

## WCPF Newsletter Number 8: October 2002

Dear Supporter,

### Trans-Saharan Trek - publicity

The December edition of National Geographic Magazine will contain an article on the Sahara crossing that we completed earlier this year. A box at the end of the article will contain concise information about the work that we are doing to save the wild Bactrian camel from extinction and will contribute to publicity for our cause. I have received an invitation from National Geographic to talk to the Society on 5th December about the trans-Saharan crossing. This will also give another opportunity to mention the significance of the wild Bactrian camel. Apparently the evening lecture is sold out and they have asked for a 'back to back' afternoon lecture. This publicity will, I hope, help the wild Bactrian camel cause. Lastly, Constable and Robinson will publish the book on the journey, entitled '**Shadows across the Sahara**' in June 2003.

### The Wild Bactrian Camel – Critically Endangered Status in the Red Book

Each year, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, (IUCN), an NGO based in Switzerland, publishes a Red Book, which lists and prioritises the world's endangered species. In 1996, we submitted a proposal to them outlining the reasons for listing the wild Bactrian camel as "endangered" managed to persuade them to list the wild Bactrian camel as 'endangered'. In September of this year, after three years of submissions, from the Wild Camel Protection Foundation we have managed to persuade them to list the wild Bactrian camel as 'critically endangered'. It now has the same critically endangered status as the giant Panda. This, of course, is not a reason to rejoice. The wild Bactrian camel is on the brink of extinction and the Arjin Shan Lop Nur Nature Reserve is under threat from economic development, hunting and illegal and legal mining. However, the enhanced endangered status of the wild Bactrian camel does mean that additional international attention has and will be roused. National daily newspapers around the world carried information on the new classification. There were television and radio interviews and attention has been raised world-wide, especially in China. Indirectly, this publicity attracts attention to our captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme that we feel is so important for the future of the wild Bactrian camel.

### The Captive Wild Bactrian Camel Breeding Programme

Dr. Sarantuya, a consultant and former Director of Environmental Legal Policy in the Ministry of Environment and Nature in Mongolia who had been known both to Kate Rae and myself for many years, signed an agreement this month to work with us as the Project Co-ordinator on the captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme in Mongolia.

Dr. Sarantuya has excellent relations with the Mongolian government, and she has established a new non-governmental organisation (NGO) to coordinate the captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme. This programme will be the main thrust of our work over the next three years and for new members I would like to set out once again why we feel that is essential.

Only fifteen wild Bactrian camels are in captivity in China and Mongolia. With so few captive animals, the whole species could be wiped out if their natural habitats in China and Mongolia are destroyed. It is therefore important to breed enough animals in captivity to insure against this possible disaster. As each female camel can have young at most once

every two years, relying on natural methods would permit the numbers to rise very slowly. When the Przewalski horse (*Equus przewalskii*), the Asian wild horse, died out in the wild in 1969, there were hundreds of captive horses in zoos around the world. This is not the case with the wild Bactrian camel. This is why the WCPF, after much thought and careful consultation with scientists, has decided that a captive wild Bactrian camel breeding programme is vital. The Australian scientist, Dr Alex Tinson, has already visited Mongolia and discussed in detail with Mongolian scientists the process called 'embryo transfer' which is similar to human IVF techniques. It will make it possible to increase the numbers of wild Bactrian offspring each year by using surrogate domestic Bactrian camels to carry the embryos of the wild Bactrian camel

It is of course essential that the right site be chosen. This site must be as close as possible to the habitat of the wild Bactrian camel otherwise any reintroduction programme will be very difficult. Mongolia offers more space than China and the Ministry of Nature and the Environment has been very supportive of the project offering a large enough area of land in a protected area. So earlier this year, Kate Rae and myself looked at a site in the South Gobi 'county'. We met the Governor of the South Gobi and he supports our initiative. However, was a severe drought in Mongolia this summer and the site in the South Gobi we were considering was badly effected. We had hoped to start building the holding fence and move the wild Bactrian camels from the Great Gobi Park to this site. However it is absolutely essential that any site is chosen has reliable and adequate water resources, and reasonable camel pasture.

Some of the animal scientists at the Ulaan Baator University who are wild Bactrian camel experts have divergent views on where this site should be and the precise form the captive breeding programme should take. There has been a suggestion that the site should be closer to the wild camel's natural habitat in the Gobi desert. Others prefer the location already identified in the South Gobi. In order to resolve this and to obtain unanimity, Kate and I will travel to Mongolia early in the New Year. The Ministry of Nature and the Environment have agreed to host a Workshop then, to discuss these issues and also how the different scientific organisations will work with the Wild Camel Protection Foundation on this breeding programme. As with the new Nature Reserve in China if this project is to succeed long term there has to be a sense of ownership by the Mongolians and the direct involvement of the Mongolian scientific community.

