

WCPF Newsletter 15: January 2006

Dear Supporter,

Expedition October/November 2005

In October/November of last year I made another expedition into the Lop Nur Wild Camel National Reserve in China. Once again, this expedition was undertaken on domestic Bactrian camels and Professor Yuan Guoying and his son Yuan Lei were with me. I have been travelling on expeditions with the Professor since 1995 including the one that crossed the Sahara. For the very first time the Chinese authorities allowed Mongolian scientists to enter the Reserve. Security issues on account of it having been a former nuclear test site have always inhibited the Chinese in the past from allowing foreigners to enter the area, so this was an unexpected and most welcome break through. At the wild Bactrian camel conference held in Beijing in August 2000 which was organised by the WCPF, the Conference Statement signed by both China and Mongolia confirmed that the two governments would cooperate on future wild Bactrian camel protection in both countries. They also agreed to exchange relevant information and data on a regular basis. Our training course in Kenya in February of last year was an earlier example of this cooperation in action and last autumn's expedition was further proof that there is now a willingness to work together. Slowly but surely we are making progress in this respect.

The aim of the expedition was to survey wild Bactrian camel numbers in an hitherto unfrequented region near the Arjin Shan mountains which form the southern boundary of the Reserve. In the process we would reach the desert spring of Kum Su that we had discovered in 1999 and where, as many of you will recall, we encountered a naïve population of wildlife, i.e. wildlife that had never encountered man. On reaching Kum Su we received a great shock. Illegal gold miners had camped in the spring area for at least two years and brought potassium cyanide to the spring to facilitate the extraction of the gold from rock. This process, banned in South Africa since 1902, not only poisons the spring water but the cyanide leaches into the surrounding vegetation and poisons that as well. The miners had shot many of the naïve population and we saw skeletons of wild Tibetan asses and wild Argali sheep. Not a pleasant sight. We also uncovered 74 four-gallon-drums of cyanide and found seven unopened tins. A horrid story. To give members an idea of the sheer size and scale of the Arjin mountains, they together with the Kunlun mountains to which they are linked, stretch for over 400 miles and there are innumerable gullies and crevasses, far too many to patrol on any regular basis with the present staffing resources available to the Reserve authorities.

I am hoping to get this discovery published in this country and the USA and some of you might have heard an account that I gave of the expedition on Libby Purvis's Midweek programme on Radio 4 on December 28th.

On my return, I made representations to the Chinese Embassy in London and also to SEPA, the State Environment Protection Agency in Beijing. This appears to have had an effect as pressure has been brought to bear on the Xinjiang Provincial Government and as a result they have already sent a clean-up team to the contaminated site. They cannot clean up the poison which has leached into the soil, however, they have removed the drums of cyanide. They also reported seeing wildlife in the area, including wild Bactrian camels. The expedition has made the Nature Reserve management aware that they must develop and implement better patrol mechanisms for monitoring people entering the Nature Reserve. What was interesting and pleasing for me was to see how quickly the Chinese National Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) responded to information and pressure from the Wild Camel Protection Foundation and how sensitive they are to international pressure when environmental and pollution problems are raised. The Foundation will continue to apply pressure where-ever and when-ever possible.

It may be apposite to remind readers of what I wrote in the last newsletter about this expedition. '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.'

Wuwei Centre for Endangered Species

After the expedition I went with Chinese scientists and government officials to the Wuwei Centre for Endangered species in Gansu Province China. We found that they have 4 captive wild Bactrian camels (two bulls and two females) and 8 hybrid camels, crosses between the domestic and wild Bactrian. In Lanzhou

the capital of Gansu we met two Mongolians from the Great Gobi Protected Area and joined them for a one day meeting with Chinese representatives of the Gansu Forestry Bureau to discuss joint international boundary problems between the China and Mongolia. The Great Gobi Protected Area has a contiguous border with the national border between China and Mongolia. There were many problems discussed the most significant problem to emerge was the fact that the Chinese are in the process of building a 15-foot boundary fence along the border with Mongolia in northwestern Gansu and Inner Mongolia. The wild Bactrian camel is a migratory species and migrates between Mongolia and China. It is protected under the Convention for Migratory Species (CMS). Both countries have and signed and ratified the Convention. Under the Convention the migrating routes of the wild Bactrian camel must be kept open and protected at all times. Such action taken by the Chinese officials in Gansu is not permitted under the Convention. We have formally advised Dr Robert Hepworth the Head of CMS Directorate of the present situation.

Captive Wild Bactrian Breeding Programme, Mongolia

The DNA testing will take a long time to produce data we can usefully use for the International Stud Book. I have sent further samples collected on our autumn expedition and at Wuwei to the testing centres under Dr Chris Walzer in Vienna and under Dr Ulli Wernery in Dubai. Dr Chris Walzer has also collected wild Bactrian camel fecal samples while he was in Mongolia and hopefully these can also be used for DNA work. He is working on the project to reintroduce the Przewalski horse and so is very familiar with both Mongolia and the importance of a DNA database.

Bilgee our project manager has been on a training course in Austria run under the direction of Dr Chris Walzer. All of the trustees are acutely conscious of the importance of starting the Stud book but all the data must be accurate especially of the DNA results of all the wild Bactrian camels currently at the Breeding Centre.

Winter feed has also been transported down to the site. They are expecting a very cold winter and this food is essential to the success of over wintering and the mating season.

Publicity

29 September 2005

The Weeping Camel – Benenden Village Hall, Kent,

The showing of this film was a huge success. Over 150 people paid to attend, there was a very successful raffle and the evening raised over £3,000 for the camel funds. We would like to thank Benenden School for kindly letting us use their equipment for the evening.

If any member has an idea where we can show the film, in the UK then please do get in touch with us. We have been granted permission to show the film, copyright free and with no royalty payment to the distributors. We would very much like to hear from you if you can suggest a suitable place.

March – April 2006

Lake Turkana – Fund-raising walk with camels

On March 1 2006 I plan to attempt to walk around Lake Turkana in Kenya with camels and Josh Perret, the grandson of Jasper Evans a co-trustee of the WCPF. This 450-mile trip will take approximately six or seven weeks and in the process we will be crossing the river Omo where it flows out of Ethiopia and into the Kenya Lake. I do not believe that anyone has travelled right around the Lake with camels and members **are invited to sponsor me either on a per mile basis or for the whole trip.**

The proceeds raised will be used to fund our wild Bactrian camel breeding programme at Zakyn Us, Mongolia and also our educational work in both China and Mongolia. Sponsorship forms are being sent out to members with this newsletter, they will available on the website, or from me directly. You can also simply send a donation marked "Lake Turkana" to the Foundation Head Office.

As with the expedition across the Sahara, which indirectly raised sufficient funding for us to establish the captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme in Mongolia. We are hoping that the journey around the barren and remote Lake Turkana will achieve the same objective for the on-going work at the breeding centre in Mongolia.

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](#) 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. Some successful fund raising activities:- Schools have had a wild Bactrian camel day, a bridge day raised a generous donation and a camel ride in Australia was a huge fund raising success.

Talks

The talks in Scotland under the auspices of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society went ahead successfully with good attendances in all the towns where I spoke. I continue to talk to schools on a regular basis. Again, ideas and locations for talks are always appreciated.

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. PLEASE REMEMBER TO LET US KNOW IF YOU CHANGE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS.

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

Yours faithfully,

John Hare