

WCPF Newsletter 20: September 2008

Dear Supporter,

Patrons

We have created a new category of 'Patrons' of the Foundation. Jane Goodall DBE has kindly agreed to be the 'Hon. Life Patron' for the Wild Camel Protection Foundation and the following have generously accepted our invitation to be 'Patrons':

Jane McMorland Hunter
Damon de Laszlo
Lulu Lytle
Professor David Munro
The Marchioness of Reading

All these people have been most generous and long-standing supporters of our cause and we hope from time to time to add other names to the list.

Visits

In April/May 2008 I visited China and Mongolia to check on developments in the Lop Nur Wild Camel National Nature Reserve in China and at the captive wild Bactrian camel-breeding centre at Zakhyn Us in Mongolia.

China:

1. The Chinese now have permission to make an aerial survey of Lop Nur Reserve. This would be very worthwhile as it would help to establish the true wild Bactrian camel numbers in Lop Nur and also give us an idea of the Reserve's carrying capacity i.e. how many camels the vegetation and water reserves within the Reserve can sustain. For many years we have said the number of wild Bactrian camels in China is approximately 600. This figure was reached by using the information given to us by herdsmen who live outside the Reserve and from our own observations while participating in numerous surveys and expeditions. It is significant the Chinese have given us permission to survey what was formerly a military and restricted area from the air. The cost of the aerial survey is \$20,000 for which the Wild Camel Protection Foundation would have to contribute **\$10,000 (50%)**. There are many other urgent and pressing priorities which require funding, however we will attempt to raise funding, or find a sponsor for this survey to be undertaken.

2. I travelled through the north of the Reserve, following the entire length of the pipeline road, built four years ago through the Reserve as part of China's east-west gas pipeline. We said to the officials at the time, that this road would become the new northern boundary of the Reserve and it is; and as we feared it is used by private traffic as well as gas and oil traffic. When the pipeline was put through the northern sector of the Reserve it crossed the 'core zone' at one point. The core area of the Reserve is the area designated as requiring the most protection, the heartland of the wild Bactrian camel habitat. The WCPF protested vigorously about this then and as a result managed to get the pipeline moved out of the 'core zone' and into the 'experimental zone', which describes an area contiguous with the 'core zone'. An additional concern we had then was the establishment of four booster plants along the pipeline. We raised the issue that the noise these plants made when they pushed the gas through the pipeline would be unacceptable for all wildlife in the protected area. However, it has proved unfounded largely because the technology used renders this operation silent. I was also pleased to see that the Reserve was well signposted although one of the check-points, built by the oil consortium, was non operational and deserted. I saw two black-tailed gazelles (an endangered species) near the road but no sign of wild Bactrian camels.

3. Along the southern boundary of this enormous Reserve, bordered by the Arjin Mountains, which form the northern escarpment of Tibet, the wolf population is increasing. This is because herdsmen are now no longer permitted to carry rifles and the numbers of domestic animals are decreasing substantially. This is good news for hybrid camels (cross-breeding between wild and domestic camels) but not good news for the survival rate among wild Bactrian camels, as wolves hunt new-born calves and adult Bactrian camels.

4. I visited the impressive new Urumqi zoo which is a fenced area of over 500 hectares of land including a mountainous area. They have two wild Bactrian camels, one of which was captured and identified from its ear tag, as having migrated from Mongolia and crossed the international border into China. We have asked the the Lop Nur Wild Camel National Nature Reserve Director to establish a link their website and the Urumqi Zoo and we will also be linking them to our www.wildcamels.com website.

MONGOLIA

1. The disquieting news when I visited the Great Gobi Protected Area A, the home of the wild Bactrian

camels in Mongolia, was that illegal gold miners had entered the Reserve to look for gold. At the moment Mongolia is gripped with mining fever and former herdsmen are endeavouring to make their fortunes by prospecting illegally for gold. They had been chased out of the Reserve by rangers but had quickly regrouped and re-entered the Reserve. This illegal mining is a major concern both in China and Mongolia and members will remember our discovery of the potassium cyanide and the disaster at the spring of Kum Su in China. This increase in environmentally damaging mining activity in both countries, in particular in areas which include the habitat of the wild Bactrian camel confirms to us, the great importance of the captive breeding centre at Zakhyn Us in Mongolia.