Dr Alex Tinson is willing to come to Mongolia early in the New Year to start the embryo transfer programme. This slight delay has meant that while all the materials for the fence have been ordered, the protective holding fence has not been erected yet. Once there is agreement on the site then the fence can be erected very quickly and the wild Bactrian camels moved to the new site..

### **FUNDING FOR THE WILD BACTRIAN CAMEL BREEDING PROGRAMME**

A generous donor has enabled the programme to secure the initial funding for the construction of the perimeter fence. As soon as the basic decisions are made regarding the site, the programme will commence, weather permitting, with the construction of a one square kilometer fence. This fence has to be strong enough to not only protect the females and newly born wild Bactrian camels, but also stop the bull camels from escaping during the mating season. At present the recommendations are to build a 2 -3 metre high metal fence with metal posts every 1-2 metres. All the materials including the posts and nails and fencing

will have to be transported to the selected site. The fencing a strong wire mesh will be imported from China.

**Estimated cost for the fencing and the construction: \$50,000.**

### **SPONSORSHIP WILD BACTRIAN CAMELS**

The wild Bactrian camels will have to be protected and fed either by hand or moved to feeding areas. This will mean paying herders to move the camels and a person on site to watch the camels daily. There will also be the cost of feed and the various medicines required for the females and their off-spring during the first five years. A number of Foundation members, individuals and organisations have expressed an interest in showing their support by **SPONSORING** a young camel.

**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 medical costs.**

**This SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME is now underway. If you would like to participate in this sponsorship programme please email Kate Rae, a WCPF trustee at the following email address: [krae77777@aol.com](mailto:krae77777@aol.com)**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AWARENESS PROGRAMME**

#### **The 'KING of the GOBI' and ' BLOWING on the WIND'**

Language editions of the children's book, **The King of the Gobi** have been translated into Uighur and Kazakh and have now been published. Copies in these two languages and also in English and Chinese are being distributed in appropriate schools, villages, towns and cities near the **Arjin Shan Lop Nur Nature Reserve** in Xinjiang province.

The Chinese edition has also been distributed through Jane Goodall's Chinese **Roots and Shoots** network. A second Chinese reprint has been made and these books are being distributed throughout Xinjiang Province. **Shell, China**, generously contributed funds for the Chinese, Uighur and Kazakh versions.

**Blowing on the Wind, The Fight against Desertification** has recently been published in English. This covers the habitat of the wild Bactrian camel and other world drylands that are under threat from the advance of the desert. It has been written specifically for children and deals with the problems of Desertification and desert degradation and what can be done to combat these problems. We received funding to cover the preparation costs for this book from the Global Wildlife Division in Bristol. **Shell, China** also made a generous contribution towards the publishing and printing.

There are five more books planned in this educational series. The Foundation is currently seeking funding for the preparation of the next two books which will be on the Chiru and the Snow Leopard.

**These books English are available, price £5.00 including post and packing (\$US 7.00). If any members want to purchase copies, please email, <Krae77777@aol.com> We will supply copies free to schools, libraries and environmental centres**

## NATURE RESERVE PROTECTION CHINA

### Arjin Shan Lop Nur Nature Reserve

The first phase in the establishment of the Arjin Shan Lop Nur Nature Reserve is now complete. All the five check-points have been built, two with the generous support of international donors, the Robert Schad Foundation and the Kadoorie Foundation and the radios which were donated by Cable and Wireless have been installed by a team working for the British Company C&L Ltd. The headquarters of the Nature Reserve has been set up in Urumqi with its own office in the offices of the Xinjiang Environmental Protection Institute and this has also been connected by radio link to the check-points. Headquarter staff have been increased under a new director, Mr. Zhang. This appointment has given fresh impetus to the project.

A proposal has been submitted for upgrading the reserve from provincial to national status. This is very important for it will secure future funding for core costs from SEPA, the Chinese Ministry of Environment and reduce the financial burden for the Nature Reserve from the provincial government which has limited financial resources. It also gives the Reserve more protection under the national laws once it is gazetted a National Nature Reserve.

