

## WCPF Newsletter 17: November 2006

Dear Supporter,

### **Captive Wild Bactrian Breeding Programme, Mongolia – Genetic testing**

As mentioned in Newsletter 16, Dr Pamela Burger and Katja Silbermayr from the Institute of Animal Breeding and Genetics, University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, Austria have obtained funding to undertake genetic and DNA research on the wild Bactrian camel. This was organised by Dr Chris Walzer, formerly the director of Salzburg Zoo, who is now the Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarian at the Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology, University of Veterinary Medicine in Vienna. Dr Walzer is also the Research Co-ordinator for the International Takhi (Prejwalksy wild horse) Group which is working in the Great Gobi "B" Strictly Protected Area at Takhin Tal, Mongolia.

Kate Rae and I visited the Institute of Animal Breeding and Genetics at the University of Veterinary Medicine in August 2006. We spent two days there meeting with Dr Walzer, Dr Burger, Katja Silbermayr and Professor Schwarzenberg to discuss the implications of DNA testing and genetic research; the establishment of an International Studbook for the captive herd of wild Bactrian camels; and the micro-chipping of the captive wild Bactrian camels. We also discussed the Breeding Centre at Zakhyn Us and possible ways of expanding the work there. We arranged for Dr Burger and Katja Silbermayr to contact Dr Han Jianlin and Dr Olivier Hanotte at International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Nairobi Kenya who have been carrying out DNA testing on the wild Bactrian camel in China.

We invited Dr Burger and Katja to visit the Breeding Centre at Zakhyn Us and suggested they travel there with us and, if possible to try and attend the UNDP/WCPF International Camel October Workshop on the protection of the wild Bactrian camel in China and Mongolia. This would give them an opportunity to take blood, hair and faecal samples when visiting the Zakhyn Us Captive Wild Bactrian Camel Breeding Centre in Mongolia and microchip the captive wild Bactrian camels,

### **2006 INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE WILD BACTRIAN CAMEL**

Kate Rae and I travelled to Mongolia to attend the International Workshop on 12-14 October, 2006 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The Workshop was co funded by the WCPF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Before the workshop, we went with Pam Burger and Katja Silbermayr to visit the Captive Wild Camel Breeding Programme at Zakhyn Us. At Zakhyn Us the two scientists took blood samples from the domestic Bactrians and Katja was able to go into the Gobi 'A' Reserve with staff from the Reserve Headquarters to collect wild Bactrian camel hair and faeces samples.

Organisers of the International Workshop

- Ministry of Nature and Environment (MNE)
- Park Administration of the Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area "A" (Park Administration)
- UNDP/GEF Medium Sized Project (MSP) "Conservation of the Great Gobi and its Umbrella Species Project" (Great Gobi Project)
- Wild Camel Protection Foundation (WCPF)
- Institute of Biology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences (IB, MAS)

### **Aims of the International Workshop:**

One of the main goals of this workshop was to develop a long term Action Plan for wild Bactrian camel conservation and management by sharing knowledge and experiences on both national and international levels.

The workshop was also required to update the status of the Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area "A" Management Plan (that covers overall activities of research, monitoring, law enforcement, patrolling and public awareness) which was approved by the Mongolian Ministry of Nature and the Environment in January 2006. This Management Plan will be for the period 2006-2012.

Scientific surveys and research in both China and Mongolia have recorded the main threats to wild Bactrian camels as habitat degradation, predator pressure, human activities and crossbreeding with domestic Bactrian camels. The section of the Management Plan that relates to wild Bactrian camel research, monitoring, conservation and management can be used as one source for developing a conservation plan for the wild Bactrian camel in both China and Mongolia. The habitat area required by the wild Bactrian camel is large and as this habitat is also endangered it is possible to consider the wild Bactrian camel as an 'umbrella' species i.e. an endangered species which when it and its desert ecosystem are protected afford protection also to a wide range of other endangered fauna and flora.