2. Tsog Erdene, our herdsman, had a tough time during the winter breeding period with fighting males. They broke the fence near the water point and no-one would help him. One young bull escaped. Another young bull has a damaged eye. We are at the moment repairing the fence and making a plan to ensure the young wild males are controlled during the breeding season. To do this we need to buy (a) **a dart gun (\$800)** which will tranquilize animals if absolutely necessary. The herdsman also badly needs (b) **a motor-bike (\$1,800)** as he works on his own and often has to move quickly from one spot to another. We also need (c) ample hay for the harsh winter months and (d) repairs to the fence have to be carried out urgently. **These four items are a fund-raising priority.**

3. The good news was that there had been four wild Bactrian camel births, on 3/4, 15/4 and 17/4 and 27/5 - one male and three females. The calves are all healthy.

4. I had a meeting with Dorgotov, deputy director of Gobi A Special Protected Area (SPA), in the absence in China of Mijidorj, the director, and also with the Reserve staff. It emerged that:

(i) We should take out an insurance policy for the captive Bactrian camels in case they either cause damage or are hurt.

(ii) A survey of the grassland in our fenced area at the breeding centre is urgently required now, so we know the carrying capacity of the area. This will contribute urgently required data to our management plan programme with ZSL.

(iii) An agreement should be drawn up between Gobi A (SPA) and the Captive Camel Breeding Programme. This is a good idea as it will clarify all issues relating to the relationship between the breeding centre and the SPA for example, Tsog Erdene's position and release of some animals, young bulls, from the breeding centre into Gobi A during the breeding season.

We are acting on all these excellent suggestions.

I travelled with the WCPF Project Director, Bilgee, to the Gobi Specially Protected Area B. This Reserve is where the wild Prejwalsky horse is being released as part of a programme from a Mongolian captive breeding centre. I wanted to see whether the site would be a good one for the release of the wild Bactrian camel. Our own breeding programme has been so successful we are in a position now, to develop and implement with ZSL a release programme for a small group of the captive Bactrian camels back into their own desert habitat. Numbers have increased from 12 to 21 in just four years and it is important that we have a plan for a site where they can be released. Over 100 years ago there were wild Bactrian camels in this area.

The visit was a success. We found ample water and vegetation. The only problems were wolves and the close proximity of domestic Bactrian camels. We met with the local government officials to discuss this possibility and on my return to Ulaan Baator I spoke with senior officials in the Ministry of Nature and the Environment. They agreed to be sympathetic to request from us for a release programme for the wild camel in Gobi B Special Protected Area.

EDGE – Wild Mammals on the Edge of Extinction

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) with whom we have a five year working agreement 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. The two WCPF sponsored EDGE fellows, are Yad Adiya in Mongolia and Yuan Lei in China. They have completed 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. On Yuan Lei's last survey on behalf of the Edge Programme in China the team encountered 142 wild Bactrian camels which is excellent news and highlights the need for an accurate survey to establish whether there are more than 600 wild Bactrian in China.

Our two Edge Fellows attended a two-week workshop at the headquarters of the Zoological Society of London in August/September 2008. It appears to have been a great success. In particular, Adiya and Yuan Lei have become good friends and close colleagues. Having striven for China/Mongolian cooperation on wild Bactrian camel matters since the joint country workshop in Beijing 2000, this a notable and significant move forward.

MONGOLIAN NGO

The WCPF Mongolian NGO has now been established and I attended the second meeting of its Steering Committee. This NGO 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. It is not possible in China to set up a similar NGO so WCPF 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 funds which currently cover ALL the costs of the Mongolian WCPF work are now transferred to this bank account. The WCPF vehicle has been transferred to the NGO's ownership and new office premises has been established at the Mongolian Institute of Biology.

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. Unfortunately there has been difficulty with the computer software but it is hoped that this will be resolved very shortly.

FUNDING FOR THE ONGOING WORK REQUIRED IN BOTH MONGOLIA AND CHINA

The Trustees continue to fund raise to cover the on-going costs of the Captive Camel Breeding Centre in Mongolia; the overheads for the office and staff in the Mongolian NGO; the environmental public awareness projects; and where possible to provide support to the Directors and Rangers of the National Nature Reserves in both countries. We are also attempting to raise funds for the aerial survey in China. As we have a number of substantial additional costs now and URGENTLY require a new vehicle in Mongolia. Once the Management Plan is prepared and agreed with ZSL and the Mongolian Ministry of Nature Protection, there will be the major cost of establishing and implementing and maintaining the release programme in the Gobi "B" Special Protected Area, Mongolia. The Managing Trustees have therefore decided to work with a fund raiser.

FUNDRAISER

The Managing Trustees have appointed this month, Mark Jones, a former schoolteacher at Dulwich Prep and Sutton Valence schools in Kent as our Co-ordinator of Fund-raising and Public Relations to raise funds and media awareness on behalf of the Wild Camel Protection Foundation. Mark who has a proven track record in fund-raising for children in Sierra Leone is showing much energy and enterprise on behalf of the WCPF.

