

WCPF Newsletter 9: April 2003

Dear Supporter,

Since the last Newsletter a number of things have happened.

The Captive Wild Bactrian Camel Breeding Programme

The captive wild Bactrian breeding programme in Mongolia was held in abeyance until we could visit Mongolia and clarify certain issues on the ground. Mongolia is a small country, (population 2.7 million people, 7 million horses) and the scientific community is tiny. In these circumstances factional interests between scientists inevitably occur. In order to resolve these issues and ensure that the project has the full support of the Ministry of Nature and the Environment (MNE), we put the programme on hold until we had had a chance of meeting directly with relevant Ministry officials. Under the Environmental Protection Law in Mongolia the Ministry has full responsibility for protecting endangered species and their habitats. On arrival in Mongolia in April this year, we attended a number of meetings with the Ministry and other organisations which has been arranged by our representative in Ulaan Baator, Dr. Sarantuya. At the conclusion of these meetings we now think that there is a clear way forward. However any final decision to proceed in Mongolia made by WCPF will include the full involvement of the MNE.

1. The Ministry wants the WCPF to initiate the programme and to work with Mr. Dorjraa the head of the Mongolian National Commission of Endangered Species.
 2. The 13 captive wild camels in Mongolia will be walked from Ekhin Gol on the extreme east of the Great Gobi Reserve A in Mongolia to Bayan Toroi the Reserve headquarters in September of this year. A journey of 8-10 days. They will be moved to an area 15 kilometers west of Bayan Toroi where there is adequate water and suitable grazing.
 3. This area will be fenced off to form a large holding area. During the breeding season (December/January/February/ 2003-2004), the captive camels will be allowed to breed naturally under supervision.
 4. The embryo transfer programme will be deferred until the end of at least two natural breeding seasons.
 5. Mr. Dorjraa is preparing a budget for this planned work. This is to be submitted to us by the end of April.
- The WCPF is putting forward a written proposal to the Ministry.

There are 13 captive wild Bactrian camels in Mongolia 2003. There were 26 within the Reserve area in 1999. These figures only emphasise the seriousness of the situation and the need for urgent action. No one can forecast what will happen to the wild camel in the Mongolian and Chinese Protected Areas 30 years from now. Having established that the wild Bactrian camel has a unique genetic make-up, it is essential that everything is done to see that this is preserved – in case the worst happens and the wild Bactrian camel disappears in the wild. 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 and there are at the most 20 captive wild camels in the world. All in China and Mongolia.

SPONSORSHIP WILD BACTRIAN CAMELS

The captive wild Bactrian camels will have to be protected and properly managed. This will mean paying local herders 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 offspring 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

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. We 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, building on the success of the Mongolian/China Wild Camel Conference which WCPF organised and funded in Beijing in August 2001. At this Conference a Letter of Intent was signed between the two countries to implement inter-country co-operation and information exchange on the wild Bactrian camel. WCPF has been invited to attend the Inception Meeting for the Mongolian MSP in July 2003.

China

There is the possibility of two new nature reserves being established in Gansu and Xinjiang Provinces of China and these would cover the area south of and contiguous with the Great Gobi Reserve A and afford protection to migrating wild Bactrian camels. The WCPF is active in investigating the possibility of establishing these additional Nature Reserves. There could also be an element in the research component of the MSP project that might enable us to carry out additional research on the captive wild Bactrian camels in Mongolia.

LOP NUR WILD CAMEL NATURE RESERVE

I visited Urumqi, the headquarters of the Lop Nur Wild Camel Nature Reserve in Xinjiang, China. Although we were successful in having the gas pipeline moved from the experimental area of the Nature Reserve, it will still cut across the northern section of the Reserve. It is an 'ill wind' because as a result of this, under Chinese law the Nature Reserve is entitled to receive substantial compensation from Petro China. This guarantee of money will provide for salaries for Reserve officials for the next 30 years. The compensation agreement has been signed. Part of the compensation money is to be used fund scientific field surveys of the protected area. We will be working closely with the Nature Reserve staff on this programme of activities. The kaolin mine to the east of the Reserve appears to be on hold at the moment because the soil in the area could be contaminated by the former nuclear activity. Again, an 'ill wind'. The WCPF has been appointed the sole international consultant to the Reserve and I was presented with appropriate certificates by the Nature Reserve Director, Mr Zhang which confirm this. The Lop Nur Wild Camel Nature Reserve should be upgraded from a provincial to a national reserve in June of this year. This would be a very

important development and strengthen the powers of the Reserve as well as securing national (not just provincial) funding. We see the main role of WCPF now is in assisting the Nature Reserve in developing the capacity of the staff; further strengthening its infrastructure; assisting in the implementing of a scientific programme, which will include field surveys to identify the water points and a full survey of all the endangered flora and fauna in the protected area.

Our project with UNEP/GEF to establish the reserve has been assessed by both these organisations and they are very pleased with the result of the three-year project. Many of you have supported us with cash donations and by other means. You can be assured that your funds were well spent.

EXPEDITION WITH DOMESTIC CAMELS TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS

I discussed with the Reserve director Mr. Zhang, an expedition which would travel with domestic camels from Hohot on the east of China (near Beijing) to Hami in the west. This expedition would be undertaken to raise public awareness for the wild Bactrian camel and the work that we are doing. It would follow the old Winding Road camel route – unused by commercial traffic since the nineteen thirties and would undoubtedly attract press and media attention. The Reserve in Xinjiang would give \$20,000 towards this expedition. A budget has been drawn up and an additional \$80,000 needs to be found at the time of writing. If the money is raised in time, then the expedition will start on 7 September and last about three months. We are approaching commercial firms in China for sponsorship of this expedition.

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC AWARENESS

Educational Books

We have been successful in obtaining some funding from the Fred Foundation in the Netherlands for two more books in the environmental awareness series we are doing in China and Mongolia. Shell, China has generously agreed to fund the costs of translating and printing the two environmental awareness books and the Nature Reserve staff will distribute and use them in their public awareness environmental education programmes in Xinjiang. One book will cover the rare flora to be found in the Reserve and the other the large mammals, other than the wild Bactrian camels to be found there: The Tibetan wild ass, the Black-tailed Gazelle, and the wild Argali Sheep. The two books that we have already published: The 'King of the Gobi and 'Blowing on the Wind' can be obtained from the Foundation at a cost of £5 each.

Scientific Work

Dr Han Jianlin from the ILRI in Nairobi has to date very kindly been testing, without charge, the blood samples sent from the wild Bactrian camels in Mongolia and China. This work is essential to ensure, all the captive wild Bactrian camels used in the captive breeding programme are genetically pure. Therefore WCPF has agreed to support an application for a Dr Han Jianlin to obtain funding for further testing and research work for a PhD student, to study the wild Bactrian camel. The funding required for such a grant is \$15,000- \$20,000.

Thank you all very much for your continued and very valuable support. Please remember that if you are on Email please send us your Email address. This helps to disseminate this newsletter and saves costs. And don't forget to visit our updated web site on <www.wildcamels.com>

Very best wishes,
John Hare

PS I am giving a talk at the Royal Geographic Society in London on April 28th which is about the trans-Sahara expedition which was completed last year. This will also provide a very good opportunity to talk about the plight of the wild Bactrian camel in China and Mongolia.

Further information from:

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