

WCPF Newsletter 19: January 2008

Dear Supporter,

We missed the usual November Newsletter mailing as there were a number of discussions and developments on-going and we very much wanted to include them in the Newsletter. A very Happy New Year to everyone.

2007

The major news of 2007 has been our co-operation with the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). In March we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with them to co-operate jointly on the protection and conservation of the endangered wild Bactrian camel and also to work with them to develop a Management Plan with a release programme for the Breeding Centre in Zakhyn Us, Mongolia.

EDGE – Wild Mammals on the Edge of Extinction

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) launched a programme called EDGE in March 2007 to support wild mammals, which are on the edge of extinction. If you want to visit the website click on www.wildcamels.com and on our website look for links to ZSL/EDGE. Under the EDGE criteria the wild Bactrian camel is listed as the eighth most critically endangered wild mammal in the world.

Surveys by EDGE Fellows

The two WCPF sponsored EDGE fellows, are Yad Adiya in Mongolia and Yuan Lei in China. They have completed the first of their fieldwork surveys in their respective territories – The Great Gobi Specially Protected Area 'A' in southern Mongolia and the Lop Nur Wild Camel National Reserve in China. These are the two locations where the wild Bactrian camel is found.

Yad Adiya's conclusions were:

1. 60% of a total of 36 water points included in the west and central part of GGSPA had water but most of them do not match human and animal drinking requirements. More than 40 water points had no water and six water points have dried out this year. The average rainfall in the months May-August 2007 was 2 mm. This could be the reason why these water points have dried up.
2. The impact of domestic graziers has not been totally eliminated in some areas of section 'A'. An overlap of local herders' location, herding and pasture-watering in the reserve buffer zone still exists. For example, at the northwest boundary of the reserve, local families enter the buffer zone boundary and herd their livestock inside the reserve, which causes degradation of habitat and the migration of wildlife.

Summary

From the results of the survey it can be seen that the most important issue is to protect the water points for wildlife. In future we should survey water points on a regular basis every quarter.

We should:

- Look for ways to improve water points
- Free water points from local herdsman around the reserve boundary
- Dig wells and boreholes in areas where ground water can possibly be found.
- Identify places where artesian wells might be built.

Note for readers. The water points in the Mongolian reserve contain fresh water whereas in the Chinese Reserve the water is salt.

Yuan Lei's conclusions were:

Because there is more mining and domestic livestock grazing around the Arjin Mountains, which border the south of the reserve, I organized a team of seven persons with three vehicles. On the 17th September the team with three vehicles started from Aksai county [in the south-west] in the morning. We went over the 4000m Dangjin mountain and into Qinghai province, then along the south fringe of Chaidamu basin to the north and into the Arjin mountains from the south. The team went over the 4000m Heidaban plateau and into Heidaban valley. We slept there. We investigated three mines located in the valley. One of them is an iron ore mine and the other two are plumbum-zinc ore mines. But only the plumbum-zinc ore mine had people working there. The team met a herdsman at the entrance of the valley near the Heidaban spring. Note: herding in the reserve is illegal.

On 18th September we went out of the Heidaban valley and then went to the east along the Arjin mountains. We observed 17 wild Tibetan asses and 12 black-tailed gazelles. I did not see any wild Bactrian camels on

the expedition. We saw 61 wild camels' footprints near a narrow valley in April this year. 43 of them were adult and 18 young. But we did not see any of them on this expedition. According to an interview in Aksai, there is a man who saw approximately 60 wild camels around Sanjiaotan area in the middle of August. We observed wild camels' hair everywhere in the desert although we did not find any wild camels.

Summary

Because of the huge change in the herdsman's traditional life style, they have moved away from their habit of using domestic camels. Nowadays, using a vehicle is much more convenient for them. The domestic camel's carrying abilities is used much less frequently than before. Herdsmen have lost their desire to care for domestic camels. So the dangers of cross-breeding between domestic and wild Bactrian camels is less than it was before because domestic camel numbers have dropped dramatically. Domestic camels that have run away and joined wild camel herds will be detrimental to the wild camels DNA.