The Letter of Intent that resulted from the International Workshop on the wild Bactrian camel in August 2000 in Beijing, stated that China and Mongolia would cooperate on wild Bactrian camel protection and research. The wild Bactrian camel is listed in the Red Book of Endangered Species in both countries, however, in addition to protection in National Nature Reserves and Protected Areas, as a migrating species it should be protected when crossing the international border between China and Mongolia.

The International Workshop in Mongolia in October 2006 enabled Chinese and Mongolian scientists to meet for the first time to discuss important cross-boundary issues and to share common experiences, data and scientific research on wild Bactrian camel protection. Four Chinese delegates came from Xinjiang Province, including the Director from the Lop Nur Wild Camel National Nature Reserve and six from Gansu Province. All the Nature Reserves in China where the wild Bactrian camel is protected sent a representative to the Workshop.

The Workshop Agenda outlines the wide range of topics covered.

### **Workshop Agenda 12 October - Wild Camel Status in Mongolia**

- Keynote address: The Wild Camel - Mongolia (B. Mijiddorj, Director at the Park Administration, GGSPA)
- Population structure, size, density (Yad. Adiya, IB and G. Dovchindorj, Park Administration)
- Behaviour, reproduction, recruitment (Yad. Adiya IB and G. Dovchindorj, Park Administration)
- Wolf seasonal diet (IB Ranger-based umbrella species monitoring (Ranger and border patrol representatives, and Park research officer)
- How to catch elusive camels – experiences with winter captures. (WCPF Breeding Centre, Project Director)
- Preliminary screening on endo and ectoparasites and diseases (Institute of Veterinary Medicine)
- Genetics (WCPF, Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology at the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, Austria, Captive Wild Camel Breeding Centre)
- Vegetation (Institute of Botany)
- International border issues with China and Exchange of data and research with China

### **Wild Camel Status in China**

- Keynote address: The Wild Camel China (Chinese delegate)

Population structure, size, density; behaviour, reproduction

- Construction of fresh water points
- Wild camel monitoring (Lop Nur Wild Camel National Natural Reserve)
- Preliminary screening on endo and ectoparasites and diseases
- Genetics
- Vegetation (Institute of Botany, Lop Nur)
- International border issues with Mongolia/ Exchange of data and research with Mongolia
- Status of Mazongshan Reserve, Gansu
- Threats to the wild Bactrian camel within the LNWCNR. Response to threats

### **13 October**

#### **Wild Camel Conservation and Management Issues**

- Captive wild camel breeding program in Bayan Tooroi (WCPF)
- Status of DNA work on the captive wild Bactrian camels (WCPF)
- Restoration and rehabilitation on natural water sources in the Park (Park Administration, Oyunbadrakh Co. Ltd)
- Survey on possible hybrids between wild and domestic camels in Buffer Zone and legal aspects for umbrella species protection and crossbreeding issues with domestic camels as a case study
- Activities related to wild Bactrian camel conservation and management in the newly approved Park Management Plan

#### **Great Gobi Project**

- Community level activities and initiatives (environmental clubs, information centres, pressed fuel production, saxaul consumption, public awareness) (Great Gobi Project)
- Pasture mapping in Edren ridge (University of Agriculture)

- Panel Discussion on Best Practice for Wild Camel Management
- Continuation of Discussion on Best Practice for Wild Camel Management
- Discussion section for developing Umbrella Species Action Plan (working groups)

i) Population Assessment and Monitoring

ii) Human dimensions and management options

iii) Discuss options for long term funding and sustainability of the Action Plan

#### **14 October**

- Wrap up previous days activities
- Continuation of discussion for developing Umbrella Species Action Plan
- Presentation by working groups
- Summary and Statement of Management options for drafting Action Plan

#### **FINAL STATEMENT FROM THE WORKSHOP**

The International Workshop on "Conservation and Management of the Wild Bactrian Camel", Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia,

12-14 October 2006 has, as a result of the papers given and the conclusions reached by the three working groups, agreed the following Recommendations, where joint cooperation between wild Bactrian camel Protected Areas in China and Mongolia should take place.