### WORKSHOPS

In August 2002, a Workshop was held in Urumqi to discuss the revisions required for the Nature Reserve Management Plan and specified in detail exactly how the new Nature Reserve would function on a daily basis. It was important to discuss effective management of the Nature Reserve as there are many new economic developments in the Province many of which will directly effect the running of the Nature Reserve. We are pleased to say that the Workshop although funded by the Wild Camel Protection Foundation was organised and run by the new Nature Reserve Head Office with only minor assistance from us. Kate Rae and I attended. All outstanding points were discussed and agreed and a revised Management Plan was drafted. This has now been sent to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi for onward transmission to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in Washington which funded this initial phase of the project. We have also completed a financial report for the GEF.

Earlier in the year the WCPF organised and ran an educational awareness-raising Workshop in Urumqi linked to the new Nature Reserve. it is important the Nature Reserve staff organise public awareness activities in the towns and small communities near the new Nature Reserve if the local people who live near the Nature Reserve are to understand the importance of the wild Bactrian camel and how they will obtain benefit from the creation of the new Reserve.

The multi-language (Chinese, Uighur, Kazakh) public awareness materials have been prepared for this field work and are both used and distributed by the Nature Reserve staff.

### FUNDING

The UNEP/GEF funding for the Nature Reserve has now finished. The Wild Camel Protection Foundation has already contributed \$15,000.00 towards the running costs (cost of

heating checkpoints, petrol, fee for radio licence for this year) of the new Nature Reserve and is URGENTLY FUNDRAISING for money to enable the Foundation to continue to make this contribution. Without radios and petrol they cannot effectively operate and manage the Nature Reserve area. It is vitally important that the Reserve remains sustainable and our efforts are being concentrated to this end.

### SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Now the Nature Reserve Head Office staff have been appointed and several scientists from the Xinjiang Environmental Protection Institute seconded to the Head Office the Scientific Research Plan can start to be implemented. The area of the new Nature Reserve is largely unmapped and for effective management by the staff it has to be properly mapped and surveyed and detailed studies done on the biodiversity of the area; the numbers and movements of all the endangered species and whether the present description of the areas within the Nature Reserve are accurate. It is important to realise that this area has only been open to study in the last seven years. WCPF is applying for funding from scientific institutions around the world and also looking for scientists and universities interested in working on joint projects with the Nature Reserve and Institute scientists.

### POTENTIAL THREATS

In the last newsletter we raised concern over the construction of a gas pipeline, planned to run from the Taklamakan desert in the far west of Xinjiang to Shanghai on the eastern seaboard. The decision was initially taken by the Chinese government to route the pipeline through a sensitive area of the reserve – a core area. Due to the sustained representations of the WCPF the pipeline has been diverted to the north at an additional cost to the oil companies of \$11 million. Oil companies we discovered are not the easiest of organisations to deal with or persuade. However after all the efforts and support we had received in establishing the Nature Reserve we thought it worth trying. This success made us aware that the Wild Camel Protection Foundation albeit a small UK based charity was able to have a large voice and be listened to with great seriousness by the Consortium and other economic interests. It also made us aware of how sensitive China is sensitive to international pressure when environmental issues are raised.. The second proposal mentioned in the last Newsletter to establish a leopodite mine in the dried-up lake bed of Lop Nur has for the moment been postponed while the soil structure is tested for radiation. Maybe the former Chinese nuclear test site may, paradoxically, once again, be of benefit to the wild Bactrian camel. We are continually facing a situation, both in China and Mongolia, where economic pressures and developments, are constantly in conflict with endangered species protection.

### FILM FUNDING

Shell, China has contributed to the cost of making a video which will present the plight of the wild Bactrian camel. This video will be made from footage taken during the 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1999 expeditions. **It will be ready for Christmas and the cost is £15 including postage and packing . (US\$ 23. Please order directly from the WCPF.)**

## **EMAIL AND WWW**

If members have **Email**, **please** let us have your email address so that we can keep you more fully informed via that medium. **This will save the Foundation expense.**

— Please look at our updated website, <[www.wildcamels.com](http://www.wildcamels.com)>  
Again, many, many thanks for your continued and much valued, support.

## **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

**Members subscriptions were due in September this year. If you have not renewed, please send the annual subscription fee of £15 (\$22.50) to the WCPF at the address below.**

**Please note that new members may obtain a Membership Form from the website**

### **Further information from:**

John Hare,  
The Wild Camel Protection Foundation,  
School Farm,  
Benenden, Kent.  
TN17 4EU  
Tel: 01580 241132  
Fax: 01580 240960  
Email: [harecamel@aol.com](mailto:harecamel@aol.com)  
[www.wildcamels.com](http://www.wildcamels.com) >>