.

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 watch the camels daily. During the winter and spring months it will be necessary to buy feed for them and this is expensive to buy and also to transport to the site. Medicines will be required for the females and their offspring during the first five years. There will be veterinary fees. A number of Foundation members, individuals and organisations have already generously agreed to sponsor a young camel. So far six of the thirteen Mongolian captive wild Bactrian camels (plus the two newly born camels) have been sponsored.

If you would like to sponsor a captive wild Bactrian camel and want more information please contact Kate Rae, a WCPF 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 the 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 herders to protect the young camels from wolves and veterinary costs.

Lop Nur Wild Camel Reserve

The Lop Nur Wild Camel Nature Reserve in China has now been upgraded to a National Nature Reserve. This means it comes under the direct supervision and protection of the State Environment Ministry (SEPA). The Nature Reserve has benefited from the East West gas pipe line compensation from Petro China as outlined in Newsletter Number 9. The Reserve management Headquarters has sent the WCPF a budget in general terms for this money. We still need to see more financial detail and will be pressing for this over the coming months. The pipeline is not welcome, but inevitable. On the supposition that 'it is an ill-wind that doesn't blow some good' we are determined that these funds will be put towards underpinning the long-term future, and development of the Nature Reserve.

Salzburg Zoo

Dr Chris Walzer, the head of the Salzburg Zoo has agreed to help us with our wild camel project in both China and Mongolia. As a result of our meeting, Dr Walzer wrote to us as follows:

I suggest we establish a simple wildlife / livestock / other activities monitoring system in both the Gobi A and the Lop Nur Reserve in China.

We will base this on the Cybertracker® system. This system has found it's way into conservation programs world-wide. The simple field computer is designed to be quick and easy to use in the field, even by non-literate users. Using a sequence of screens on a hand held computer (Palm OS), displaying simple and easily recognisable icons, rangers are able to record and store data in minute detail. They can for example record sightings, species and feeding behaviour, carcasses with additional criteria for example natural death, poached and predation. Basically there is no real limit from the technological side as to the type of data recorded. The program automatically stores this data along with a GPS fix and time for later downloading onto a PC. Detailed further analysis with mapping applications (Geographic Information System (GIS) e.g. ArcView®) and statistical packages is then possible.

In a first phase the cybertracker would have to be programmed (simple) and the screens customized to match the areas and rangers needs. In order to carry out this stage I will need significant input from you concerning the various species and datasets of interest in the Lop Nur Reserve. Changing the set-up is easily carried out. Adaptations can be implemented together with the rangers in the field.

I suggest we start implementing monitoring in China and initially wait to see what the GEF-UNDP Grant may bring the Gobi A. This grant contains significant amounts of resources for ranger training and monitoring implementation (I would hate to duplicate efforts here). However, once we have a working system we would immediately demonstrate it to the rangers in the Gobi A – (and possibly get a mandate from the GEF-UNDP project).

Before going into China we would test the set-up under field conditions with our "own" rangers in the Gobi B.

2.) Scientific Field Surveys and Research in Lop Nur

The field surveys would initially be carried out using the above-described system. We would train a local scientist to manage the database and carry out some of the further

analysis. Further input and planning would really need a field trip to the area. This trip would provide an insight into the needs of the local scientists and rangers and clearly define priorities. As we can combine this with point 1 we would already be implementing a first scientific monitoring phase on our initial trip.

3.) Captive Breeding in Mongolia

As I had already pointed out we would need to have the mandate from the government to carry out this project. No point in starting and then finding the surveyed camels moved to another area.

- 1. mandate*
- 2. establish breeding station (personnel, communication modus, fences, sufficient fodder Reserves etc.)*
- 3. move potential wild camels to the breeding facility*
- 4. take samples for genetic analysis (compare with domestic and samples from China)*
- 5. reproductive evaluation (general health exam, ID animals, non-invasive faecal steroids, ultrasonography of the reproductive tract)*

Once the animals have been moved to the breeding facility and are available for examination we would require a single short fieldtrip (total 14 days from Europe) to collect samples and for reproductive evaluation. The personnel would have to be trained in communications and faecal sample collection, labelling and storage (list restricted to immediate veterinary needs). As far as I remember you are presently using a genetics lab for camel identification – would this facility be available and able to process and analyse these further samples? If not I could find a partner at Vienna University.

We will be taking this forward during the course of the year.