1. An investigation into the carrying capacity of wild Bactrian camels in Protected Areas in both China and Mongolia using an Ecosystem approach .
2. An investigation into wolf predation in Protected Areas in China and Mongolia.
3. The establishment of a trans-boundary International Protected Area including ecological corridors to protect the routes of the migrating wild Bactrian camels.
4. Research into the migration routes of wild Bactrian camels between China and Mongolia.
5. The effect of human influence and illegal human activities: grazing, hunting, resource extraction and mining within Chinese and Mongolian Protected Areas, including the Buffer Zones.
6. To research the genetic status, hybridization/cross breeding between domestic and wild Bactrian camels and their management in China and Mongolia.
7. To research the reproductive processes, physiology and behaviour of wild Bactrian camels in China and Mongolia.
8. To research into diseases of wild Bactrian camels and wildlife and domestic interface in China and Mongolia.
9. Strengthening Protected Areas management capacity in China and Mongolia.
10. To research the effects of climate change in the Protected Areas in China and Mongolia.
11. To evaluate ecotourism in Protected Areas in China and Mongolia .
12. The establishment of communication links for exchanging data between China and Mongolia, this communication to be implemented by nominating positions and a time table for the exchange of information on a regular basis.
13. The development of environmental public awareness in Protected Areas in China and Mongolia.
14. The resolution of resettlement issues in Protected Areas in China and Mongolia.
15. The enforcement of existing environmental laws and regulations for Protected Areas in China and Mongolia.

The Conference requests China and Mongolia to further strengthen co-operation to resolve all issues relating to the protection of the wild Bactrian camel as an umbrella species in their Protected Areas.

The conference requests the organisers of this workshop, using this final statement and the conclusions of the three working groups, to identify and attempt to secure long term funding sources for the sustainability of wild Bactrian camel Protected Areas in China and Mongolia.

#### **Organizers:**

UNDP/GEF funded and Ministry of Nature and Environment of Mongolia implemented MSP "Conservation of the Great Gobi Ecosystem and Its Umbrella Species Project"

- \* Wild Camel Protection Foundation
- Ministry of Nature and Environment of Mongolia
- \* Park Administration Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area "A"
- \* Institute of Biology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences
- \* Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Government
- \* Xinjiang Environmental Protection Bureau
- \* Xinjiang Lop Nur Wild Camel National Nature Reserve
- \* Gansu Annanba Wild Camel National Nature Reserve
- \* Gansu Mazongshan Nature Reserve
- \* Gansu Dunhuang Xihu National Nature Reserve

\* Lanzhou University, Gansu

## **MANAGEMENT PLAN AND INTERNATIONAL STUD BOOK**

### **Co-operation with the Zoological Society of London (ZSL)**

Dr Glyn Davies, the Director of Conservation at ZSL has agreed to assist the WCPF with the establishment of an International Stud Book for the wild Bactrian camel based on our captive herd at Zakhyn Us. The ZSL will provide us with the relevant software to enable us to do this. He has also agreed to assist us with drawing up a Management Plan for Zakhyn Us. This, we feel is a priority as various issues have arisen such as:

- As the numbers increase is to be done with surplus young males and also at a later stage females?
- Whether we consider a controlled release programme of wild Bactrian camels into areas in the Special Protected Area in Mongolia, areas which are far away from the Breeding Centre?
- When releasing should the wild Bactrian camels be collared?
- How to rest the area within the fenced area, where the camels graze during the winter months, which is also the mating season?
- Whether we should fence off a second area and rotate the captive wild Bactrian animals between the two areas?
- How to manage and monitor contact with domestic animals, camels, as there is always the risk of disease and pathogen transfer between the wild Bactrian camels and the domestic animals.
- Develop and implement sampling Protocols for disease and worms.

These are the types of questions that we need to address in a properly prepared Management Plan. Kate Rae and I are meeting Richard Kock of the ZSL, who is the Programme Manager for the Deserts and Rangelands Programme for Mongolia on 5th December to discuss the Management Plan and the International Stud Book.