Mining exploration is a serious problem for wildlife that live in the Arjin Mountain especially the wild Bactrian camel. Mining will disturb wild camel water points. Wildlife will therefore move to other places to find water. How we resolve this problem is a huge task.

MONGOLIAN NGO –Inaugural meeting September 2007

The WCPF Mongolian NGO has now been established and I attended the inaugural meeting of its Steering Committee on 2 September 2007. This is important both to develop more capacity in Mongolia and also when applying for funding it is often a requirement to have an NGO in the relevant country. This is not possible in China so we decided to support the establishment of a Mongolian NGO, an NGO which has as its sole purpose the protection and conservation of the wild Bactrian camel and its habitat. I have an ex-officio position on the committee. Yad Adiya is the chairman and the WCPF UK Mongolian Project Director, Bilgee is a member. The NGO has opened a bank account in Ulaan Baator and the WCPF UK funds for all the costs of the Mongolian WCPF work are now transferred to this bank account. The WCPF vehicle will be transferred to the NGO's ownership and new office premises, possibly within one of the Universities in Ulaanbaator is currently being sought by the Project Director.

2006 INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE WILD BACTRIAN CAMELA full report of the workshop was given in Newsletter 18. The papers have been printed in English, Mongolian and Chinese. WCPF has completed editorial work on some of the papers and made a financial contribution towards their printing. There are a few copies available to members from the WCPF headquarters for £6.00 (\$12.00) including p&p.

MANAGEMENT PLAN AND INTERNATIONAL STUD BOOK

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

As announced in Newsletter 18, on 8 March 2007 the WCPF signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Zoological Society London (ZSL). The ZSL is already working in Mongolia and very interested in extending their scientific work to include the wild Bactrian camel. With the success of the captive Bactrian camel breeding centre, their knowledge of captive breeding programmes is vital, particularly their expertise in animal release programmes. The MOU will make it possible us to have close co-operation on these issues.

The captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme at Zakhyn Us is successful, but this success has raised many issues common to other captive breeding programmes.

For example:

- What do we do with surplus young wild Bactrian males?
- How do we extend the holding area when wild Bactrian camel numbers increase beyond its capacity?
- Do we release surplus wild Bactrian camels back into the wild, and if we do how and where and under what control?
- How do we ensure the long-term sustainability of the project?

These issues are currently under discussion with ZSL and others and all options are being considered. If a Management Plan is developed, this can be part then of the strategic plan for the protection and conservation of the wild Bactrian camel in both China and Mongolia.

INTERNATIONAL STUD BOOK

The Mongolian Project Co-ordinator, Bilgee came to England for two weeks in June 2007 for a training course with ZSL. The main aim of the course was to enable him to learn the SPARKS system so he can establish, with the support of ZSL, an International Stud book for the wild Bactrian camel. The Stud Book should be ready shortly.

FUNDING FOR THE MONGOLIAN AND CHINESE PROJECTS

The Trustees are continually fund raising for the on-going costs of the Captive Camel Breeding Centre in Mongolia; the overheads for the office and staff in Mongolia; the environmental public awareness projects; and where possible to support the work of the Directors and Rangers of the National Nature Reserves in both countries. We have been very fortunate to date with the support of members; sponsors of individual camels at the breeding centre in Mongolia and generous international donors. A camel safari to the WCPF breeding centre and to Holy Buddhist Mother Mountain was organised for one of our members and friends. The group enjoyed it enormously and if any other members would like to visit the Breeding Center and undertake a mini expedition into the Gobi on a camel please let me know. It can be arranged.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION NETWORK (WCN) – San Francisco, October 2007

Thanks to an introduction by our Patron Dr Jane Goodall, I attended the annual convention of the Wildlife Conservation Network in San Francisco during the first week of October 2007. Participants were invited to a two-day workshop connected to fund-raising for endangered species, a dinner, a gala where trade stands were displayed and talks about individual species were given. Travel expenses and accommodation were paid. As a result, some funds have been raised for wild Bactrian camel protection and WCPF. Through contacts at this event the Trustees have been invited by Disney to apply for funding for the wild Bactrian camel work in Mongolia.