We have been very fortunate to date with the continuing support of members; the sponsors of individual camels at the breeding centre in Mongolia and the several generous international donors.

CURRENT ADDITIONAL COSTS – MONGOLIA

1. WCPF vehicle in Mongolia

The condition of the roads to the Breeding Centre in Mongolia have taken their toll on the WCPF vehicle. It has been repaired so often and Bilgee is very good at keeping it roadworthy. However, we will have to replace it by the beginning of 2009 as the maintenance costs are now too high. Recent repair bill just to keep it on the road was \$3,500.00. Bilgee is trying to sell it for approximately \$15,000.00. However a new good Toyota Land Cruiser 76 which has to come from Japan and is almost same as the WCPF jeep will cost \$45,000 so we are also looking at buying something cheaper, another second hand jeep if possible.

2 Fence extension

Given the success of the Breeding Centre it is now necessary to extend the fence and increase the grazing area and carrying capacity. This will always be the case now even with the planned release programme. The Budget for the fence extension is \$50,000 using local materials and also providing work for the local community.

MEMBERS VISITS TO MONGOLIA

A domestic Bactrian 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 Centre and undertake a mini expedition into the Gobi on a domestic Bactrian camel please let me know. It can be arranged.

DNA TESTING – update

Katja Silbermayr from the Institute of Animal Breeding and Genetics, University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, Austria has 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.

RECENT FINDS

September 2008, Damascus: Archaeologists have unearthed in a desert in Syria what could be the oldest camel jawbone ever found. The jawbone is a million years old, said Heba Al Sakhel, an archaeologist. Al Sakhel said the jawbone was uncovered last month near the village of Khowm in the Palmyra region, northeast of Damascus. Last year, the same mission discovered the bones of a giant camel in Syria dating back 100,000 years. The researchers said the new find, along with the remains of the giant camel, could offer important clues about the animal's evolution.

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 as a way of fund-raising and we are considering whether this is possible. In early December last year, I visited 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 They have agreed to sell camel items to help us raise money for WCPF. They also agreed prepare the two Bactrian camels at their place near Pau, to be ready for the journey of nearly 1000 miles. The Bulgarian camels once purchased would be sent by road to Pau. Any advice or tips or fund-raising ideas would be welcome. Please email John Hare direct at [<harecamel@aol.com>](mailto: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, we have just paid \$5,000 for part of the hay for this winter and the transport costs to the site are expensive. Wherever possible we purchase hay locally, to provide badly needed income for the locals and to cut the high transport costs. 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 involving them in the work of the Breeding Centre, and ensuring they understand the importance of protecting the wild Bactrian camel a Mongolian Red Book listed endangered species. 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. There is an electronic order form coming with this newsletter to obtain the book at a 50% discount if it is ordered before 15 October 2008. What a good idea for Christmas!!!

Members who receive their newsletter by post will receive a hard copy of the electronic version. Copies should be ordered from the distributor, Macmillan, whose address is given on the form. Matthew Parris has contributed a very generous foreword and Jane Goodall, and Ranulph Fiennes have all added generous

copies on the dustcover.

WEBSITE CHANGES

We have recently updated the <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.

NEW RANGE OF ITEMS

We are also planning to keep updating the Shop Page especially when we have a range of unique items knitted by our herdsman's wife from the wild Bactrian camel hair collected from the Mongolian Breeding Centre. In addition we are hoping to have for sale soon, Bactrian camel chocolates manufactured for us in Cornwall and a Christmas card which will be specially painted for WCPF. All these activities help us to raise funds.

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

We would like to cut the cost of postage so, PLEASE IF YOU HAVE AN EMAIL ADDRESS THEN SEND IT TO US TO SAVE POSTAGE AND OTHER COSTS. PLEASE REMEMBER TO LET US KNOW IF YOU CHANGE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS. COPIES OF THE NEWSLETTER ARE ALSO AVAILABLE ON THE WEBSITE www.wildcamels.com

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

Yours faithfully,

John Hare FRGS
Founder and Chairman of the WCPF

CHOCOLATE BACTRIANS

We have just acquired solid chocolate (milk or dark) Bactrian camels for sale at £3.50 a camel. Available either in milk or dark chocolate they are ideal for either a Christmas stocking filler or a simple treat. Order through harecamel@aol.com or through the WCPF address at: School Farm, Benenden, Kent. TN17 4EU