Awareness-raising, Educational Booklets

Through the generous sponsorship of the Fred Foundation in the Netherlands and Shell China, work has started on two more awareness-raising booklets. The first has been produced and covers the valuable and endangered plant species within the new Nature Reserve in China many of which are used for medicinal purposes. It is currently being translated into Chinese, Uighur and Kazakh. The second will highlight the new wild Bactrian camel breeding programme in Mongolia and is in the course of preparation. These booklets will be translated into Chinese, Uigher and Kazakh as were the two previously published books: *The King of the Gobi* (about the wild Bactrian camel) and *Blowing in the Wind - the Fight Against Desertification*. Both books have been written for a young readership and are available from the WCPF priced at £5.00 each.

WCPF is in addition funding the Mongolian project coordinator, Bilgee, to initiate a local public awareness programme in Mongolia, using WCPF materials.

MSP- Mongolia

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the GEF have, with the Mongolian government drawn up a project for biodiversity protection in the Mongolian Great Gobi Reserve A. This is the same kind of medium-sized project that enabled us to work with SEPA to establish the Lop

Nur Wild Camel Nature Reserve in China. The main aim of the MSP is to increase the capacity and infrastructure of the Reserve A. Because of limited financial resources and several severe winters the local protected area staff have been under funded. This has also meant little real opportunity for the protected area staff to study the habitat of the wild Bactrian camel, maintain and improve water points and the manage the threats, e.g., wolves, to the wild Bactrian camel.

One element of this MSP relates to trans-boundary co-operation between China and Mongolia especially when the migrating camel crosses the international boundary. It has protection in Mongolia but not in China where it is frequently shot or poisoned. Kate Rae my co trustee and I met with the UNDP project manager and it appears highly likely that the Wild Camel Protection Foundation will be responsible for implementing this part of the project with a workshop or conference , building on the success of the Mongolian/China International Wild Camel Conference which WCPF organised and funded in Beijing in August 2001.

The WCPF has donated \$750 to a large mammal study (including wild Bactrian camels) which the UNDP is currently undertaking in the Mongolian Reserve A. We consider it important that we work closely with UNDP as far as the wild Bactrian camel is concerned.

Bilgee, the Monoglian WCPF project coordinator has initiated a project near the captive wild camel site which will aim to assess the local grasses and flora and quantify the grazing capacity and yield of the site and the surrounding area. A controlled planting programme of nutritious grasses will be implemented. This programme is being funded by WCPF.

Camel Conference, Ashkabad, Turkmenistan

In April, Kate Rae and I were invited to attend a camel conference in Ashkabad Turkmenistan financed by NATO which drew knowledgeable camel experts from all over the world. We presented papers on the plight of the wild Bactrian camel and public awareness to further their cause. Other papers gave fascinating statistics and insights into the value of camel milk, especially as a substitute for insulin in treating diabetes and the remarkable immune system of both the dromedary, domestic and wild Bactrian camel. It was explained that camel antibodies are smaller than any other mammalian antibody known, about two-thirds to one-tenth the size of common human antibodies. This means that they can enter tissues and cells other antibodies cannot. Camel antibodies demonstrate a remarkable ability to render germ molecules inactive latching on to active portions of toxins and preventing them from working. Is this how the wild Bactrian camel managed to survive 43 atmospheric nuclear tests in Lop Nur, China?

Funding

As members and supporters you are aware that the work of the Foundation is funded entirely by donations. The major work to start the captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme in Mongolia has been funded through a donation from an Australian donor, Hunter Hall Investment Management Ltd. We are very grateful for their support for without it this vital and important work could not have started.

Talks

Since the last newsletter I have give 23 talks to schools and colleges and also lectured at the Royal Institution in London, the Royal Geographical Society's Regional branch, the Royal Society for Asian Affairs, the Zoological Society and the Smithsonian and the Explorer's Club of America in the USA

Membership Renewal

Will members who have not yet renewed their annual membership for 2003/2004 please send £15 (or its equivalent in foreign currency). Also emails addresses as this saves on postage. Thank you once again for all your most generous and highly valued support.

Yours faithfully,

John Hare

As the co-Managing Trustee and Treasurer of the Wild Camel Protection Foundation I thought everyone might like to know that John Hare has been awarded the Lawrence of Arabia medal in 'recognition of work of outstanding merit in the field of exploration' by the Royal Society of Asian Affairs and also the Royal Geographical Society's Ness Award for 'raising public awareness of and promoting the conservation of the endangered wild Bactrian camels in Mongolia and China.' **Kate Rae**