Since my return we have received funds from WCN and also from donors I met while I was there.

DNA TESTING – update

Katja Silbermayr from the Institute of Animal Breeding and Genetics, University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, Austria as just sent a report of an address that she recently gave in New Zealand on wild Bactrian camel DNA. The relevant passage states: 'the phylogenetic analysis clearly reveals that the wild Bactrian camel population differs genetically from the domestic Bactrian camel population. The knowledge of the genetic distinctiveness of the wild Bactrian camel sets the foundation of effective breeding programs and therefore provides crucial information towards the conservation of this critically endangered species.'

This is a highly significant statement and is of immense value to our work

PLANS FOR 2008

VISIT TO CHINA IN SPRING 2008

Having not visited China and the Chinese Reserve for some time it is clear that a visit is now required. Developments either good or bad only come to light through personal contact with the Reserve senior management staff and since the discovery of the potassium cyanide disaster at Kum Su spring in 2005 we have not had any information regarding illegal miners, poaching or other developments within the Reserve. There are many such issues to discuss and I will combine the trip with a visit to Mongolia to have a meeting with the new NGO, our Project Director and Ministry officials.

BACTRIAN CAMELS ACROSS EUROPE FUND RAISING AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

WCPF is considering a plan to walk two domestic Bactrian camels through parts of Europe to England during the summer of 2008 to raise awareness of the plight of the wild Bactrian camel and money for the work of WCPF to protect them in China and Mongolia. We already have a home for them in this country and sponsorship to purchase them. We are at the moment looking at domestic Bactrian camels in Bulgaria to see if we can identify and purchase a suitable pair of female Bactrian camels. Accompanied by a Mongolian herdsman to look after the Bactrian camels the plan is for me to walk the two Bactrian camels from a suitable site to England. Many people have expressed an interest in walking part of the way and we are considering whether this is possible. In early December I travelled to a place called La Maison des Chameaux near Pau in southern France where an English couple Paul and Sarah Bird keep Bactrian camels. Their website address for anyone interested in camel riding in France is camelsinfrance@yahoo.com

[<mailto:camelsinfrance@yahoo.com>](mailto:camelsinfrance@yahoo.com) They have agreed to sell camel items to help us raise money for WCPF. They also agreed to get the two camels fit for the journey of nearly 1000 miles, so if Bulgarian camels were purchased they would be sent by road to Pau to enable them to be got ready for the journey. However, the onset of Blue Tongue in Europe could be a factor in making such a journey particularly difficult to plan in

advance and I am currently in touch with DEFRA to see what restrictions are in force and how they could effect the journey. Any advice or tips would be welcome. Please email John Hare direct at <harecamel@aol.com>.

SPONSORSHIP: CAPTIVE WILD BACTRIAN CAMELS

First of all thank you to all twelve 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 increase 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 to date, however this also means more pregnant females. As a result we urgently require at least five more sponsors.

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.

Remember, we have the rights to show that wonderful film, 'The Weeping Camel' to raise money for the WCPF. If any member has a hall or suitable site that they can hire and can gather together a number of interested people, then we will certainly come and give a showing of the film. Ideas please! The showing at the British Museum was very successful and a donation bowl at the door raised substantial funds for our cause, from a delighted audience.

John Hare's - NEW BOOK – THE MYSTERIES OF THE GOBI

My book entitled 'The Mysteries of the Gobi: Searching for Wild Camels and Lost Cities in the Heart of Asia' is due to be published by I.B. Tauris, in October 2008. The price is £17.99 and it is hoped that we will be able to offer a substantial discount on the published price to all members and supporters

WEBSITE CHANGES

We have recently 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 unique camel hair items knitted by our herdsman's wife from the wild Bactrian camel hair at the Breeding Centre.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Most members have renewed their annual membership for 2005/2006/2007, but if you haven't, please send £20.00 (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. After 10 years we have decided to raise our subscription by £5 to £20/\$40/25 Euros from 2008. Could members kindly adjust their payments accordingly?

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