## **PUBLIC AWARENESS**

### **Children and the Gobi**

With UNDP, WCPF undertook a joint public awareness work in Mongolia with 6 school nature conservation clubs of the 6 buffer zone sums of Great Gobi A. During this work, we recorded the programme which we were doing with the Gobi school children. A thirty minute film was made from this project in the Gobi and it was broadcast as the "Children and the Gobi" on Mongolian national television this month.

### **SPONSORSHIP: CAPTIVE WILD BACTRIAN CAMELS**

First of all thank you to all the Nine members and supporters who have already generously sponsored a young wild Bactrian camel. We now have pictures of the young camel calves on our updated Website. However, to continue to protect the captive wild Bactrian camels and manage the pasture areas and water, we must have our herdsman and his assistants there on site at all times 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. As the number of camels increases each year, we have additional costs of identifying and fencing new areas for pasture; and the Project Director, Bilgee works continuously with the local communities and schools to ensure they understand our work.

The good news is the success of the Project so far, however this also means more pregnant females. As a result we urgently require at least five more sponsors as a number of the female wild Bactrian camels are pregnant.

## **TALKS**

I am always giving talks to both raise awareness of the plight of the wild Bactrian camel and funds for the work of the Foundation. As we do not have a permanent sponsor for the annual cost of running the Breeding Centre in Mongolia we are constantly fund raising. We are always interested in hearing of ideas and suggestions from members about possible fund raising activities.

The talk to the Directors of Exxon on 8 September and the event at the RGS on September 4th with Ranulph Fiennes, John Blashford-Snell and myself under the heading 'Expeditions, What's the Point?' with Libby Purves in the chair, both went very well. Substantial funds were raised at the RGS talk for the Transglobe Expedition Trust which kindly sponsored my 2005 camel expedition to the Chinese Gobi. It was on this trip that we discovered the potassium cyanide at Kum Su spring.

- **On 13 February 2007 at 6.30pm I will be speaking at Asia House, Asia House, 63 New**

**Cavendish Street, London W1G 7LP Tel: 020 7307-5454**

**Fax: 020 7307-5459 [www.asiahouse.org](http://www.asiahouse.org). Tickets will be priced at £7.00**

The talk will be called *The Mysteries of the Gobi* and will encompass two expeditions made on camels to search for the wild camel in the Gobi desert. It will include details of our discovery of an outpost called Tu Ying of the ancient city of Lou Lan on the middle silk road. Photographs and details of 1500 BC mummies that were found near the site, and the discovery of 84 drums of poisonous potassium cyanide that had been brought into the desert by illegal miners in their search for gold. In the process they had wiped out the 'naive' population of wildlife.

- **At the British Museum on 16 February 2007 at 6.30 pm the WCPF will be showing the highly acclaimed film, *The Weeping Camel*. The WCPF has been given permission by the distributor's to show this film anywhere in Britain – royalty free.** I will be speaking briefly about the wild Bactrian camel in China and Mongolia and work the WCPF is doing there. The film relates how a Mongolian herder family persuades a female camel to suckle its calf after it had rejected it. It is a moving film and if members in the London area have not seen it, then I encourage them to attend. **It will be shown at 6.30 pm and admission is free.**

#### **WEBSITE CHANGES**

We have updated the [\\_www.wildcamels.com\\_](http://www.wildcamels.com) (<http://www.wildcamels.com>) website and now have a Shop Page showing items which can be purchased to support the work of the Foundation. Payment can now be made by Paypal; UK/Euro/USD Cheque or bank transfer. Details are on the website.

We are also planning to keep updating the Shop Page especially when we have a range of knitted camel items made from wild Bactrian camel hair knitted by our herdsman's wife.

#### **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL**

Most members have renewed their annual membership for 2005/2006, 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 TO SAVE POSTAGE AND OTHER COSTS. PLEASE REMEMBER TO LET US KNOW IF YOU CHANGE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS.

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

Yours faithfully,

John Hare